



Fiction

Group 3

A Shanghai Tale

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Haefliger, Henry – 13

A tall, frail figure emerged carefully from the shadows. Dark. That was all he could be described as. He wore all black clothes under which, not even his face was visible. He was completely wreathed in shadows as if he himself was a human impersonation of the shadow he had stepped out of. The only thing not dark about him was his hand, just peeping out of his jacket. As wraith-like as he was, that hand stood out completely in contrast to the rest of him. The hand was completely pale, ghost-like, the veins bulged like a blue spider web against the transparent skin of his hand. He was a ghost cloaked in shadows. He was nobody. Nobody. That was his name, his identity, his being. He had no known family or friends, in fact he was not known at all. None, not one of the 450 million people in China in 1845 would have recognized him. Even if they had seen him without his outfit. That's what made him so perfect for his job; he had no acquaintances, no personality, not even a nationality; he had no being.

"Splash. Splash. Splash." His boots spluttered through the fresh puddles from a night's rain. He blinked. He felt the hand leave his shoulder as he stumbled forward into the street. He could smell the thick, dizzying opium fumes drifting out from within the large red wood and brick house that he had just left. The envelope remained tightly clutched against his frail chest as if he was protectively carrying a baby through a horde of people. He was now winding his way through the thin alleyways and back streets of Shanghai. The houses around him were all built out of the same material: dull, red brick. Every house in the area was made of it. It was as if every one of them had been built to make it as hard as possible to remember them specifically. The same black tiles covering their outwards curving rooves, the rough uneven bricks, even the reinforced hardwood doors, they were all the same, there was no way to define a house by a unique feature it possessed as those did not exist here, only dull, orderly similarity.

He knew that most of the households around him were caught up in the illegal opium trade; this was a poor area and everyone had to support their families somehow, but he was buried deep in it. He knew, if he was caught smuggling money for the illegal trade gang he was tied to he would most certainly be killed. But he had to, for his wife, for their soon to be child. So he continued walking, the money tucked into his torn jacket. He blinked.

The thick, musky opium smoke lingered all around the brown brick chimneys of the worn out looking houses surrounding him. He knew all too well that these places existed only to satisfy the addictions of the creatures whose lives had become an existence centered by the only things in their world, opium just as he knew that if he were ever to enter one of these places he would most likely never exit. The drowsing musk of the opium was quickly rendering him dizzy and as he turned into a cavern like alley to clear his mind, he blinked.

He sat beside his wife. She was lying in bed, her thin black hair splayed out around her head like a halo of death. Just under three weeks ago she had been diagnosed with terminal cholera, her unborn child to die with her. He was holding her frail, bony hand when he heard a knock at the door. As he opened the door he recognized the face of the messenger for 'the boss'. He had had a few visits from him in the past, all the same he would be handed two parcels, one with money for him and the other with an address. The address to which he was to deliver it. "We understand the situation you have at hand." Said the messenger understandingly, "but the boss, as you well know does not appreciate tardiness, he has also warned of the recent disappearances of our agents." He received merely a solemn nod in return, and with that he departed.

Returning to his wife, the man contemplated his options. Backing out was not a possibility, he had heard of the boss' punishments. The only path left was to deliver his parcel. As he returned to his seat he quickly realized he could no longer hear his wife breathing. He checked her pulse, it was clear that she was dead. He knew well that she had passed, and with her his last two ties to the world, with her his being. He blinked.

The knife shot out of nowhere. He had no time to react. It slid cleanly and silently between his ribs. He gasped wildly as he was dragged into the shadows. His breaths were slowly becoming more labored as his face became paler. He was dead. Dead. His last feeling was the smell of the assassin's fetid breath filling his nostrils. It was the end. He was dead.

A Tale from Old Shanghai

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Hoon Yoon, Yeo – 11

It was a blistering sunny day. Brian enthusiastically wondered around the busy walkway of Shanghai, still getting used to the chaos around him. His body was tired from the late arrival yesterday, determined to experience Shanghainese tranquility in his new home. However, his head said otherwise. He acquiesced to his own demands, and decided to circle this town. He had come against will, but honestly was starting to like this place. The eccentric sun reached out its rays, greeting Brian with an innovative feeling. He scrutinized the assiduous inhabitants of Shanghai, learning that their lifestyles were 180 degrees different from his. "I'll have to get used to it" Brian murmured to himself. Nearby people didn't notice Brian as a western tourist, but as a customer. He already had 20 people ask him "Do you want any sweets?" or "This one is very cheap!" in Shanghainese, which he wasn't great at, but was still able to understand certain questions or offers made by the people.

He put his hand into the pockets of his vintage coat that felt noticeably comfortable. Suddenly. He shocked alert with realization. He had come to Shanghai for a reason. His parents. It was barely visible or rewriteable history, but was still alive. The last thing his parents had left him was a note with coordinates on it. He had thought it was his last hope, so did everything to follow his parent's trails. That had lead him here. An abstract, incandescent fire burned inside him: scraping up the last of his happiness and filling him with determination.

The distant howl of the wind played an eerie tune. While the sinister moonlight which was accompanied by a countless number of fluorescent stars danced around Brian's head. How do I start? A thousand different questions clawed mercilessly into his head, haunting him. The damp, mossy cobblestone street was notoriously cold, forcing Brian to stand on his feet. He stared into the nothingness, his face pale, but he knew he had to move on. He had walked for a while, jolts of pain shooting up his legs every breathtaking step. Despite the endless route into oblivion, Brian felt no fear inside him. What he felt was pity; like it was an unavoidable fate he had to face. The only guidance was the somewhat-flickering lights of the diminutive stars, scattered oddly over the boundaries of the boundless horizon. And there he was, a 15-year-old with barely any knowledge of this city called Shanghai. Just the second Brian felt the first drop of rain tap on his forehead, a million others followed it and darkened the mood. He headed for the nearest shelter. A barbed rhombus roofed building, size colossal, towering up, above all others, was his choice. He was intrigued to see what was inside the vast 'Monument of Peace', which Brian had read from a label he passed.

After he reached the tower, Brian reluctantly shook his wet hair. He noticed a few lanterns glowing bright red. It was like a soul, cruelly kept into an object that could show its form. What? It was then when he noticed. The building was blank. Not a trail of human could be seen. Suddenly, all the lights were demolished into an eerie silence. Brian attempted to open the door. However, he knew best that it would have been locked. "Wh-what are you doing?" he waited a moment for a response, and hearing nothing, carried on. "Wh-who are you?" again no response was heard. Unpredictably, a shadow dashed down the everlasting height of the Monument of Peace.

The shadow camouflaged to the pitch black shadows that a wooden pillar made. The pillar was carved into the shape of a dragon, recklessly fire-blasting into midair. The shadow calmly walked towards Brian. Then held out a candle, and lighted it. It forced a billion different range of shadows rise onto the decrepit walls of the Monument of Peace. The shadow revealed its identity to be an old man. He was wearing an obsolescent waist coat that was too long for him. His crooked back seemed to be higher than the top of his head. The man's nails were five times longer than an average human; it was also covered with foreign substances. This made Brian to the edge of vomiting. "I see that you are on a quest" The man said wisely. Not waiting for an answer, he continued. "Your parents have been lost, is it not?" A subtle smile glided through the man's scarred cheeks, his enigmatic, grey

eyes still emotionless. "Yes," Brian answered.

"Tell me about them," The man demanded.

"Pardon?" Brian asked, clearly confused.

"I said—" He nearly screamed at Brian. However, lowering his voice he reattempted. "I said," The man looked annoyed as if talking to a child gently was a very hard job. "I said, tell me about your parents."

“M—my mother raised me to be creative, if I saw a newspaper, I could make a hat, an airplane, or a sword. And that was just three out of a million possibilities!” He continued naturally. Automatically feeling more and more confident. “My father raised me to be a generous man, he—” The sentence was split by a thunderous scowl.

“Enough! Did I ask you to tell me that much?” Brian didn’t know anything about this man, but one thing he knew was that he had anger control issues. A part of him giggled at the saying of that. Slowly breathing in and out of his body, the man said, “I cannot hear more of your tragic story. I see you were raised with love, then abandoned carelessly. It is a pity tha—”

“Do not say a word against my parents!” Brian shouted out with rage. “I know that it looks like they abandoned me,” Brian continued, this time losing confidence as he went on. “But I know it’s not.” At that moment, the man stared curiously into Brian’s eyes. He held up a piece of note from his pocket. It was his parent’s farewell to Brian. The coordinates. A sudden grin spread across the man’s face. “Always unpredictable, just like your father.” A tsunami struck Brian’s mind. Clearing everything he thought he had known. “We have a lot to talk about, come, time is not so abundant.” With a grin on his face Brian stepped towards the man. This was his first step...

Boundary of Love

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Jiang, Jenny – 13

Above the trees, the wind is howling deeply and loudly. It is a cold day of winter. Outside the window, it rains heavily, raindrops hit the window hardly. Down the streets, there are rarely people walking. The erect street lights stand lonely as if it was midnight. Empty, lonely, cold.

It is a rainy afternoon in 2017, as it is my 100th birthday! But I am not so happy to celebrate my 100th birthday, as many people think that is so unique, but I have been through too much, and been through too many birthdays, so the 100th isn't that surprising to me. I was born on the 15th of January 1917, in Shanghai. I walk over to my old drawer that I keep using it since 1948, take out a precious photo album with all my pretty memories and my love. I flip to the first page, where I find a group photo with me in the middle, and many Jewish people surrounding me, we all looked very happy, with a huge smile on our face. All at once I just break down and weep tears with joy. Then, I looked up at the cloudy sky, and think about my legend life...

"Ding-Ding!" It was a fresh but cold morning in 1943, Shanghai. I began my morning with some famous breakfast in Shanghai: Soybean milk, fried bread stick and steamed buns. These are the tradition of Old Shanghai that everyone like, men, woman, children and the elders. Then I dressed myself and began my business. I was a rich merchant who lived in a gigantic house with my lovely wife and 2 children.

Winter in Shanghai was especially cold, so I added an extra warm coat. The Jinrikisha was already waiting outside. But just as I walked out of my front yard, I saw a young foreigner girl selling newspapers on the street but a man passed and bumped into her, her newspapers all fall on the ground. She began to pick it up, but people passed by just stepped on it. I couldn't bear to watch it, so I walked over and picked the newspapers up for her. She thanked me, but when she reached out her hand and tried to get the newspapers, I saw her hand was shivering hardly. When she touched my hand, her hand was as cold as ice, and I noticed that she was wearing just a brown linen sundress and a pair of old trainers. I asked "Would you mind going to and café with me?" She looked worried and scared but I decided for her.

As we went in the café, it offered a warm current across her frozen fingers, and let her felt comfortable. I offered 2 cups of hot chocolates. I can tell that as she drinks the hot chocolate, it was like going to paradise. I watched her finished the whole cup, hungrily and quickly. Then I began to ask eagerly "What was your name and where were you from? Why were you wearing so little in winter? Where were your parents?" We broke down to silence for a moment, but then she slowly started to speak "I am a Jew." She burst into tears. Tears streamed down her cheeks and dropped down. I signed. "My parents and I escaped from our homeland, Poland, of being killed by the monster, Hitler. So luckily we were here. But we had nothing. No money, no clothes, no jobs. My mother died one day after we arrived in Shanghai and now my father was really ill so I have to go to work to get money and save my father." She wept as she spoke. I felt really sorry for her, I tried to think of ways that I can help her. Then, I came up with a new and challenging idea: To took her family to my house!

"What? A Jewish family to our house?" my wife said. "They were poor, no jobs, no money no clothes and they were starving!" I shouted emotionally. My wife thought for a moment. And said "Actually, you know what, I felt really sorry for them as well. You were such a caring person!" We together.

I came to the Jewish girl again, "Would you like to stay in my house for some days?" When the girl heard this news, her eyes became wild open with joy and tears, but full of excitement. "Really?" she said in an astonishment. "Of course!" I said with joy as well. We then went to the Jewish girl's little room beside to streets, there were only a few living here. We took her ill father back to our house and arranged them a comfortable room. I also offered them a doctor to cure her father's illness. The Jewish girl came up to me with tears "How could I thank you?" I kneeled down and looked into her eyes, which are as clear as the blue sky, no dusts, and no awareness, I said "No, you don't need to thank me, when your home is destroyed, we should help and bring your life to normal." The young girl came up and hugged me tightly. This moment, it seemed like I know what a Chinese people should do, and what everyone should do.

After a few months, the girl's father's illness was cured completely.

The second day, I came to visit him. When the old man saw me, he immediately sat up from his bed and got off the bed. This old man kept crying but smiling to me. He didn't know how to thank me, but I don't want anything, I just want you safe, and happy. The old man felt very pleased and hugged me tightly.

Furthermore, he told me that he and his daughter lived in an area where there were a lot of poor Jewish people. I took a day off and went there again. There, I saw all kinds of people sitting in the alleyway, with very few clothes, all looking at me. But they were all Jewish people. With the experience from last time, I decided to take the ones that were the young and the olds and the one who were most ill to my house. In Total there are 17 people.

When my wife saw me coming back, she came up enthusiastically with her beautiful red Qipao, but she didn't expect there are 15 strange people behind me. Her smile immediately disappeared. "Who were those people? Jewish again?" "Yes, I found them in Hongkou alleyway. Look at them, we should do something humanity." "Alright alright, but this is the maximum. No more ok?" "ok."

Once I finished arranging all their rooms, I felt so tired and exhausted. My house became so crowded, and full of people. My 12 years old son ran out to have a look "why were they here, I don't like them." He then ran away. Well, but I think this worth me to do this.

Days after days, I took more and more Jewish people in my house, my wife and children became more irritable, we also fought sometimes. I knew that these Jewish people can't stay here forever, so I began contacting my friends and sent them to America.

Now, I didn't go to my factories anymore, instead, I spent loads of time sending them overseas, and looking after them. After a month, I have already sent 1/3 of the Jewish people to America. Meanwhile, I was not a rich merchant anymore, I lost my 2 factories. My wife and children became very angry at me of why would I gave up my career, my family and my life for them? But no one understood me. So, in her anger, they left home and went to Hong Kong. At first, I thought they were joking. So I waited for 1 year, 2 years, 5, 10, 15... but they never came. Gradually, I lost contact with them.

One thing that kept me going on is these Jewish people. I kept on using the money that I left to support them overseas. The day when I sent them to the wharf, everyone was looking very happy and exciting, so why not me as

well? We took a big group photograph together. Everyone, was smiling, not a single one was not. As I watched the last group of Jewish people were on board, and the ship became smaller and smaller, my heart dropped down. Bye, Bye...

Ah. My wonderful, legendary memories in old Shanghai. I open my eyes again and look outside. A tear drops on my album. I give the picture one more look and close it. Although I am living in a small apartment on my own, but I know that there is no boundary for love. It is my 100th birthday, but no one, would remember my birthday, and no one, would celebrate my birthday.

Empty

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Jurisic, Pina – 13

Empty. That's how she felt. The feeling surrounded her, choking, smothering, making her crave for something, anything, to happen. Empty room, empty house, empty body, empty mind. Only her mind wasn't empty, it was racing with a million thoughts, each trying to make it to the finish but disappearing in a swarm of others instead. Empty. She wanted to scream, yell, anything to fill the deafening silence, but she couldn't find even a sliver of motivation to do any of that. She was, and always would be, empty. It had started about a year ago. A bad day had turned into a bad week, and then a bad month and now it was just all so horrible that she didn't even remember the last time she had been genuinely happy. Her life echoed her pain. It was all so perfect from afar, where you couldn't see the cracks and breaks, that was exactly how she liked it. No one noticed, and no one ever would, but that didn't matter, she'd be gone soon enough and then it would just be a memory, a picture perfect girl in a picture perfect world. And that was exactly how she wanted it. They didn't deserve to know the truth, how she was broken, cracking under the pressure, falling apart, destroying herself from the inside out. They had never taken the time to notice themselves and they didn't deserve to notice now.

Shanghai never seemed to stay still. It was bustling and alive, changing every second and never stopping for anything or anyone. Unfortunately, Mei Li didn't live in that part of Shanghai. She had somehow managed to find the one place in the city that was duller than sitting in an empty room and watching beige paint dry. Perfect little houses on a perfect little street with perfect little people living inside them. They woke up every morning and the husbands kissed their wives and went to work, the children went to school and the women cleaned and cooked and gossiped and they all came home and had dinner and the children played and the parents would talk and then it would start all over again and it was so mind numbingly boring that she wanted to pull her father's pistol out of the kitchen cupboard, stick it in her mouth and pull the trigger. Of course she never did. It had gone through her mind several times in the past year, she'd even made a plan but there was always an excuse. Maybe she had to throw out the trash, or feed the cat, maybe she had a big math test coming up that she really wanted to ace just so she could rub it in Shen Zhang's smug little face. Whatever the reason, she could never bring herself to do it, until now.

It had always bothered her how everyone around her ignored their problems. They all had the indecency to bad talk about each other all day, everyday, but refused to acknowledge their own faults. Her next door neighbor had a drug problem which was getting worse and worse because her parents didn't want it to get out. Her sister had a stack of failed exams shoved in the back of her closet that she was too proud to show to her parents. They all had secrets, and they never spoke about them, but she was going to change that. She was going to scream and yell and tell them all just how broken she was, she was going to ruin their little picture as much as she could. The horror that would settle was the only thing that had kept her going through all the weeks of insufferable boredom with life and everything surrounding her. It was all so fake. The people, the place, their lives, it was all fake. Didn't it bother them? Didn't anyone else notice? Wasn't anyone else dying on the inside because they knew that this was the only life they had ever lived and most likely the only life they ever would live? No. It didn't bother them, they just went on with their lives, blissfully oblivious and she could have been too if it hadn't been for Miss Pai.

Miss Pai had been her English teacher two or so years ago. She had come from the city and all the students instantly loved her. Bubbly, joyful, and mysterious. She had grown up in America and traveled the world by the age of twenty six, when she decided to come back to Shanghai, where she had been born, to teach, she was a wonder to the students, exotic even. Many of them had never even left the country, much less traveled around the world, meeting new people, seeing places that to them only existed in photos. Mei became Miss Pai's biggest fan. She was amazed with the concept, this new idea that she didn't have to live here forever and follow the same life as everyone else she knew, she could travel, go as far as she wanted and there was no one to stop her. Or so she

thought. At the first mention of even leaving the city her parents had shut down the idea and shattered her short lived dreams. After that, she lived knowing that she could become anything in the world and go anywhere she pleased but that she never would. The thought ate her alive. Making it through life only seemed possible with the stories and hopes that Miss Pai flooded her with, but even that didn't last for long, the young teacher had decided that this life was too plain for her and went on to continue her tour of the world. Slowly but steadily, Mei collapsed.

Nothing interested her anymore, how could it when she knew that there were such great things that she would never achieve. Thoughts raced through her head every day, and they drove her insane, as usual, no one around her noticed. Blissful obliviousness remained in their minds, Miss Pai had been a crazy and exciting experience for them but it was nothing memorable, and any thought of her faded from their minds after a while, they just didn't care at all, they didn't want to see what she had seen, do the things she had done, perfectly content with only hearing about the great wonders that could be achieved. But Mei just couldn't live with it, she either had to live any amazing life or no life at all. Which is how it came to be that she was walking through the street towards the park, bright pink socks on her feet and a loaded gun in her purse.

She had considered how she would do it several times, jumping off a building or swallowing a handful of pills just didn't seem certain enough, she could always be saved and that was not an option. She was going to go out with a bang, quite literally. The world around her blurred as she caught sight of the park, everything had to be shut out, no turning back. A blanket of fallen leaves covered the ground that she walked on, crackling with each step taken closer to the fountain, the fountain with the icy blue water that would soon be tinted red with her blood. Blood had always made her nauseous, sometimes she really wondered how she survived it every month, but now she would be gone before she had to see it, a sheet of welcoming darkness would be draped over her mind. Joyful cries vibrated in the air around her, children running and jumping into piles of leaves, watching in wonder as they flew up only to come back down to earth. That was what she had done. She had flown up into her hopes and dreams, imagined an amazing life for herself, become a helium balloon that would only ever go up. But of course, leaves fall back to the ground, balloons deflate and dreams get crushed. It was time.

Pulling open the zipper of her purse seemed like the hardest thing at that moment. Her fingers curled around the cold handle of the gun and she lightly pulled at the trigger, being careful not to pull too far back. The gun felt heavy in her hand as she pulled it out of the purse and brought it up to her torso, she had to do this now, now or never. People were beginning to look over at her and the children had stopped running around the park. Time seemed to slow as she brought the gun up to her temple and rested her finger on the trigger. Everything around her was blurring, all her senses were lost, did someone scream? Was that a person coming towards her? Blinking once was all it took to bring her focus back to reality and a bright smile melted onto her shaking lips. She pulled the trigger.

An Old Shanghai Tale

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Sun, Raymond – 12

It is a warm and sunny day in Shanghai. A beam of sunlight bounces off the window of a nearby modern skyscraper, runs through an old neighborhood of the city, and lands on a brown house on Hua Shan road.

Today, there is apparently a big family reunion in front of the old house. There were about seventy people. Many are children. Some are middle aged and some are very old sitting on wheel chairs. They were all listening to an old man who has grey hair and a clean and well ironed suite. He stood in front of the crowd and looked at the house, his eyes slowly watering. "It has been seventy years," he raised his right hand, "now I am back to pay tribute." He turned around to look at his whole family and said, "Today I brought you all here to tell you a story. There was once a Jewish boy who had to flee from his home in Austria because the Nazis was in the process of wiping out all Jewish there in early 1930s. Many Jewish people died. His parents were almost sent to the concentration camp. The boy and his family applied for visas to a number of countries but none of the countries issued the visa to Jewish people because they were afraid of Nazis. We became desperate."

He stopped for a moment, and then continued, "Then we heard that China was issuing visas to Jewish people so we gave it a try. They waited and waited as there were so many Jewish applied. One day, a kind looking Chinese consul went up to the boy's family and said their visa request had been accepted by China and that China would welcome them anytime. The boy and his family were happier than they had ever been in their whole lifetime."

They finally escaped from Austria to Shanghai, China. In Shanghai, they found out that almost 20,000 Jewish people came from around the world to Shanghai to run away from the Nazis. At that time, China was also in a difficult situation as they were invaded by the Japanese. However, Chinese were friendly and helpful to Jewish people. Although there were bombing and there were famine, the boy and his family managed to start a small business and learnt to make friends with some local Chinese people. They learnt to speak Chinese and cook Chinese food. The boy's parents even learnt how to play Ma Jiang!" He smiled.

Finally after a few years, the Nazi lost the war and so was the Japanese, which meant Jewish people could finally go wherever they want. The boy and his family decided to go to the USA. They settled down in New York and started a business. Fifty years later, they became one of the biggest real estate owner in New York. The company's name is Seinfeld Company, which is our family owned company." He raised his voice and looked at the crowd. "The boy grew up and took his family business. He got married and had children. Then his children got married and had their own children" he said, like it was just happened yesterday.

"I was that Jewish boy named Roy Seinfeld!" The old man stopped to take a breath. "Now you know why I brought you here. This house is the house we used to live in China." He went to the front of house and touched the door and the brick wall emotionally. "We should never forget those Chinese officials who saved us in Austria and those kind Chinese people who helped us in Shanghai. History is a lesson. We can learn a lot from it. Let's hold hands and pray for world peace". So the crowd held hands and prayed. At the moment, a large group of white pigeon flew through the houses.

THE END

The Red Ribbon

British International School Shanghai Puxi, Tan, Munique – 14

Well, *this blows*. I stood, grumbling to myself in the midst of what had to be the most chaotic attic in the history of the world, coughing as a billow of dust rained over me. Begrudgingly, I reached up onto my tiptoes, blindly groping about the cluttered top shelf searching for my luggage. I dodged to the side, shrieking as an avalanche of papers came crashing down, barely missing me. Another mini tornado of dust to swirled in the air above me as I collapsed onto the creaky wooden floorboards. I stared as a ray of sunlight broke through the nearby window illuminating the falling dust. It reminded me of a Northern Lights show... You know, if the Aurora Borealis occurred in the dingy, damp attic of an ancient, crumbling house. I'd lived here all my life. I sighed. I couldn't believe we were moving to China in two weeks. I'd known my best friend, Annabelle, since I was two years old and even though we hadn't talked much lately, the thought leaving my life here felt unreal. I abruptly sat up as I realised I was virtually lying in a pile of century old dirt.

I rummaged around the pile, gathering the fallen papers in an attempt to tidy. My fingers brushed against a few more papers and I paused, reaching to grab them. Something about them looked different. I fingered the pages, flipping through the slightly crinkled sheets as the rough surface scratched my skin. I skimmed through the first one, heart thumping as the words tumbled off the page.

"Yang Mei and I had our first proper argument today. She claims that I've been acting up lately, but she just doesn't understand. Today, of all days. I can practically taste the smell of opium reeking off her clothes, breath and even her hair. We spent hours planning a night out for my 18th birthday but I guess that won't be happening. I don't care. Tonight, I'm wearing the new Qi Pao Mama got me from high street. I'm going to curl my hair with my trusty old rollers and head to the Black Cat so I can forget all about today – with or without her."

–Chen Li Na, June 9th 1931"

Opium? Qi pao? Why hadn't I ever known about this? I was suddenly buzzing with questions. Was this an ancestor of mine? I sat still for a moment, filled with intrigue. My mind was tingling as I revelled in my newfound discovery. I greedily reached for the next entry, hungry for more.

"Last night, when I was meant to be asleep, I overheard Mama and Papa discussing talk of Japanese spies captured in Manchuria. What did this mean? The government is trying to assure us that they have it under control but whispers are spreading across the city. Newspapers all over the country have announced that minor fighting has been occurring throughout the North East of China. Fingers crossed that this dies down soon..."

–Chen Li Na, September 21st 1931"

That hadn't been what I was expecting at all... I had hoped to find out more about Yang Mei but much to my disappointment, there was no further mention of her. That couldn't possibly be the last page. I scrambled up, desperation overcoming me as I searched for more. I overturned each box, spreading its contents across the floor. I glanced around, hoping I'd missed one. I gasped, excitement jolting through me as I spotted a small tin container on its side— just out of reach on the top shelf. A loose ribbon barely held a stack of papers together as they spilled out, leaning over the edge.

I scurried over, jumping to grab them, but my fingers missed them by mere millimeters. Eventually, I managed to knock them off and immediately pounced on it as soon as they touched the ground, slipping and scratching my elbow in the process. I brushed it off, unraveled the faded red ribbon and began to read. This had better be worth it.

"I'm afraid things have only gotten worse. It's official. As of July 7th 1937, China and Japan are officially at war. Beijing and Tianjin have fallen to the Japanese forces and Papa has been increasingly mentioning the possibility of fleeing. It's risky but either way, the prominent fear of death looms over us like a thunder cloud. They had promised us there was no imminent threat but six years have passed and it has only been getting worse... I fear for our lives as reports of the enemy troops appear to show them progressing further and further into the mainland, dangerously close to our hometown of Shanghai. Life now is nothing like it had been years ago. I miss my life, and most of all, I miss my best friend. I must hurry now, Mama is calling me."

—Chen Li Na, July 30th 1937"

I froze in pure suspense, trying to drink it all in. This one was dated years later— what had happened in between? These entries were so personal, so raw. It was almost felt as if I was intruding on something important. It felt so realistic yet at the same time, utterly impossible. I considered it for a while, contemplating the choices available to me. I couldn't stop, not now. Oh well, only one way to go now...

"Tonight is the night. It's finally happening. Tonight, we're running away. Although a part of me is completely crushed, I'm relieved to be leaving all my problems behind. I received a letter two days ago from Yang Mei's address. She had passed away from an overdose. I cried for hours and hours after that. My heart has broken into a million pieces and everything once familiar to me has all come crashing down. My story shouldn't have to end this way. I'm determined to make it better. I know she would've wanted that for me. Wish me luck."

—Chen Li Na, August 7th 1937"

I impatiently, I flipped the page, only to find myself at the beginning again. I twisted the paper, expecting there to be more but to no avail. I exhaled, out of breath simply from the thrill of it all. She was right... How could her story have ended this way? She had to have made it... I mean, I was staring at the proof of it and my existence itself was evidence enough but it still felt incomplete. Disgruntled, I picked up the strewn ribbon and retied the papers before trudging downstairs with the package under my arm.

As I reached my bed, I dropped in exhaustion as the pages fluttered to the floor. I gazed at them before making the decision to reach over my bedside and grapple for my phone. The line was ringing before I'd even thought it through.

"Hello?" The sound of her voice made me realise how long it had been since I'd heard it.

"Oh... Hi, Annabelle." I replied hesitantly, suddenly at a loss of what to say despite having known her for sixteen years. "How are you?"

"Good, thanks...You?"

"Actually, that's not why I called. I know I'm moving soon but that doesn't matter... We have phones and the internet and I could even write you letters, if you wanted. I don't even remember why we're not talking anymore but I know I miss you." I held my breath as I heard a huge sigh on the other side of the phone.

"I... I miss you too. I guess it kind of felt like you were leaving me behind and I didn't know what to do. You're right, though." She laughed nervously, "Can I come over? I'll bring ice cream!"

"See you in five. I have something to show you!" I smiled to myself, feeling lighter than I had felt in the last months. I hung up, before picking up the papers and heading upstairs again. In a way, I had Li Na to thank. I wanted to show Annabelle the box and return these to their rightful place. This time, I successfully grasped the tin container but to my surprise, it wasn't empty. I reached in, preparing myself for what I was about to read.

"This is my last entry. News has arrived from China. The war has finally ended. September 9th 1945 will forever go down in history and I'm unsure whether the loss of thousands can be considered a victory, but we have finally won. I've made a happy life for myself here. I've settled down with the man I love and come home every day to my beautiful children and maybe someday, when the time is right, I will tell them about how we got here. I will tell them about the Black Cat, about the war and about my best friend, Yang Mei. When the time is right, I will tell them the new tales of old Shanghai."

—Chen Li Na, November 20th 1945"

The Warning

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Tang, Emma – 12

England, December 1930

A lighthouse guard lit a cigarette lazily. He was just about to close the blinds when a sudden movement caught his eye. However, after he scrutinized the horizon again and it did not reoccur, he shrugged to himself and stalked away. If he had looked a little closer, he would have seen a pale boy with brown hair, around thirteen, getting tied up and beaten savagely.

Shanghai, March 1931

The only thing Jamie remembered was a hand seizing him and the rocking of a boat on the sea, an overwhelming feeling of dread and cold resentment. A sharp stabbing pain appeared in his torso and he couldn't breathe.

Jamie awoke to the sound of distant muttering that he couldn't quite make out. He tried to sit up and instantly a wave of nausea blurred his vision. Images flashed in his mind, a cobbled street, a man who resembled a hawk...all jumbled up, throwing his brain into yet another world of confusion. He was sure these images formed a picture, though he didn't have a clue how to arrange them. Maybe that was why he was here now; maybe he had been too close to the answer before. The Jamie before would know, but the new Jamie would have to start from the beginning.

The muttering closed on him and a boy, around his age, with dirty blond hair, came into view.

"Who are you?" the blond boy enquired, an edge of annoyance in his voice.

"Jamie."

"Right, well, we were all brought here because our parents were influential Lords. This is their revenge, see, they're going to keep us here until the ransom price gets high enough. My name is Sixten, by the way."

72 hours of sitting in a wall-surrounded courtyard gave Jamie plenty of time to think – without any distractions, about an escape plan. Every day food was slotted through a window, which according to Sixten was an attempt to make them look healthy for photos in the ransom notes. Sometimes he wondered about Sixten's past. On the outside Sixten was constantly jubilant and talkative, though his kaleidoscopic eyes told another story. Every night Jamie dozed off with more and more unanswered questions, but as he searched his mind, there was only a hollow space that greeted his curiosity.

One day, for the first time the gate opened and a dwarf like man with features stretched to the extreme entered. He handed them a piece of tattered paper.

"This is a ransom note. Take it to the lawyer in the government building. He'll help you, I'm sure. And beware of the man that looks like a hawk. He is ShenWu, the leader of our gang." As soon as he said that, Jamie felt himself plunged into dizziness, like he was being strangled by an invisible hand made of ice. "I've had enough, they'll kill me when they find out, but at least in life I've done something useful. There's a hole under the back wall, just tug on the big rod and it will open. It should be easy, getting into the government building. Good luck and fare well."

Getting to the government building was nowhere as easy as Jamie expected. Firstly, men were pulling rickshaws with such speed they narrowly missed pedestrians – men in long robes and women wearing flowery gowns. Nobody laughed or stopped to talk with friends. They were all hurrying about to get to their own business. A fight broke out between a barman and what appeared to be a tramp, who was twitching convulsively, his surly face masked with bellicose anger. Secondly, armed soldiers trudged around, glaring darkly at passersby. Jamie had learned some Chinese from his Chinese governess, so he was able to catch the words “Japanese invasion” weaving in the air, buzzing around like angry bees. An odd feeling of tense anticipation filled the atmosphere. Patches of wilted grass were hanging their heads, as if they too were sharing the misery. Then again, there was always the possibility that someone working for ShenWu was posing as a pedestrian waiting to pounce on them and get a reward from the boss.

Sixten led him through the winding passageways and aisle. They passed a magnificent temple with the Chinese characters “Jing’an Temple” on the front, where several monks were practicing a form of martial arts that Jamie recognized as “Wushu” while other monks were humming Buddhism prayers routinely.

“Hey, you!” a raspy voice cut across the prayers. Jamie averted his eyesight to the direction of the voice. “Yes, you, Kid, I’ve got something to show you,” an elderly woman beckoned towards him. Jamie exchanged a significant glance with Sixten before he shrugged and followed the woman into her shop.

As Jamie entered the shop, the distinctive aroma of green tea whiffed his senses. The woman turned and gave him a toothless grin, a mad gleam visible in her eyes, before taking out a white block of marble and a match. She lit the match on some logs and then started to ground the marble into the fire. Suddenly the flames erupted into blinding purple fairies, which joined hands and danced around the logs, flickering elegantly.

“When the flames of heaven burn, the evil will overcome the world; and the few left with a hope to save it will get a warning. Jamie, be careful, ShenWu’s intentions are more insidious than they seem,” the woman asseverated and they relapsed into a prickly silence. She waved a hand towards the door and backed into the shadows until only her emerald green eyes were visible, glowing eerily.

Jamie wasted no time recounting the warnings, to his surprise Sixten just nodded glumly. After another five minutes, a tyrannical grey building stood in front of them, leering at everyone and anyone that dared to disturb the cold aura it radiated. Dodging around the gate, Jamie was surprised to find the entrance unguarded. Once inside the building, he heard an old grandfather clock ticking away vindictively, like a nuclear bomb, only making them more nervous. Everything had gone too smoothly since they left the gang’s headquarters, making fear bubble like acid inside his stomach and the thought that sooner or later a tornado of catastrophe was going to strike only made it worse. Above his head, a pirouetting chandelier was swinging alarmingly. Nobody in the lobby stopped them although Jamie knew hundreds and hundreds of eyes were upon them as though each were a searchlight. They successfully made it to the lawyer’s office. Knocking fervently at the door, Jamie was once again left to dwell over their streak of good luck as the lawyer opened the door and motioned for them to enter.

“Well, times are changing around here. What have you got to tell me?” pronounced the lawyer in rather fluent English.

“Sir, you’ve got to know a local gang left by the notorious ShenWu has been kidnapping children of important officials overseas for ransoms,” remarked Sixten with unexpected confidence, as the absurdity of the sentence sank in.

“I cannot pretend I haven’t been expecting this since my poor brother was murdered by them. I assume that the piece of paper that you are holding is the ransom note,” the lawyer sighed and carried on, “Very well, I’ll arrange transportation for you to go back to England. It’s very fortunate that you’ve stopped this in time.”

Jamie was lounging in the luxurious cabin of the ship, lethargically flipping through the newspaper searching for an article about ShenWu’s gang. When he finally found the page, he saw a picture of them all wearing vindictive smiles while officers pinned them to the wall. He threw the newspaper at Sixten who caught it and folded it into a paper airplane. “10 minutes till we arrive,” came a voice from the loud speakers.

England, November 1931

Once disembarked, a man in black tuxedo showed them into a gleaming silver Rolls–Royce and drove towards London. Jamie and Sixten were too busy making card castles to notice the scenery outside the window changed from crowded streets to isolated lanes.

“Lads, do me a favor and go move that pot plant aside, ’fraid this car won’t fit through,” wheezed the driver.

Jamie and Sixten clambered out. A rhapsody gale of wind disturbed the timeless complexion of the lane. It was only when Jamie surveyed his surroundings that a bolt of horror and realization struck him. The cobbled street. The Rolls Royce had already disappeared down the corner, into the dense fog.

“No,” he heard Sixten gasp. Whirling around, he felt his heart stop abruptly. There was a man who was wearing a malicious smile that twisted his hawk–like features. “Home is where chaos grows, trapping the innocent and devouring lost souls, wiping our mind until all that is left fades into darkness.” Then the fog thickened for a moment, and when it parted, there was nobody there.

Get the Job Done and Over With

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Woo, Lara – 13

March 1934 AD

Juan Fu District, Shanghai

Neon lights pulsed in time to the city's electric heartbeat. The cobbled roads were paved with gold and radiance, gleaming with greed and pleasure, accompanied with swirling clouds of purple smoke that loitered around. Take a turn and down an abandoned alleyway, a man sat in his wooden rocking chair flipping through a collection of papers, clipped together into a smooth, leather file. He stopped turning, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, and brought it closer. "Fool," he muttered, closing the file and throwing it under the chair.

He removed the coins from his pocket, and replaced them with a set of knives. Took off his hat, and replaced it with a black bandana. *Get the job done and over with*, a motto he lived by, and this job was no exception. He bent down to tie his laces, stood up, and scaled the wall into the gloom.

Shu had always liked Shanghai in the late hours. Everything seemed at peace, even though he knew, more than anyone, how much of a lie that was. But for now, he could pretend everything was perfect, and let his body soften. Above the roofs, there were no angry traders, nobody to bother him. Just the moon, his beating heart, and his thoughts.

The refreshing journey never felt long enough. Shu leaped off his favourite territory and landed gracefully in front of a typical commoner's house. *499 Blk, 23C*. Yes, that was correct. There would be a father and his two daughters sleeping peacefully inside.

Shu climbed through an open window to find himself in the master bedroom. *Perfect*. He set up a noose from the ceiling lights and put his gloves and mask on. Carefully kneeling on the bed, Shu tied the unsuspecting man's hands and gagged him, then grinned and pinched his face. The prisoner awoke abruptly, pulling against his restraints.

"Mr. Zhou, what a pleasure to meet you. Now, I'm going to take the gag off, but if you scream, I'll slice your throat without a second thought. *Keyi?*"

The man stayed rigid, before nodding reluctantly. Slowly, Shu pulled the cloth out of his mouth.

"Now tell me Mr Zhou, who will miss you when you're gone?"

He didn't answer. Shu laughed drily.

"I don't suppose you already know your fate, *sir*. I mean, how long did you think you could hide from me?"

The bound man gritted his teeth. "It has been five months, so quite long if you ask me."

"Such a smart mouth for someone so incredibly dumb. Well, I don't believe your daughters will be very proud that you're cheating in casinos and not paying taxes. Don't you agree?"

"Don't you dare do anything to them. I'll cut your body up."

"That sounds like a decent threat, if only you could live long enough for that. You'll get your wish though, Zhou. I'm a kind man, and besides, your daughters would look lovely in a bar."

And with that, he sliced the man's neck in one smooth move.

After hanging his body in the noose and breaking open his safe, the masked man left as silently as he came and disappeared into the midst.

Pirouettes of hazy fumes performed its teasing dance, glazing over the pink and blue spotlights shining onto the crowded floor. Tonight's music was no different to any other; a collection of drunken bets being placed and arguments being voiced. Most men were purely searching for a good time, often reeled into opium, but Shu wasn't here for that.

There would be two men that didn't belong here, and Shu knew it wasn't a coincidence.

Glancing around the humid room, he fixed his eyes upon his targets: two blokes in black. He made his way through the drunken pool of people, locking his eyes onto them. They were near the bar, chatting. He recognised them as *capo-regimes* in the gang from the neighbour district. Shu made himself comfortable on a nearby chair, holding his drink he had randomly picked up, and tuned into their conversation.

“Another suicide yesterday, Liao. This guy is cold-hearted, whoever he is.” The first man, sporting a large eagle tattoo, said.

“Yeah, too bad he won’t be able to act high and mighty for much longer.” The other, wearing a rather obnoxious top hat, answered.

“You really think we can, though? We don’t even know who this guy is.” Man 1 said skeptically.

“Big Boss is onto him. He’s convinced we’ll have him by next moon.” The two blokes started walking towards Shu.

Even though he was well disguised, a little spark of panic rose. Shu scolded himself. Of course they wouldn’t recognise him.

True enough, they didn’t. “Two *Huangjiu!*” They shouted at the bartender.

Shu scoffed internally. *The classic low-class alcohol, of course they would order that.*

“Seriously. Big Boss has a whole plan set up. Like, knives and stuff. You know, to seal the deal.” Man 2 said. He was obviously very determined.

“I don’t know. Last time we tried something he killed eight people without exposing himself. I don’t know how he does it.”

Well first you have to lose all those pounds, love, Shu jeered. The two blokes started talking about brands of whiskey, so the disguised man decided that it was time to leave.

Pan Xiong, or their “Big Boss”, had always been greedy. Tonight he wanted to scare Shu, though it was a pathetic attempt. Well, how off he was in reality compared to plan would nearly be funny. Bet a thousand coins Pan didn’t know anything about the cameras situated everywhere in his base, how his gang had dozens of snitches, taken in by Shu’s better prices. He knew how much hard work Pan had put in.

Don’t want to waste his efforts, right? Pan wants a game, a game he will have. Only problem is, he won’t be the one winning. No one wins against Shu.

The sky was a dull abnegation grey, puffs of smoke released from factory chimneys. Signs advertising ‘*Coffee & Dimsum*’ were fixed on the same cobbled roads, now paved with horse manure. Shu weaved in between those irritating traders, managing a slow stroll, enjoying the eyes watching him. He was playing a game some may call risky, but Shu had calculated the probability; he had a nice advantage and several surprises in store.

Taking a turn and walking down the same abandoned alleyway, he was finally alone. Waiting. Slowly, two men appeared, both masked. Shu rolled his eyes, plastering a smile coated with venom.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe it! I wonder who told on me? Ben and Liao, it’s nice to meet you again.” Shu winked, voice dripping in poisonous sarcasm.

“Mr Zhou’s daughters happily gave us all the information we needed.” Ben said smugly. “Wait— how does he know—”

The eagle-tattooed man elbowed Ben, standing up straighter and putting on his big-boy pants. “We see you’ve taken a liking to us. Names? Wow. Now give us your money and land and we’re all good.” *Those two idiots...*

Shu put his hands deep into his pockets, enjoying the hot gazes. “Did you know I’m particularly skilled in the fine art of security?” The two men cocked their heads. The masks really were useless. “Ah, I can’t expect you dimwits would understand. Let me say this very slowly, *keyi*? You. Are. So. Screwed.”

Liao tried to look intimidating, “We have knives. And more people coming. We’re just ploys...” Then, as if realising his mistake, he froze. *Rookies*. “I mean— No! We’re actually officials. Yes! We’ll get you good, Shu. See, we know your name. Ha! We know your signature mafia moves. Well, we’ve got you good— Where did he go?”

By then, Shu was already gone. He had shot the three other men through the heads and vanished into the metallic air.

The infamous Single-Man Mafia had no mercy, but he *got the job over and done with*.

A Burning City

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Yan, Natarsha – 13

Black. Red. Kai stared into the fireplace, watching the turrets of red-gold flames lick at the grey stone around it. “Tell me a story, Grandpa! Tell me a story!” The excited lilt in the voice of the little boy in front of him startled Kai out of his reverie. He smiled. As the glowing embers of the fireplace lit up the room around him, Kai seemed almost to fade back as he spoke, in that slow raspy voice of his, “You want to hear a story, boy? This is one you’ll remember. This is a story of pride and honor and vengeance, of blood versus water, of the descendants of the fiery dragon rising against the bloodied sun. This is a story of a city torn apart at its seams but still thrumming with a strong, steady beating heart.”

October, 1939

1939 was a year of many things. It was the year World War II officially begun, and over 2 years into the Japanese Empire’s conquest of China. It was a year of widespread panic and wreaked havoc. It was also the year Kai watched his entire family die before his very eyes, lost to a ring of shadows and flames.

He saw the smoke first— thick plumes rising over the squat tiles of his gated home. He heard the crackling of fire against wood and a sturdy snap. “I have no son called Kai.” The deep, throaty voice of his father carried over the thick stone walls. Kai paused in front of the heavy brass knocker.

“Liar.” A heavily accented voice snarled back. “I’ve had enough of your games, old man.” A frantic shout and then the sharp crack of a gunshot blasted the air.

“Ma!” An anguished wail. Jing, Kai’s little sister. Kai shrank back against the walls, his eyes wide open. “Ma.” He whispered.

“I was going to be lenient,” the snarling voice said, “but I’ve run out of patience. I don’t need your son anymore. He’ll be dead soon anyway.” Kai felt blood pounding in his ears.

“Burn them all!” the man thundered. Desperate cries filled the air. Kai bolted. Moments later, he felt himself knocked off his feet, flung into the sky before slamming back onto the ground with a sickening thud. The sky above him exploded into an expletive of color, of gold and crimson and crackling ivory. That night a forage of history and blood burned and fell, and out of the shards of ash and dust rose one very vengeful boy.

Three months later, Kai Ming enlisted into the army. Gone were his days of late-night partying in the infamous nightclubs strewn across the fashionable streets of Shanghai. Gone was the flippant, pampered demeanor of the *shaoye* who was to inherit the massive fortune belonging to one of the most prestigious families in the city. In his place was the soldier Kai: the young man who had a heart burning with hatred and thoughts of revenge, who wanted nothing more than to shed away the cowardly boy he’d been and kill the men, the soldiers of the Japanese army, that had slain his family and wiped out entire towns and cities of his homeland.

May 1943

Relentless artillery fire pelted the streets of Shanghai, blasting through the mass of sandbags and wire set in a flimsy attempt to protect the citizens of the city from the horrors of the war raging around them. For the most part, Shanghai seemed at peace – a fashionable city ahead of its time filled with bustle and noise and an influx of foreign embassies. But then there were times like tonight when the harsh reality of war retreated from the shadows and hit the city at full force.

Kai ducked low as he skirted around an overturned casket. He gestured to the boy beside him, and the two opened fire. Zhang was Kai's best friend. His only friend. They'd risen through the ranks together, both driven by an intense, burning hatred and an even more ferocious need for vengeance. Zhang was 15 when he lost his parents, an innocent student eager to be taught in the big schools of Shanghai. But everything changed when in the winter of 1937, the Japanese Army, led by their insignia of the rising sun, rampaged the city of Nanjing, killing every man, woman and child that crossed their path, including Zhang's parents, until the whole city was soon soaked in blood and teeming with empty streets. Zhang had then thrown away his dreams and future and dedicated himself to avenging his family and countrymen. Two years later, Kai joined him and over time, as they lay awake in the army base late at night, he would reminisce aloud how he'd been out all night partying when he should've been with his family the night of the attack. How he hadn't even had a chance to properly see them before it all happened. How he'd been a coward and a fool and ran away when he should've stepped out.

Black. Red. The colors flashed before his eyes as Kai felt more than saw Zhang's falling figure. Once. Twice. Zhang's body convulsed from where the bullets struck him. Kai snapped out of his stupor fast enough to catch Zhang before he made impact on the cold, hard floor. "No." Kai whispered. "You promised. That we'd stay together. Right to the very end."

"I'm – sorry." Zhang choked out.

"No." Kai repeated, louder this time. But it was too late.

Kai howled. He surged on in a blind frenzy, white-hot anger coursing through him. Once. Twice. He fired and fired. "Stop. Please." A quiet sob. Kai turned around. A boy of 14 knelt behind a ruckus of sandbags, his hands held high behind his head, almost drowning in his too-large uniform.

"Please." He managed again in broken Mandarin. Kai paused. He should just kill this boy. Get it over with. But he looked so small. So innocuous. So terrified.

"I–didn't. Want to–" the boy mimed shooting. "But you were– shooting– me. So I– hit back." Kai said nothing, eyes still pasted to Zhang's limp body and the discarded gun next to the boy. "Please." The boy tried again, his thin voice breaking on the last word. Kai clenched his fist. The way the boy was pleading, it reminded him of when his brother wheedled himself out of beatings from his father.

Crack. The boy collapsed against Kai as a small hand-bomb detonated a few meters away from them. Kai cursed, picking himself up, and dragged the boy with him down a nearby alley. The boy was sweating profusely, large eyes tinged with fear. His name was Shiro, Kai learned through his tremulous attempts at explaining himself. He'd been forced to fight in the war when soldiers were running out. He'd been an aspiring artist before that and though he wanted no part in the war, he had to follow his general's orders. It was imperative.

Kai shook his head, his mind a jumbled mess. All his life, the enemy had just been the enemy. They were faceless, ruthless creatures. They were the ones who'd murdered his family, and ripped apart his home. They were all the same– heartless, feral, inhumane. But what Shiro was showing him– that perhaps some of them were different. Perhaps not everything could be blamed on every single one of them. Perhaps under different circumstances some

of them would be friends. Perhaps. Perhaps. The words echoed in his mind. No. They'd still slaughtered his family. They'd still ravaged his city. But looking at the boy—soldier in front of him, shivering, crying, he found it hard to imagine him doing all that. But he'd shot Zhang. Kai dragged his hands over his face. But perhaps to Shiro, the ordinary soldier who only followed his commands and only wished to go back home, perhaps *they* were monsters too. Kai clenched then unclenched his fists. The fighting had subsided. He turned towards Shiro. "Go." He whispered. "I won't fight you today. But let's hope for both our sakes that our paths don't cross again. I won't be able to not shoot you then." Through the red haze of the city around them, two shadowy figures limped their separate ways.

"That's a horrible story, Grandpa." The little boy frowned. "Mama tells me that Old Shanghai was a romantic place and time. Not at all like you described."

Kai leaned forward and patted his grandson's head. "There are good and bad parts to everything, my boy. Shanghai then had been a beautiful place. It still is. But perhaps it's more so now because of all that the city had endured and all the history that had transpired. All of the tales make up Old Shanghai, not just the romantic ones. The brutal ones too. The tragic ones. Don't just appreciate the city for what you see now on the surface. Love it for all that it had suffered to get to how it is now."

A Tale of Old Shanghai

British International School, Shanghai, Puxi (BISS Puxi), Zeiss, Helene – 12

The sun died, drenching the sky in blood. The dark hours had breezed in, the time of the gangsters and outlaws. An eerie silence swallowed the streets of old Shanghai. Dark figures slithered along the aphotic side streets. A young girl, 15 at most, paced the dimly lit road, rushing from streetlight to streetlight. With every strong step she took, her golden hair shimmered in a new light, and the sequins glittered on her expensive dress. One of the crimson sequins loosed and fell to the ground. It flimsily floated on the foul water of a puddle. Maliciously, a withered hand shot out and grabbed it. Its fingers closed around the thin, shining jewel, leaving it no escape.

The girl darted towards the door of a vast mansion and shut the door, closing out the foggy streets of Shanghai behind her. The immense entrance room was full of flaming velvet chairs, sat at the walls in the orderly Chinese fashion. Faintly, heartbroken melodies echoed through the house, down the large staircase. She slipped off her coral silk cloak and layed it in the hands of an elderly woman, waiting by the door. The woman bowed low and disappeared in the depths of the manor. She took a step towards the first, illuminated stair. Suspiciously, she looked around the darkened room, then she disappeared up the stairs.

„Violet.“ The girl flinched and gently turned her head towards the voice, though avoiding eye-contact.

„Father.“ Her faced was masked with a fabricated smile. „Working by candle-light again?“

The stout man grunted and turned back to the pages of paper-work. His face glistened in the dim candle-light.

„Go up to Mei Fang.“ His pen flew over the tinged paper, as though it were as agile as a birds feather.

„Yes, Father.“ Slowly, she moved out of his sight, and hurried up the second, golden staircase.

„Violet! Where have you been! Its dark outside, its dangerous!“ Dropping her ErHu, Mei Fang stood up. The instrument made a soft sound.

„Sorry Ms Li...“

„Violet! I told you many times, you can call me Mei Fang!“ The tall woman kneeled down to pick up her ErHu. Her black, silky hair brushed the floor. „Silas, I mean your father and I, are going to get married in less than two months.“ She sighed and sank into the cardinal velvet armchair. „Its already past midnight,“ she paused and looked at the mystical, mesmerising moonrays. „I think its time for you to go to bed.“

„Wang!“

„Yes, sir?“

„That chair... The Table... Why is everything so rundown in this house?“

„S-sir, We ca-cannot afford to fix or, or to b-b-buy anything new, sir.“

„Is that so?“

„I-I, well I guess sir.“

„And... why don't you do anything about this?“

„We don't get, well we don't get p-paid enough! Well, well I guess so.“

„Is that the case then?“

„I—I—I guess, sir.“

„AND HOW AM I TO WORK IN THIS ‚OFFICE‘ THEN?“

„Sir, sir, s-s-s-sir!“

„Make sure this house is cleaned and renovated when I begin to work here.“

„B-b-b-but, sir...“

„Wang...“

„No! Sir, please!

„See this knife?“

„S-s-s-s-sir!“

„SEE IT?“

„Y-y-ye-yes sir.“

„It's simple, Wang. When I come back in July, next month, this house is brand-new.“

„Yes, sir“

„And if it isn't...“

„No, sir!“

„I have done it before and I am not afraid to do it again.“

„Sir! I can't!“

„Find a way, Wang.“

„B-but sir!“

„The easiest ways are illegal.“

The sweet sounds of the city slipped through the open window and rang in the young girls ears.

„Violet?“ Mopping the kitchen table with a damp towel, Mei Fang called for her Step-Daughter.

Violet opened her eyes and lept out of her bed. A young maid was staring out of the window, watching the clouds drift across the cobalt sky. Violet let out a silent shriek of surprise. The girl whirled around, a broad smile on her face.

„You looked as though you were dead!“ She giggled and closed the windows as a bitter breeze flared into the room.

„Chao-xing! You scared me!“ Violet dropped herself onto her burgundy bedsheets. „Chang told me about this new modern hairstyle from Paris, could you try to style my hair that way?“

„Yes, ma—am! If you sit at your dressing table, I'll give it a try.“ Both girls chuckled as the sun rose higher and higher above the clouds, like a venomous snake, rising to daunt his enemies.

Violet opened the heavy oak doors and stepped out into the burning rays of the golden sun. It was past mid—day, the hottest time of the day. She walked along the jammed roads of Shanghai, rushing from shop—window, to shop—window. Many eyes followed her as she examined the dresses and hats in each petite shop. Her bright, blonde hair was yearned by many citizens of the thriving town. As she strolled along the sidewalk, she noticed a particularly extravagant dress; The sanguine, velvet dress was ornamented with a mysterious, vicious golden tiger which stood not far away from what seemed like a glittering pearl, waiting to attack.

In the depths of the crowd, an old man was standing, watching the young girl. He knew he had to do it. He had to do it for his own life. To save his own life. He felt selfish, yet scared. Like the tiger on the dress that stood in the dwarfish shop, he was purchasable, bribable. Quivering with fear. He walked towards the young girl. His hand shot out and closed around her mouth, leaving her no escape.

The fullmoon illuminated the sky, sending his mesmerizing rays through the closed window.; a lonely giant surrounded by glittering lights. Everything felt so familiar. Violet opened her eyes. The frigidness of the hard stone floor froze the blood in her veins. She wanted to stand up, but she couldn't. Broad ropes tied her to a crumbling chair, every attempt to free her aching hands from the tight grip of the strong ropes failed. She opened her mouth to scream, but the sound came out muted and suppressed. A damp towel covered her mouth, the smell was making her nauseous. She noticed a piece of paper on the decrepit table beside her:

June 3rd 1931

Da Ping Rd.

Shanghai

Unfortunately, as the import/export of opium is getting

more and more difficult, I shall to inform you that I

have to decline your request for a pay rise.

Additionally, I have come to the conclusion that

In case any of my workers request a pay rise, I shall,

In difficult times like these, fire them immediately.

Regards,

Silas Handoe

Hardoe's import/export

Shangha

Violet read the letter many, many times. Opium. She closed her eyes, as the vile feeling of betrayal slithered through her heart.

„Violet?“ dimmed sounds ran through her mind, “Wang! What have you done?“

„Mei... Mei fang?“ Violet opened her eyes. The towel covering her mouth had been removed.

„Who told you to do this?“ Swiftly, Mei fang pushed Wang towards the wall. His old bones cracked.

„I-I-I-I-It was Jun-jun... JunJie.“

„My own Husband?“

„He-he wanted me to get, to get M-m-Mr. Harddoe to p-pay m-more.“ Mei Fang let go of the aged man.

The energy in her face fell. Her hair did not seem to shine anymore.

„JunJie... He was Detective. He betrayed me.“ She shook her head in disbelief. „Betrayed me.“

A rush of empathy filled Violets heart as she watched tears roll down Mei Fangs morose face.

She closed her eyes again, hoping for more hidden pieces of the puzzle to uncover themselves.

„Poor Girl,“ Wang suddenly uttered, „If she knew thi-this was, this wasn't her first time being kidnapped.“

„What?“ Mei Fang whirled around and stared at the old man in disbelief.

„I-I, I read a letter from my b-boss,“ he mumbled, „I-I shouldn't have, I-I guess.“

„Go On!“

„It said that, that if a-a, a certain l-Lady Eveline Cherre of Swanlakewouldnt p-p-pay in less than a w-week, he would k-keep her. Forever.“ Silence swallowed the room. „The l-letter was from 1917.“

Violet opened her eyes. She could not keep them closed any longer.

The Sun awoke, chasing away the glittering stars and the moon. Two figures stepped onto the unsteady plank leading to a ship. The woman heaved a large suitcase onto the deck. The girl, around fifteen rushed to help her. They dissapeard into the crowd on board of the ship. Several minutes passed, but at last, the Jade Lady disappeared at the Horizon.

Skiping Rocks

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Bhatia, Samara – 14

“Meili! Help Ba!” The giggling girl ran towards her father, who’s back was hunched on top of a ladder. His thick fingers tried to loop the fishing wire through the lantern – but slipped each time. Ba gave up when Meili arrived – he helped her onto the ladder, supporting her from the ground. He watched as her delicate pale fingers wrapped the thin fishing wire through the final lantern. Ma turned on a switch – the lanterns started to glow and twinkle in the black night sky surrounding the town. Ba looked down at his daughter; her round face looked up at him, with eyes that shone brighter than the full moon. Her two black braids as well as her fringe couldn’t be seen in this light; but something that stood out against her cream skin was the smile she wore on her face. One girl, one smile. And that was all it took to light up the whole town.

Being part of a small town, Meili was known amongst all the villagers, as well as the other children, of course. The village town was quite small, everyone was treated like family. Word spread fast, so Meili was always told to not talk to anyone her parents didn’t know. But Meili, being the curious child she was, didn’t listen. Indeed, she was a very disciplined child. But she was friendly – a bit too friendly, her parents would argue – so she didn’t want to not be able to talk to some people. And that’s how she met Samantha, the girl who changed Meili’s vision forever.

“Table 7.” I grabbed the black plastic tray that Ma handed to me. Two perfect Shui Mai, still sizzling sat in a bamboo steamer, their bright yellow skins bursting with the orange shrimp filling inside. I walked slowly. I didn’t want to rush, even though Ma always told me I wasn’t serving fast enough, and that the food was getting cold, as it should be served hot. But it was better for someone to have warm food than no food at all. I crossed ‘Shui Mai’ off of the order list, to mark that the customer received their dish. I kept working my shift until 5:00, which was when Ma finally let me off. But then, I was attacked with questions from Dongmei, my little sister. Homework questions. That took an hour off of my day, since Dongmei kept goofing off. Finally, I had my time to myself. I made sure to finish off any school work – so I wouldn’t be scolded for it. And then, as I did every single day, sat on the stone rock that was right outside of our small village. It was only a 5 minute walk, and it was my favorite place to be. Ma always told me about stories of Ba and how every afternoon, while he wasn’t working, we would come to this stone rock and he would teach me how to skip stones in the small pond nearby. Now, I could skip stones with my eyes closed. And so I did. Ma always made me believe in an old Chinese fable, saying that each stone that is skipped represents a wish; and that every time it lands in the water, it is bounced into our reflection – which means it will come true to our lives. And so, because of this, I wished for the exact same wish every time I skipped a rock. It didn’t matter that it still hadn’t come true. It didn’t matter that it might be impossible. But the wish mattered to me. So I wished for Ba to return home.

Working for the Chinese army, I hadn’t seen Ba for 2 years now. I remembered him, more than Dongmei does. It crushed my heart trying to tell her that he might not return home. Anyways, we as a family preferred not to talk – or even think about it. I sat on the rock for a little while longer. My hands spread over the smooth black stone that curved in different directions. It was a soothing feeling on my palms. My hands stopped moving when I saw something – or someone to be more precise – come closer to the stone rock. It was a girl. A girl who looked a bit older than me. And I think I almost fainted when I saw her. I had never seen anyone like her. The word *foreigner* passed through my mind. As she stepped into the sunlight and close enough for me to see, I realised how beautiful she was. Her oval shaped face was surrounded with golden light curls. Her skin, as white as ivory, with sharp features carved into her face. And what shocked me the most was her eyes – they were green – green as in the color of jade. I had never seen anyone like her before. She was with her mother – they had just arrived out of a taxi. Taxis were very expensive, and I had never been in one before. They grabbed their luggage – 2 big suitcases, and headed past the stone rock. I was curious. They would be staying in the same village? Such wealthy people in our village? Questions swarmed my mind. All I could think of doing was following them.

It was a short walk. My feet were aching from the stones in the uneven floor. They, however, walked completely confidently, in wide strides across the ground. They were also wearing shoes, unlike me. They stopped in front of a small village house, and their guide led them inside.

“Meili!” Someone shouted my name. It was Aunt Lu, a family friend. She, like all the other villagers, were curious to see who these foreigners were.

“Do you know who these people are?” She whispered into my ear. I shook my head. She returned to the rest of the villagers, telling them that nobody knew who they were. But I wanted to wait and see who she was. The jade girl. And maybe, just maybe, I would be lucky enough to talk to her.

Ma, as busy as she was, scrambled to give people their food.

“Where have you been?” She asked when I returned home.

“Outside.” I replied. I didn’t want to tell her that I went to the stone rock – I could imagine the tears forming in her eyes.

“Outside? Dongmei has been needing your help. And if she doesn’t need it, I do. Table 3.” Ma handed me a steamed basket. I took the basket, and went to Table 3. I hurried back, wanting to help Ma after that. The customers had disapproving looks – probably because of the slow service. Ever since Ba left, everyone told Ma that she couldn’t run a business by herself. She was too weak – not physically, but mentally. That she needed a man to help her. Ma didn’t listen to them, and didn’t want them to prove her wrong.

“Table 7.” Ma handed me 2 Shui Mai in a steaming basket. I brought it to Table 7. It was the same man as earlier. The same dish too. I gave him his dumplings, and crossed it off the list.

“Are you enjoying the food?” I asked him. He didn’t budge. I decided to leave after that. After all, he seemed quite old, and maybe just wanted to be alone. I watched as he stared off into the distance, only slightly moving his mouth to chew his food. It wasn’t until about a half hour later until Ma said, “Table 7.” and handed me another bamboo steamer with 2 Shui Mai in it. I delivered it, and then crossed it off the ongoing list, which I scanned to see he had ordered 7 orders of Shui Mai. He finished, 7 minutes later. And then paid the money, and left. Ma had warned me about strange customers before, but never anything like this.

Because it was a Friday, I suspected Aunt Lu to be in the kitchen when I got home from school. Ma liked to celebrate the end of the week by taking a 30 minute break off of work, and drinking tea with Aunt Lu. But today, both of them weren't there. Dongmei was helping, which surprised me that she took such responsibility into her own hands. Of course, Lihua, Aunt Lu’s daughter who was older than I was, was also helping out. After Lihua finished her first two years of high school, she dropped out as she was going to get married. She refused to accept the marriage however, being the strong and independent woman she was; which was something I definitely admired about her. She was considered a disgrace to her family, as well as the village community. That event happened two years ago, and the community dared not to talk about it.

“Meili, how was school?” Lihua asked me. As well as me admiring her, I also thought of her as my older sister. I told her about my day, but quickly, as customers were starting to line up.

“Taybel fur tuoo.” The voice struck me in shock, so that my head snapped up before my eyes could adjust.

Standing, in front of the counter were the two foreigners. The mother could arguably be just as beautiful as her daughter. And the way she talked was nothing like I had heard before. I looked around, confused, and the tour guide came.

“Table for 2.” He said. I looked around at the tables. They were all full. I could feel my heart thumping like crazy, and my head started feeling hot. The jade girl was actually here. I could see everyone in the restaurant turn towards them. There were no more spots, and surely we couldn’t disappoint them. Then, I noticed, sitting at Table 7 alone was the old man.

“They will have to share with him. We are sorry.” I told the tour guide, and he translated. They both nodded their heads, and I smiled. The jade girl smiled back, revealing perfectly white and straight teeth. Her jade eyes became friendlier too. I led them to the table, and took their order, with the guide translating. I then had an idea. Due to the success of the restaurant, and Ba serving in the army, Ma was able to put us in a nicer school. Still, definitely not anywhere near the top schools, but a school that taught us how to write some English. I grabbed a piece of paper from

the kitchen, along with a black ink pen. I brought it to the table. My throat tightened as I knelt down on my knees, and placed the paper on the table. I began to write trying to use my neatest handwriting possible.

After my encounter with the jade girl, which continued with simple greetings until I had to help Lihua with the next customers, I never saw her again. A week past – and just as I had been doing everyday – I arrived at my usual destination: The Stone Rock. But as I arrived, I noticed someone sitting on the stone rock, in the very way I did everyday. The person was too small to be Lihua. And as I gained a better look, I was delighted to realise it was the jade girl. I confidently went up to her. She seemed to be staring off into the distance.

“Y–our..name?” I managed to croak out, hoping she wouldn’t notice my false pronunciation. She looked startled. Her head turned and I was taken aback by her beauty. Her jade eyes pierced into my brain, and was something I would never forget. When she recognised me, her facial expression became friendlier. Perhaps she wasn’t meant to be here. Her mother ought not to let her travel a strange village by herself.

“Samantha.” She held out her hand, still in mid air. She must have noticed my confused expression, as for her next words.

“Your hand.” I gave her my rough hands, and she thrust it into her soft hand. And started shaking.

“Our greeting.” She explained. I laughed. What silly type of greeting! Who would want to touch hands? And I think she laughed because I did.

Using my best English, I tried to explain to her about our village, and about our restaurant. She told me that she was leaving tomorrow, and that she liked dogs and some food called ‘pizza’.

“You like this stone?” She asked me. I was confused. Her accent was very difficult to understand. She saw this, and pointed to the stone rock.

“Yes. You?” I replied.

“Yes, very much.”

“I come here..ah, um.”

“A lot?” She suggested. I shook my head. I picked up a rock, and motioned as if I was throwing it into the river.

“To throw rocks into the river?” Again, I shook my head. I took the rock and moved it up and down, each time further to show her the bouncing motion.

“To skip rocks! Oh, I see now!” She seemed pleased with herself. She picked up a rock – and just as easily as Ba did – made it perfectly skip 3 times in the water. Then she handed me a rock.

“You do.” She motioned for me to do it. I tried, but again, failed. She gave me another rock. Before I threw it though, she adjusted my arm, making me bend down low.

“Rock goes straight.” She told me. I aimed the rock so that it would be hitting the water at a nearly straight angle and would be able to jump. This was my last chance, it was getting dark, and I couldn’t be out for much longer. So before I threw it into the water, I remembered Ba. And imagined he was here, right beside me. I remembered to make a wish – because every wish counts. Finally, I threw it in the water. And it skimmed the water. And then jumped. And jumped. And jumped. Four jumps! I couldn’t believe it. My wish would definitely come true. And then I remembered that this time, I didn’t wish for Ba to come back. I obviously wanted him to come back, but it wasn’t what I specifically wished for. I wished for happiness. Because, before, I thought I could only be happy with one person: Ba. But I was happy right now, aren’t I? I realised it didn’t have to be Ba who gave me all my happiness. Right here, right now, Samantha fulfilled that simple wish too. When everyone thought that Lihua was a disgrace to the community for denying her marriage, she wasn’t being a disgrace to herself. At least she is happy now. And maybe the old man who ordered 7 orders of dumplings, and sat at a table 7, and ate for 7 minutes did what he did because it just made him feel happy. And even though skipping a rock isn’t a huge accomplishment, it is something I have been trying for a while, a tradition with someone special, and so it made me feel happy. And at that very moment, with

Samantha, at the stone rock I had visited for years, I realised that being happy with yourself is one of the most important things. And, as I reflected on my childhood, as I turned into a mature woman, I realise that being happy is the number one key to success in life.

They Saw Me as a Hero

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Harris, Thomas – 13

I watched them from the small, empty restaurant as the sirens wailed. The bombs dropped as screams echoed through the grey sky. Xiu Ying, the waiter, covered my eyes to shield me from my parents death. I rapidly scraped and tugged at her hands and tried to pull them off my face, but they wouldn't budge. After two long minutes, she released her hands from my eyes. The window was as red as a dragon's flame. I felt cold water trickle down my cheek. Suddenly, shouts and the sound of marching filled the air as hundreds of Japanese troops stormed the train station, wearing their bloodied khaki uniforms. It sickened me that it was most likely the blood of their enemies on their uniforms. Tugging my arm, Xiu Ying pulled me into the dumbwaiter.

Suddenly, it was dark and cold. Sounds of gunshots echoed through the air. I heard the store door open as the bells jingled. All of a sudden, I heard screams as Xiu Ying shouted incoherent Chinese and abruptly an ear shattering gun shot louder than a . I heard her body collapse and time stopped. I heard nothing—no footsteps, no gunshots, no screams, no shouts. Closing my eyes, I wiped away tears that were now coming out like a waterfall.

I suddenly opened my eyes to ear shattering gunshots. I had just realised that I fell asleep. I sat there listening for footsteps, but this time they really were gone. I got out and ran down the street. My first instinct as a child was to run home.

"Get down on your knees and put your hands up!" I saw a man wearing a tan jacket. There was the imperial flag of Japan on his shoulder. He had a thick Japanese accent that made it hard to understand him. I quickly got down on my knees and raised my hands as if I were in class. The man tied a rope tighter than the braces gripping my teeth. "Please don't hurt me" I cried, as my voice echoed throughout the street.

That was when I was eleven. It was late 1944, I was fourteen years old. The conditions in the internment camp were horrific, I had to sleep in the third lane of the bowling alley. It was an oven in there, the floor was practically rock. The wood had rotted away and we were sitting on hot charcoal like concrete. There were about four hundred people in the camp. We got ten grains of rice per day, everybody was extremely skinny and occasionally somebody would steal your rice. Despite all this, we knew we had better conditions than the Jews in Germany at the time. In fact we were lucky the Japanese decided to keep us alive.

One day changed everything, we woke up as usual. I walked to breakfast and waited for thirty minutes in a line, grabbed my food for the day and waited for another thirty minutes to go to the bathroom. After eating, we went to work farming the fields. If we made one wrong move, a cold whip would be brought across our bare back. Left of me, there was a Japanese guard making his rounds and watching closely that we weren't up to anything. After he left, I heard the sound of a snake, it started getting louder and louder. *Sssstttt sst psst*. I looked to where the sound was coming from and to my relief it was one of the American prisoners trying to get my attention.

"I'm going to trip up the soldier as he walks by next, you grab his gun, ok?" he whispered.

"No! are you trying to get us killed?" I replied anxiously.

"What is going on over there?" the soldier yelled in his thick accent. He quickly jogged over and the American nodded at me and tripped him up. Hastily, I grabbed his weapon and threw it at the American. Did I agree with his plan? No. But anything, including death, was better than being in that hell hole. He cocked the gun and shot it straight at the fallen over soldier's face. The gun was a stolen Thompson submachine gun, the Japanese had many American captives who were armed with various types of guns. All the captives raised their heads over the fields to look at what had made such an ear shattering sound. Suddenly gunshots were flying towards us, we were positioned on top of a hill, which gave us an advantage. Like dominos, the captured civilians started tackling guards and stealing their guns. After hearing the gunshots, the Japanese army was sure to advance and try to wipe us out. We ran to the armory and grabbed all the weapons we could carry and packed the ones we weren't holding in a bag. I've never held nor shot a gun before yet I still got a pistol. I remember my dad owned one of these, the colt M1911. It was an iconic American pistol. I don't know why they gave it to me, as I told them over and over again that I wasn't going to shoot anybody.

We started creeping through the rummaged streets of Shanghai, it went from an alive city to slums in the years it was captured. All of a sudden a cold glove covered my mouth and two arms stopped me from struggling. I knew we were doomed the Japanese must have captured us and were going to behead us. Instead, it was the Chinese nationalists and they were there to help. We made a deal. We both wanted freedom but in different ways, they wanted to defeat the Japanese and we wanted to get back to America. We waited three months till we got a big opportunity. A Japanese armored carrier, loaded with an mg and a 20mm cannon on top. It could only fit nine people, and we had fifteen. Lucky for us there were three coming in a convoy on the way to the camp we were staying at.

We had three molotov cocktails, two rifles, three submachine guns, and sixteen pistols. We were positioned in three buildings along the street. Two next to each other and one on the other side. The first car stopped at the barrier we built previously, this brought the whole convoy to a stop. Two men got out and started work at the barrier. We then smashed the glass of the window next to us—that was the signal. The man next to me threw the molotov at the back car, meanwhile the other two buildings raised their rifles and started shooting at the two men who were out of the cars. I looked up at the other building and saw some movement on the lower floors. It was Japanese soldiers. I raised my pistol with two hands and aimed at them. They started walking up the stairs and slowly opened the door to the room with our friendlies. I shot four bullets and killed the two of them. The recoil hurt my hands. As soon as I shot the gun I threw it on the ground and ran back against the wall behind me. Tears started pouring down my face, the sudden realization that I had just killed someone. The Chinese saw me as a hero, yet I saw myself as a murderer.

The Dancing Girl and Officer

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Leung, Angel – 12

Boom!

The crashing sound of lightning filled the charcoal black sky. The luminous moonlight shimmered its light across Shanghai's shadowy Shanghai Street Circuit. In the dark, the streetlights flickered across the road. Blowing furiously, the wind swooshed through all the ruined buildings, causing the broken doors and shattered windows to creak.

Corporal General Akio stood in the dark avenue, his sultry silver blue eyes reflecting the light from the torch. He had pale skin and his black hair swayed side to side as the wind blew strongly across his face. He had one hand holding a flashlight while the other rested on his hip. Walking through the ruined buildings, Akio flashed his torch everywhere to make sure that there were no enemy soldiers around. Tall and muscular, General Akio fit in his black uniform perfectly. Various badges were dangling on his uniform, reminding him of his glorious victories from the past battles. He was known as one of the greatest soldiers in the Japanese army.

After he passed Shanghai Street Circuit, he arrived at Ghisi Route, the city's busiest street. Corporal General Akio snaked his way through the crowd and heard them muttering about what had happened recently. Anger started to fill him, but he managed to remain calm until he was recognized by a teenager.

"Look, it's that mean General that killed Chen Mani!" the teenager shrieked.

He couldn't pretend anymore.

Akio grabbed his gun and shouted at the people, "*Hey!* If you don't stop telling rumors about me, I will *shoot* you!"

Everybody ran and Akio went back to his home. He sat down on his comfortable sofa and grabbed the latest newspaper that was on the table. The first thing that he saw on the front page were the words "Japanese Officer Shot A Girl For Refusing To Dance With Him" in bold, capital letters. Akio screamed in frustration and ripped the newspaper into a million pieces. He turned on the TV. He saw interviewers interviewing people who were at the Paramount Hotel. Akio smashed the TV screen and went to make himself dinner hoping that would calm him down. With every bite he took, his thoughts brought him deeper into that ridiculous story. After dinner, he went to bed to get some good night rest.

In the middle of the night there was a knock on the door. Akio tried to ignore it but it didn't work. He grabbed his gun that was on the side of his bed and walked to the front door, hoping the person would go away. When he opened the door, he saw nothing but a piece of paper stuck to his front door.

It said:

Dear Mr. Akio,

Sorry to bother you but we would like you to come to our TV studio so that we can have a interview with you about what happened in the ballroom a few weeks ago. If you are interested, then you can meet our driver at your front door at 6:00 am tomorrow and we will pick you up there.

Hope to see you soon!

*From,
China Central Broadcasting Station*

“Ugh, why does everyone get my name wrong. It’s Corporal General Akio not Mr. Akio,” he thought then walked back to his bed.

The next morning, Akio woke up and got ready for the upcoming interview. When the interviewer’s car arrived, Akio got in and the driver took him to the studio which used to be an abandoned police station. “Okay, General Akio. Here’s how it works. You will first introduce yourself to me, *not* the camera, and then, you will tell me what happened with you and that girl Chen Mani in the ballroom a few weeks ago,” said the interviewer.

The camera was rolling and Corporal General Akio was allowed to speak. “I am Corporal General Akio. I am and always will be one of the greatest and the strongest soldiers. All of you think that I made a wrong choice, but it was Chen Mani that made the wrong choice. Let me explain. I was walking to the hotel ballroom to check that everything was going alright. Then, I saw Chen Mani, a girl with porcelain skin, brown eyes, and long dark brown hair, the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen. I came up to her and asked if we could dance together,” Akio said, looking up at the ceiling drowning himself in the memory of the girl. “But I was wrong. She said ‘Get away from me! You’re rubbish!’ No one can ever treat a soldier like that, especially in public. Sure, you can blame me for shooting her in anger, but I was trained to point my gun at anyone who disrespects the army or any of the soldiers including myself. So *there* you have it. The *whole* story about what happened between me and that wretched girl Chen Mani. ”

The interview was over and Corporal General Akio furiously walked down to the lobby and went outside.

Years passed, the battle had ended and everything was back to normal, except for Corporal General Akio. For years, he continuously paid visits to the hotel ballroom, thinking to himself; *What would have happened if I didn’t shoot Chen Mani in the first place?* Feeling guilty, Akio looked around the ballroom, imagining her dancing happily with him. He resigned from his position because he couldn’t keep his mind off Chen Mani, so he decided to be an artist. Each time he thought about Chen Mani, he would draw a picture of her in different scenery – until one day, he reached a certain age and passed away.

He woke up in this cheerful place, and there she was, the girl he had been waiting to see for 20 years. Corporal General Akio apologized to her and she smiled. Now when you go to the Paramount Hotel ballroom, you will see the ghosts of both Akio and Chen Mani dancing together.

Last Dance

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Persinger, Campbell – 13

“May I have this dance, Chen Manli?” he asks.

He is a Chinese soldier and a regular customer of mine. I look him up and down. He wears a dark green uniform as usual. He glances down at his pocket and pulls out a red wallet.

“You get 90 seconds.”

I take his hand and dance all over the floor of the Paramount Hotel ballroom. He drops some gold coins into my hand and walks away. Squeezing the coins, I put them in a small coin purse my father gave me years ago. As I look around the room, I see another man is walking towards me. He has an army hat on so I guess he is a soldier but as I take a closer look, I see the lighter brown uniform. A Japanese soldier!

“Dance with me!” he says as he grabs my hand.

I pull away as fast as I can.

“No!” I exclaim in a stern voice. “I would never dance with a filthy dog!”

“You will regret this, kono baka!”

He storms away.

As I let out a huge sigh, I walk to a conversation with my friends. When I started being a taxi dancer, I never knew how many friends I would make and people I would meet. When my father grew ill, I knew I had to do something to support us. So I became a taxi dancer. I am not proud of it but it is what I have to do. The girls and I talk for a few minutes more until I see the eyes of one of the other dancers widen. I feel my hand being grabbed. My arm jerks and I spin backward.

I stare down the barrel of a pistol.

Everything is frozen or at least occurs in slow motion. The man's finger reaches up to the trigger. I fall onto my knees as fast as I can. My father always tells me to turn to the gods in time of need. I pray to Ksitigarbha. Perhaps I will be spared!

"I prostrate, go for Refuge, make offerings, please grant blessingsⁱ. The Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, who has unbearable compassion for me and all sent..

The man pulls the trigger.

The bullet is ten centimeters away from my face. It feels like hours before it pierces my forehead. I sense a sharp pain.

Darkness, absolute darkness. I am in a room where the floor is as cold as ice. As a beaming light appears and then lanterns began to glow, I realize I am Dongyue Hall! I try to walk but my feet are stuck to the floor. A loud voice booms overhead, recalling all I have done in my life. The last words hit me hard.

"Chen Manli February 16th, 1941, 11:46pm. Dead. Cause of death: gunned down."

Was that all there was to my life? Dead at 21?

"Hall of Souls," the voice booms as a door opens into a dark gloomy hall. I slowly get up and walk to the hall, shaking with each step. As I move my foot over the threshold, I think of fighting back but I realize my fate is sealed by dying before my mother and father. Forcing my family to suffer by my death is the worse thing I have done, bad enough to go to the hall of souls.

The door slams shut.

Time is gone! All I do is walk. It feels like forever. I pass people every so often, but no matter how hard I try to talk to them, I can't. It is like a dark power stops me from making contact. Is this my punishment for the worst sin? To walk in the afterlife forever in eternal darkness?

Finally, I bump into a man who looks like a monk. A thought comes to my head. Why is a monk here? He has a slight glow to him so I can see his face. A bald head. A ring of gold around his head. It is Ksitigarbha! I am meeting the God of Redemption!

"You have earned better than this my child," he gently says.

"I just want to dance in peace!" I remark as I look into Ksitigarbha's eyes, fighting back my tears.

"Then dance you shall! A young death is always a sad thing!" he replies. He gives me a compassionate look.

With a swoop of his staff, I am back.

Back at The Paramount. The place of my death! On the cursed fourth floor. My father told me never to trust the number four. The room seems different, though I have not been gone long or so I think. Walking to the piano where on top I find a newspaper dated March 2nd, 1943.

The headline reads, 'Japanese Pulling Out.'

The newspaper looks a bit battered but it is from "China Press" so I know it is dependable. I assume it is a week or two old.

I walk to the floor and do a small twirl. My feet feel rough, but against the smooth dance floor, I spin with ease. It feels so good! I am all alone, dancing around the room. I hardly notice the door open.

I just finish a twirl when a man and a woman enter hand in hand. Their jaws drop. The woman lets out a piercing scream that breaks me out of my dancing daze. The couple bolts out of the room as fast as they can.

Why would they leave like that? I think to myself. I walk over to a table that has a metal spoon lying on the tablecloth. Picking it up, I raise it to eye level, holding it just far enough away from my face to see. I gasp at my translucent reflection. I am as pale as ivory. A radiant glow flows off my body. I am a ghost! Thoughts rush through my head as I stumble back. I remember what Ksitigarbha had said to me.

“Then dance you shall!”

These four words repeat in my head over and over. I turn to the floor and do the one thing I knew I can do.

I dance.

I dance from dusk to dusk.

I dance until the world turns into a pit of darkness.

1. Kono baka or このバカ means “You idiot” in Japanese

The above story is based on a ghost story popular in Shanghai. During the Japanese invasion in 1941, a Chinese girl refused to dance with a Japanese soldier. After he shot her down, it is said she returned to the Paramount dance floor(now the Hongdu Theater) to dance again. People who go to the Hongdu Theater have said that they have seen a translucent woman dancing on the floor.

ⁱ “I prostrate, go for Refuge, make offerings, please grant blessings. The Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, who has unbearable compassion for me and all sent...” **This is a real Buddhist prayer.**

Addiction

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Wong, Ashley – 13

A loud noise echoes through the pub as the man's *zhōng* hit the surface of the wooden table. Laughter fills the room, joy levitates in the air. From just outside the main entry hopeless shanghai citizens in their dirt covered tang suits can be seen sobbing and weeping as their desire to fulfill their addiction catches up to them.

Rickshaw men everywhere hurrying down the road, since each second of working time counts. A clear division between the wealthy and poor. It is pathetic, how their low paying jobs can't afford to satisfy their cravings. The immense feeling of want, and the desperation to please their unattainable need for the drug can drive a man crazy.

A seemingly innocent looking plant, a child with big blue eyes on the surface, but a murderer at heart. Do not judge a book by it's cover they say, they are the ones with no willpower, no strength or self control falling into the dark abyss with no return.

I look up from my dress shoes, my vision expands as I arise from my deep thoughts. A grin emerges on my face. The number of deals I made this month is astonishing. Tonight is a night to forget, an escape from reality. Being the head of the opium smuggling industry has put a lot of weight on my shoulders. It is time to let go of my responsibilities, to enjoy one night with my colleagues.

A couple of conversations start at the table. We all sip on our drinks and joke around. Time passes by incredibly fast. In a blink of an eye, it is midnight. Alcohol fills my system, everything becomes a blur. I can't think of anything at that moment. All I care about is living in the present.

After so many years in the business, never have I once thought to try the product I have been selling for a living. I have heard of its side effects, the rush you'll feel, the excitement. Yet, I have also heard of the pain, the regrets, the screams. Tonight is going to be different. The thought of trying opium come across my mind. For the very first time, it feels like a good idea. A part of my brain knows for a fact that it is the alcohol that made me think this way, yet the idea sounds so tempting and irresistible.

No matter which direction I turn, someone can be seen lighting up their opium joints. At this point the only thing stopping me is the small bit of myself still left in me, the small bit which hasn't been crazed by the over-piling amount of work I do everyday and the load of pressure from having to do everything perfectly for the past few years.

I thought over it once again with my intoxicated mind, and I convince myself this is indeed a good idea. I wrap my fingers around the bass of the joint my friend have given me, My drunken friends stand around me, encouraging and pushing me on. The wood makes contact with my lips, I inhale. My throat stings slightly as the smoke pervade my lungs. It has a bizarre effect on me, but it is amazing, I feel relaxed, joyful, much like how it has been described to me.

The rest of the night I spend with the joint clutched tightly in my grip. I haven't put it down once, it stays with me, to fulfill my cravings. I gulp down a few more drinks, then I pass out just before the sun raises.

My surrounding is full of people who overdosed on alcohol. Panic, regret. The joint still clench solid in my hand. My mouth dry, I crave it, I feel like something is missing like an itch you can't scratch. Bits and pieces of last night flash by my eyes, as I remember what I have done.

The one thing that I have been avoiding for my entire life, now chases me wherever I go like my own shadow. Remorse and shame floods me as I come to realization of what I have done, but it is too late to change anything. I burry my face into my hands, sobbing and weeping my heart out as I drown in my own tears filled with mixed emotions.

Tears no longer slide down my face, all I see is red, all I feel is disappointment and rage. I make my way to the mesmerizing door with wooden carvings. The next thing I know, I slam my head against the door repeatedly. So loud that people must have woken up because of it.

Shouting can be heard, the scene is a mess. I am dragged away to the hospital to treat my head wound as I struggle to try and escape. At some point during my scuffle, the joint fell from my hand. I scream and bawl, but are they screams of regret or screams of desire. I use to be the hunter, but now I am the hunted.

The Story that Belonged to Elisa

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Zhu, Vitoria – 14

Elisa shifted her bare feet, tucking them in a more comfortable position on a rock. She had already abandoned her shoes, setting them neatly beside her. Her sketchpad was resting gently on her legs, pencil hovering above the empty page. Eraser bits scattered the paper, remainders of Elisa's previous attempt at capturing the beauty of the rockeries, weeping willows, and the Bridge of Nine Turnings in the Yu Garden in the morning sunlight. It was a beautiful day, with a sweeping breeze. Everything in the garden, the stones, trees, and insects, flourished in the genial sunshine.

Ever since Elisa and her parents had moved to Shanghai four months ago, Elisa had developed a habit of visiting the Yu Garden every weekend morning. She missed her drawing classes back in Europe, and her parents hadn't been able to find a good teacher for her here. Elisa had decided to try to teach herself. Yu Garden, along with the narrow streets of the Old City, had quickly become her favourite spots, with so many stories passing her by every day. She tried to capture these stories in her sketches. So far, it hadn't worked well. She felt she did not belong to these stories, and the stories did not belong to her.

Sighing, Elisa flipped her book shut and gathered her things. She slipped on her shoes, the soles lightly covered in mud. Elisa stood up and yawned, stretching her arms over her head. She darted a glance at her parents, who were waiting patiently by the gazebo, both reading newspapers while exchanging a few words every now and then, and began to run towards them. Her mother smiled gently when she noticed Elisa approaching them.

"All done, darling?"

Elisa hesitated before nodding. She slipped her hands into her mother's soft, gloved ones. She could feel the warmth flowing into her own cold hands.

"Let's head home, Richard," Elisa's mother gestured to her husband, who quickly folded and tucked away the newspapers inside his long coat. He picked up his briefcase and hurried to their side. As they walked along, Elisa caught words from her parents' murmured conversation; they exchanged words like "drugs", "old city markets", and chillingly, "dead". Shuddering, Elisa turned away and tried to block out all the noise around her. She focused on the water ripples created as the colourful fish swam beneath the surface.

Elisa pried her eyes away from the pond, her gaze wandering up, settling on a family near the Mid-Lake Pavilion by the Bridge of Nine Turnings. Elisa squinted, realising that the husband and his wife seemed to be arguing, a little girl clinging to the woman's trousers. Elisa turned back to her parents, who had stopped talking in hushed tones. In fact, they had ceased talking at all. Straining her neck slightly, Elisa looked up at her tall father. His brow was furrowed, his dark eyebrows angled downwards. His gaze was turned towards the Pavilion. Elisa was annoyed. She had just opened her mouth to protest, when her mother gasped. The same reaction rippled through the crowd. Her father

took a deep breath, as if surprised. Letting go of her mother's hand, Elisa stepped towards the edge of the Pavilion, her hands on the wood railing. She pivoted on one foot and tilted her head to try to get a better view.

The throng of people grew. Elisa saw that it was the same family who was engaged in argument attracting the attention of the crowd. Through the incomprehensible shouts that flew about her, she heard a sharp sound of metal crashing to the ground. For a moment, Elisa was blinded by the sun's reflection on metal. She blinked and looked at the object that had fallen. It was a small copper box, and as it broke open, Elisa saw white liquid – no, powder – spill out. She too, gasped.

Unlike most of the crowd, Elisa had not realised what the small, circular case had held until its contents had fallen out. Recalling her parents' conversation just moments ago, Elisa thought of drugs, and backed away. Her parents were still, but as Elisa tugged on her mother's jacket, everyone seemed to move at once.

"The choice is yours. Stay with us, or—or take that and leave!" The woman cried out shakily, pointing to the copper box.

Elisa's parents looked sad as they grabbed her hand, their pace quickening. Elisa struggled to keep up, tripping. At one point, Elisa realised she had dropped her sketchbook. She wasn't too bothered; she hadn't yet drawn anything with a real story behind it. Elisa heard a voice yelling for help. She skidded to a halt and let go of her mother's hand, which went unnoticed as her parents sped ahead. She whirled her head, searching for the source of the noise. On the crowded bridge, the husband and wife remained in argument. With all the commotion, no one seemed to notice that the little girl was nowhere to be found.

Splash. Elisa traced the sound to the pond. She saw a shape moving in the water. There it was, again! Elisa leaned over the railing. Suddenly, she realised that it wasn't just something. It was someone. The poor little girl! She was struggling in the water. With her parents deep in argument and all the people pressing against each other, it wouldn't have been hard for someone to push the girl into the water.

Elisa saw the little girl helplessly wave before going under again. I'm coming, hold on, thought Elisa. She didn't even think twice before climbing over the railing and jumping into the water. Elisa expected the opaque, green water to be deep enough to slow her down, but instead felt her ankle hit a thick layer of mud almost immediately. Pain shot up her leg, but Elisa grit her teeth, more determined than ever.

She wasn't a great swimmer, but in such shallow waters she was sure she could help the girl. With no time to think, she plunged herself underwater, drowning out the sounds of police sirens and shouts from the crowd. Elisa swam as fast as she could, spotting the girl flailing around underwater. Her pale cheeks were puffed out as she tried to hold her breath. In a rush, Elisa swallowed water as she emerged. When she ducked down she was only an arm's reach away from the poor child. Pulling the girl towards her chest, Elisa broke the surface. Unlike Elisa, the little girl did not

gasp for air. She remained motionless, eyes closed. Elisa hurried through the water. She had lost her shoes to the mud, and her bare feet sunk into the soft ground and hit the small stones at the bottom of the pond.

Goldfish swarmed around her, something she had not noticed before. Elisa struggled to reach the bank of the pond, her bare feet scratching the rough surface of the rocks. She hoisted the child up in her arms. The girl was small and fragile, her face cold as ice to the touch and her legs too short to reach the pond floor. The crowd cheered, some eagerly waiting at the rocky bank, and pulled the little girl and Elisa out.

As soon as she climbed out, the girl was taken away. Elisa looked up and saw the mother holding the girl tight, her husband in tears, “It’s all my fault... I’ll change, I will.”

There was regret, anxiety and gratitude in their eyes. Elisa shivered. She was soaked and barefoot. Water dripped from her blond hair. As the crowd applauded, Elisa felt embarrassed and tried to make herself as small as possible. To her relief, Elisa saw her parents hurrying towards her.

“Oh, Eli,” her mother sobbed, “Are you okay? Did you get hurt?”

Elisa’s father took off his coat, blanketing Elisa with a sudden warmth. “That was brave, Elisa,” was all her father said, as he hugged her tightly.

Elisa looked around. The crowd was celebrating. Squinting, Elisa saw the little girl open her eyes. With an elated laugh, Elisa realised this was the story she had been looking for.

Elisa thought back to that day as she penciled out the girl’s delicate features in her new sketchbook. She finished sketching the eyelashes; making the eyes appear to be fluttering open.

Sometimes, thought Elisa, the smallest things could tear a family apart, and the worst of tragedies could help reunite a family. For months, Elisa had been trying to weave a story into her drawings of the beautiful scenery of Yu Garden, but her efforts, her experience, and her feelings that day were what she had been desperately searching for. She found meaning in her new sketches.

Setting the portrait of the little girl on the bench, Elisa looked up at the Pavilion, as tourists trailed in and smiled at her.

She smiled back.

The Reverse Legend in Shanghai

Carmel School, Apelbaum, Abigail – 9

Hi, my name is Ellie. I will tell you my life changing story. It all started on the day of my birthday. Dad and I were on our way to Shanghai. I jumped out of bed with excitement. We hopped in our car and Dad drove to Heathrow Airport. We hurried on to the plane. The flight was 11 hours and 15 minutes. I slept the whole flight, but my dad was watching movies, so time went by fast for dad and I.

“Yay! We finally arrived in Shanghai!” Said dad. Forgot to mention, 10 years ago my dad was lonely so he decided to adopt me, we are very happy together. We first very excitedly went to have dinner. We had dinner at Lost Heaven. The food was scrumptious. After that we went to the hotel. The hotel was called Elegant Bund Hotel on 138 Guangdong Road. The hotel did not serve breakfast, that means we have to go out in the morning. In our room, there was a..... WINDOW! That does not normally happen in Shanghai due to crowded spaces.

We went to bed immediately because it was late and we were tired from our journey. The next day we stayed in the hotel. Dad wanted to tell me a legend. “Let’s start. But just remember you have to trust me.” said Dad “Ok” Ellie said. “There were two snakes, one white and one green. They were enchanted slithery snakes that transform into humans, but only on full moons” Dad explained. When they transformed, they turned into beautiful girls with long brown hair; they smell like roses. They wore beautiful long dresses with silver stripes and golden dots.”

“The girls/snakes names were Bai Su Zheng and Xiao Qing.” “You can not imagine how pretty they are...” dad said cheerfully. Dad asked Ellie how she felt so far about this legend? Ellie said while shaking her head, “It sounds interesting but sorry I don’t believe this legend.” “Story continues...” Dad said “Anyways, that night Bai Su Zheng and Xiao Qing were walking in the fields and they met a nice guy named Xu Xian. They chatted pleasantly. Xu Xian didn’t know that Bai Su Zheng and Xiao Qing were snakes. Xu Xian really liked Bai Su Zheng because she was cute and beautiful.

Dad said. “Let’s go to lunch now Ellie!” “NO!! please continue the story pleeeeee pleeeeee!!!” Cried Ellie “Fine, fine...” Dad continued... what happened next was Xu Xian didn’t just like Bai Su Xian, he fell in love with her. They decided they will meet each other the following night during full moon. They met up in Yuyuan Garden. YuYuan Garden was built in 1559 and in the 19th century the first opium war damaged this garden but it was restored recently. It was a place where local people went for a quiet stroll in the park or a lovely place to enjoy time with family.

“Let’s continue... and they met up. She was looking very pretty. Bai su Xian said “ I might sort of like you” He answered shyly, “me to.” The next night they went out for dinner together and had a wonderful time chatting. “Oh no!” Bai Su Xian thinking aloud to herself. “I just remembered Xu Xian doesn’t know I can turn into a snake!” I wonder what Xu Xian will feel when I tell him about me!” One day, Xu Xian went for a walk in the park, it was raining and a little stormy but Xu Xian went anyways, all he saw were 2 snakes slithering up the tree. Dad said. And that’s all I know.

I’m old enough to know this isn’t true. I am 11. “Believe me, you never know sometime reverse might happen.” “Do you believe me now?” “ No!” Ellie said with doubt. That night before bed, there were noises outside, so she looked out the window. It was near midnight, who would be awake at this time of night? She looked outside, there were two boys having fun playing in the playground. One of them looked my age and the other looked around 8 or 9 years old.

Ellie really liked the boy because he was cute sweet and handsome the boy saw her and waved Ellie’s dad woke up. He said go to bed so she waved to the boy, and went back to bed. She kept seeing him for the past 2 weeks. And every night he would wear the same clothes, grey pants and a labradoodle shirt. I’m guessing that’s his pajamas.

Two weeks later

Ellie looked outside of the window to see if the boys were there and wearing the same clothes as always. It was raining, grey and stormy. Ellie looked anyway and she didn’t see anything. All she saw were 2 snakes climbing on

the tree. Then she remembered the story her dad told her about the white snakes and she realized it happened to her but in reverse. Then she went to her dad and she said I believe you now, because it happened to me in reverse.

I saw those cute boys like in the story Xi Xian, he saw Bai Su Zheng and Xiao Qing every night until one night when it was raining and there was no full moon. So Dad, I trust you now. I should've always trusted you.

LIFE LESSON: ALWAYS TRUST YOUR DAD!!!!

Robbed in Shanghai

Carmel School, Moscovic, Josh – 9

On a warm sunny Tuesday in May 2018, in my mansion I woke up and I stretched in bed then I jumped up. I went to say good morning to my family that consisted of my 43 year old wife, Victoria, a 15 year old son, Jason, my 4 year old son, Robert and myself.... David, I am a 58 years old jeweller

I would like to tell you about two jewellery stores we own in Shanghai, China. Lilli's Shanghai on 1051 Xinzha Road, Jing'an. Second store is Laofengxiang Jewellers on 1942 Sichuan North Road, hongkou.

So on to the story, on a freezing chilly night, there was a man dressed in a black suit which made him invisible to people. With a gadgets belt around his stomach, he was ready for action. His face couldn't be seen as he was up to something sinister. He had a laser gun that could break any wall, glass and titanium. That night I fell asleep sadly I was tired. The man dressed black was in action, first he broke through the back wall of the showroom, then he used his laser gun to break the jewellery from the glass case. He saw a door with a keypad which needed a secret code. He tried to open it but without luck. It was locked! He use his laser gun to break down the door. What he saw behind that door was a titanium see-through glass case and inside was a small rare jewel. It looked like a sphere lava with jade dragon crusted in it. If it fell into the wrong hands, the person can crush it into his or her chest and he or she would never die. He broke the glass took the jewel and escaped. Other jewels that he took were golden watches, dragon bracelets, jade rings and a chest of Chinese coin rings, 24–28 karate gold necklaces and diamond earrings.

Eight hours later which was 7:30 am, when I woke up I received a call saying “Your jewellery store was robbed!” I asked “Which one?” The guy on the phone said,” It's Lilli's Shanghai, 1051 Xinzhaoad on Jing'an, sir” “Did the robber steal the jewel behind the coded door?” He replied,” Yes, he did sir!” I rushed to tell Victoria the horrible news. I said “The Lilli's Shanghai, has been robbed.” Victoria and I rushed to the store to get more information on the robbery. on the way there we went past a Chinese famous market with stores and restaurants with dumplings and noodles and a toilet restaurant. The guy on the phone he showed us a big hole in the back wall of the store. The wall was cut open. I said,” This will cost me a fortune to repair the damage.” Huh so he said that there was no recording of the camera footage me and Victoria hired a private investigator, Mr. Chow. So we told the investigator he said this looks like he use this small gadget to kill the power of the camera. Investigator Chow said,” I will meet you at the Lilli's Shanghai. Five minutes later, we arrived at The Lilli's Shanghai. We met with Investigator Chow he said “Here is what he used to kill the power of the camera.” the investigator said “ Let's scan the gadget to look for fingerprints.” The investigator pulled out a small gadget it looked like a old game boy form the 1980s. The result of the scan was nothing because the robber was wearing gloves. Me and Victoria asked the investigator what are we going to do? The investigator said” I think we need a few more investigators.” Victoria and I went home because it was very late. Sadly, I got into my room I got in my PJ I got in bed and fell asleep. 30 minutes later, Jason my son, he put on a black mask a black jacket and some black Nike shoes with some jeans. he got to action, Jason knew the robber was going to go strike again and try stealing the beautiful jade pendent stored in my second shop. Jason watched and waited in the store for the robber to start to steal. Jason did not want to fight the robber he stole everything he saw a coded door like the previous store the robber used his laser gun to breach down the door he broke the see through glass case what he saw in side was a jewellery that looked very old and Jade pendant with very strong healing effect it was 6 thousand years old we called it the dream stone. It belonged to Emperor Chong who reside in Shanghai in 10th century. Jason got in the back seat of the robber's vehicle undetected. He was driving a car” Jason said doesn't that car belong to fong manny 20 minutes later , we arrived at his lair it was out of the city of Shanghai. His lair was behind an abandoned warehouse there was a garage door that looked like rocks to hide the lair. In the car there was a button that would open the garage door. He pressed the button the garage of the lair started to open. He drove into the garage then Jason climbed back into the trunk and hid in the back of the car. he got out of the vehicle and close. pulled of his mask it was Fong manny the inventor of Segways I quickly grap my phone out of my pocket and dialled the number 775689456 it was my

dad he awensered Jason explain what happened Jason gave the coordinates. 20 minutes later me and the cops arrived at the lair the police used the speaker to speak loud the police said "surrender and hands in the air" He got out of his lair with his hands in the air the police put the handcuffs on him they bring Him to his cell. 2 months later.

Joe's Story

Carmel School, Naphtali, Elijah – 9

Two nights ago I had a dream about a story I made up. At first I told my friends it was made up but now it is real. Why did I do that? Because the second, I woke up from my dream it happened to me. I will tell you what happened to me. But first let me introduce myself.. My name is Joe. I live two miles underground it was at wood buffalo National park of Canada . I know what you're thinking what! This guy lives two miles underground. Yes, I do I used to live in a Canadian mine.

But that was thirty years ago. My job was telling stories to the people in the mines. Then when I was forty I moved to Shanghai that's where the mystery Begins...

Now I work in a secret mine underground. I am not going to tell you where it is. Ok now for the story. I woke up at midnight I was at a bus station where I had fallen asleep.

I thought that I was in bed because I was so comfortable. Oh well I guess I had just fallen asleep. I took one step and fell into the ground. I landed in an old train station that was underground.

I know what happened. A bad man walked past me and thought I'll play a trick on this man. So this is what he did he took my mining tool and used it to move some stones so there was a big hole in front of me. So when I stepped off the bench I would fall. So now I was under ground all alone Or was I. It was very smelly in there as light as outside but not a single light it was strange. I dusted the place where the name of the station was it said baby dragon station. Why did they call it Baby Dragon Station. Then I heard a soft grumbling noise, first I thought probably my imagination. Then it got louder and louder and louder. Until I saw something coming around the corner. I gasped and saw A BABY DRAGON!

Next thing I Knew he was shooting fireballs at me. I ran for my life when I was at the next station I stopped panting. This station was called dragon station. So I ran to the next station it was called safe station. So I had a little rest then I walked to the next station it was called up to town station so I went up to town through an old elevator.

The story doesn't end there. My friends were the main character in the story. I knew that the man taking our mining tools was moving the stone but I needed two people for that. One for the person on the bench one to jump at the man that was taking our mining tools. I got one man to go with me his name was Ho he was a brave man. But he and I were very scared as this man must be very clever to do such a thing. So Ho and I went to Jing'an temple bus station (that was the name of the station).

So he sat Down he and fell asleep. Then I thought how can he fall asleep he said he would try hard to stay awake and he fell asleep instantly. I so deep in thought that I didn't notice a man taking Ho's mining tool. When he woke I said that I had saw no man pass. He took one step and fell into the ground. I thought how stupid could I be. So the next night we went back to Jing'an bus station this time we switched jobs I was on the bench and his was ready to jump out.

So, before we had a talk and he said Yǐshì jiāng bù dé dào fēn xīn tōguò xiàjiàng shuìzhe rúguò nín zuò he added (Ho doesn't speak English he speaks Chinese simplified he does now to listen to English though) . That night I sat down and hid behind it and I didn't fall asleep and no man came. Then I started thinking is this man a mind teller then I thought of something I had never thought before. We always tell our plan to our friends in the mine, so what if the person moving the stone was someone in the mine? There was a possibility that it was someone in the mine! So I got up and told Ho that we should go because the man the was moving the stone will not be here tonight. On the way back home I told Ho what I thought he said nà shì yīgè huīhuáng línian! He said ràng wômen gào sù wômen de péngyōu shénme shì bù qù zhì zuò hé kàn dào rúguò wômen néng gòu zhuā zhù yī de tāmen.

That's exactly what we did the next night. This what happened we went to the bus station again. I went to sit on the bench I was about to step on the bench but I fell into the ground. So I thought this guy does it in the morning. Ho was thinking where I was and he saw the hole. Then he went down it very slowly. It was not slippery at all the he saw a another hole and sticking out of it was his mining tool he took it and made the hole bigger then he climbed in the hole. Ho all the things in front of which were all his friends mining tools. Then he stopped. He saw the leader of his mine. He said I didn't men any trouble. That's when Ho took to the police. Joe got back up to town and everyone in the mine got there tools back. I felt like the god of earth was looking on me.

Shanghai Dark Night

Carmel School, Alex Wigisser, Alex – 9

“Oh, oh look there's Alex Wigisser with his daughter Amy!!” said a teenager, Alex gets down the airplane with his daughter, Amy was a very existed girl and caring Alex was too, when they got down the airplane Amy asked “why are we here in the first place?” “To show you my home county and to film my new movie.” Alex replied

“Can I write a story about you?” Amy asked

“Sure.” Alex answered

“Daddy, where are we staying?” Amy asked “It's a surprise!” Alex told Amy “totally.” Amy replied with excitement.

“Here we are, my old house I loved this compound. It's called Leshato in Hong Chiaw Lou Jien he Lou, in case if you're wondering.”

“Wow this place is huge but a little dusty!” Amy looked at Alex “Yeah, your grandparents had a great taste.” Alex said in a proud voice

“Anyways I've got a meeting.” Alex said “bye” “bye”

“Let's get started.”

Chapter 1

The beginning

“Jacob you must go to China to extend the business.” Jacobs partner told Jacob

“Ok,” said Jacob

Swish the plane goes to Shanghai,

“WELCOME TO SHANGHAI.” said a woman with a lot of makeup!!

Chapter 2

Birth

“AHH!” said Roxana crying with tears “We finally gave birth to him.” Roxana said happily

“Let's name him after my father's yiddish name Berny.” Jacob replied so proudly

“Stop right there we are naming him Gabriel.” Roxana told Jacob strictly

“Ok fine.”said Jacob

Chapter 3

Good business

Ring ,Ring

“How is the business there.”Jacobs partner said seriously,

“It’s been great we’ve been selling so much.”Jacob said confidently,

“ I heard about your new baby what’s his name.”Jacobs partner smiled

“Gabriel,”Jacob buffed

“What why not Berny.”Jacobs partner replied

“That’s what I said.”Jacob said

“Good bye” “Good bye”

“Anyways that’s enough for today.”

Knock knock “Daddy!!!”said Amy was to happy to say hi,

“Do you want to explore Shanghai and meet my old friend’s.”Alex said excitedly,

“Sure.”Amy replied

“Incuse if you’re wondering we are going to the bund.”Alex answered in the car

“We arrived,”Alex said sleepy

“What is that long river,”Amy asked curiously

“It’s called Hwang Pu River.”

“I wish we had a boat to go on the river.”Amy said looking to the river

“Wish granted,”Alex said pointing at the boat

“Wow this is amazing!”Amy said speech less

“Why....how!!!” Amy said hesitating,

“How do you like it.”Alex said blowing at his nails

“Let's go!!”Amy said running to the boat

“Sure.”Alex.

They both got on the boat

and suddenly we stopped and three people came on the boat,

“Who are they.” Amy said curiously

“Relax they’re old friends.” Alex said like he knew everything,

“Jeyden, Quinn, Yanai, it's been a long time.” Alex said to excitedly,

“Yeh.” they said all three of them,

“Let me introduce you to Amy,” Alex introduced,

“Hi,”

“Hi,” all three of them replied together,

“Anyway let's get started.” Alex replied,

2 hours later

“Have you heard about the gang named 888.” Quinn said randomly,

“Nope,” Alex said sleepy,

“Be aware.” Jeyden replied,

30 min later

“Bye,”

“Bye,”

Vroom Vroom

“We finally arrived.” Alex said exhausted,

“Time to sleep.” Alex said closing one eye,

“Fine.” Amy replied to hyper,

(Snore snore)

Amy couldn't sleep

“I’ll just do the book.” Amy said to herself scared

All of a sudden Amy slept

(Next day)

Amy slept till 11:23 am Wednesday

She finally woke up

CRASH BOOM!!!

Alex's screamed!!!

He tried to run away from them, but suddenly Alex trips and gets.....BOOM clinic Alex got shot "Let's get away before we get caught." said 888,

Nie yoa the robber's were too late they got the robber's then Alexandra walked down the stairs and saw blood she screamed "Ahh!!"

"Call +86 21 2216 3908 quickly."

Ring ring "yes." a nurse says politely

"My dad is dying come quick!!"

Knock knock

"Come in quick!!"

"We'll bring him to the surgery room."

Amy is waiting....

They do all they can but suddenly.....they see the screen and they saw a line making a sound diiiiii

Then the nurse went to Amy and shook her head, then Amy bursted into tears. "WHY WHY!!" Amy bursting into tears "He wrote you something," the nurse replied

"Dear Amy don't feel bad don't give up that book please please....."

"so sorry." the nurse told Amy

She arrives home and starts writing...

Chapter 4

Stalker

One afternoon Jacob and Roxana went to the Shanghai pu dong tower, but then Jacob keeps getting calls from the same guy till Roxana said it's a stalker but Jacob said no. after 1 year Jacob started to realise that it was a stalker one day Roxana said let's go to Hong Kong to get Gabriel his operations they both agreed and went to Hong Kong.

Chapter 5

Operation and birth

They rented a house in Stanley, it was gorgeous, one day Roxana went rushing to the hospital, when she was in the hospital she wanted to go to the bathroom so she went. But she couldn't do number 2 but then she realized it was the baby!!

Finally they got the baby out and named him Alex. After a few days Gabriel got his kidney operation it was successful. The hospital was called Matilda. Jacob and Roxana wanted to stay there 4 more days because it was that gorgeous.

Chapter 6

Again the same guy.

When Roxana and Jacob came back to Shanghai. Jacob got a call from the same guy then he knew it was the stalker.

So he called the police and then they finally caught the stalkers four years later.

Chapter 7

Another baby

"Please, can we have another baby? you'll choose the name." Jacob begged

"Fine."

After 8 months

The baby was born her name was Aline.

"And cut HEN HOA this Movie going to be a hit." interrupted the director of the movie.

The End

Black and White

Carmel School, Fischer, Ayla – 9

I was born in a thunderstorm. Only rainbows didn't follow thunderstorm. Floods do.

My mother called me Hope now she only speaks to angels.

For many years I drowned in my own tears but I digress my story only starters where it's supposed to end. After all, I was born in a night destined for disaster.

I was born in 1929 in Warsaw, Poland, so by the time the Polish Cavalry lost to the German tanks in September 1939 I was 10 years old. War conditions and food rations were bad enough. What made it really hard for me was I was Jewish. So, for me it was the Holocaust.

Suddenly I heard a knock those were probably The Wehrmacht. I quickly hid under my lumpy broken bed. I tried not to cry but my life here was getting out of hand promised my Mom that I would be strong. Instantly I had an idea I was going to get on train and go to Shanghai. Why? Everyone was going to Shanghai. You didn't need a visa to get into the country. But soon I found out the train was more than expensive it wasn't even realistic. Out of the ordinary well I can't say that because nothing in my life is or was ordinary then I started to sob. Right then, I wish I could change my name and didn't look the same I wish they couldn't recognise my voice, I wish I had a choice but I didn't, so I had to cope even if I lost hope. Then it became very clear to me that I was going on the train. All I needed was some food. That wasn't a problem I thought. I didn't have a lot of food anyway. to get on that train no matter what. I was going to be a stow away in the “baggage compartment

Nevertheless it was impossible I was forbidden to go out. If they caught me who knows what they might do to me. Was I honestly supposed to live like this. Then a suspicious creature moved slowly toward me, I realised it was just a figure of my imagination. I want to be free, let me out, let me live, I don't want to be locked away for the rest of my life. However if I was going to be a stow away and sneak out it was going to take guts. There it was the stroke of midnight luckily I had half a blanket I tried not to step on any creaks on the wood floor I swung the door open and...

Do you ever feel like it was your destiny to be to be empty for eternity? I felt the only constant in my life was strife. I asked someone where the train station was. He said “right along the Lublin road”. I finally found it. You can only imagine how crowded the station was. The people were like ants, mindlessly running around with their luggage. I felt overwhelmed but I was determined. I looked at the signs until I found the one I was looking for: Shanghai, platform 8. Without anyone seeing me, I tip-toed towards the train. The train was a dark bottle green and had four big passenger cars and then one at end for cargo and baggage. That was the one I needed. I waited until the coast was clear and then I snuck on to the luggage car. I hid between some huge crates and then I waited. I couldn't believe it. I knew I was there but it didn't feel real. I tried to stay alert, but, exhausted, I feel asleep nestled between the crates.

After a short while I woke up abruptly with cramp in my neck.

I was so hungry I bit my lip. Then I fell backwards as the train screeched to a halt. I had eaten all of my food within a few days. I wasn't sure how much longer the journey was but I was so hungry. I opened some of the luggage and found some German biscuits. They were so good. I tried to ration myself but a force took over my body and I couldn't stop; I ate them until I was satisfied.

After what felt like forever, I peeped out and saw a sign in a language that I didn't recognize. This must be the place. Before the train fully stopped I stuck my head out to see if I could jump down but all I got was a face full of soot. But the train had started slowing down; this was the perfect time to jump.

I felt sick. But there was no going back now. And anyway, it couldn't be worse in life in Poland. As the train slowed in the station, I jumped. I hit the ground hard. Standing up, I pulled myself together and made my way towards a crowd to try and blend in.

There were people everywhere, but they looked different to the people in Poland. They weren't speaking any language that I recognized. I felt lonely. I was used to feeling lonely in Poland, but in Poland at least they spoke the same language as me. It was like that book on your shelf that you never read; just knowing that it was there comforts you.

Here I was standing in the "Paris of the east". I was lost, confused and scared, but I was FREE. I looked up and saw a sign "Peace Hotel" – only a hotel? It seemed the whole city was a Peace Hotel. It was for me. And then my 'normal life' started...

The end (for now)

The Journey into the Book

Carmel School, Goldberg, Ella – 9

“My name is Ashlyn and my Chinese name is 金冰爱. When the sun shines on my dirty blond hair it sparkles like gold. I love new adventure. I am from Australia but I live in Shanghai now because of my Dad work for Manulife. I am 15 years old and attends American International School in Minhang Qu. My mom, Kate works in a jewellery store called Tiffany & Co..”

Two days later on a Sunday in the Summer in June, my mom and I went to a bookstore called Book City on 465 Fuzhou Lu. The store stock English books on the top floor, so I went to check the books. I saw a book called “Two keys”. I picked it up and read the back of the book. It is about a girl named Eli. Everyday she explore a new adventure.

I’m in the Bund going to Yuyuan Garden. My dad is taking me. Yuyuan garden is a beautiful and peaceful place to visit and it is more than 400 years old, it was ransacked during both of the opin war. It is one of my favourite place to come to relax. I found a quiet place away from the crowd with Dad. As I make myself comfortable on the bench under a tree, I begin to read the book. As I read, I saw a weird word, magic. When I read it the ground was shaking everybody froze and there was a door. I opened it and from nowhere the pages of the book begin to flip slowly at first, then faster then ultra fast! A black hole appeared in the page of the book. I felt something tucking...oh no----- I went inside and I disappeared into the book.

I fell through the pages of “Two Keys”. I am in Chapter Three....Hi I’m Eli. I'm really Ashlyn that's my real name not Eli! I teleported into this book. Help, I don't know how to get out. OMG, I just found a clue on a tiny strip of paper. What I need to find are Two Keys. One will be in a chapter and one will be in a very tall building with 100 floor of glass.

On a very hot day there was a girl called...Eli or Ashlyn? Anyway she was in a hot place called Yuyuan Garden. The book said I'm now on my way to 100 glass floors. I am riding a bicycle; I found another clue in the end. But it was not actually a clue it was Eli's diary and notes were.

Before the Opium War in Shanghai during 1839–1842, was a mere “fishing village.”

“I am in the 100th glass floor well it might take me one hours,on my way now I am in the first floor....third floor....who cares I have to go to the 50th floor. I'm so tired .here we go an hour past I'm in the 50th floor finally!” explained Ashlyn.

On the 50th floor, the clue read,” Stay and at 2:00pm your key will appear...” I am waiting for the key to appear magically. At 1:58, two minutes more. “What do you think? Who is going to give me the key? How do I know if it's the real key?” “One more minute to go....and it is exactly 2:00” Ashlyn said to herself. Suddenly everyone that

was in the 50th floor disappeared. A bird flapping its wings near the ceiling stopped in mid-air. All movement was at a stand still, frozen in time. All except for one guy! He had the key and from nowhere he warned Ashlyn, “ You have one more week to try to return to your time. If you stay longer, you will be stuck in this book forever.”

Next thing I know, it was morning and I am going to find out what is the next clue. Someone knock in my tent. I opened the flap of the tent and it was a breakfast delivered to me which was weird. No one knows I am here. I took the breakfast in the tent and there inside was another clue. The clue read, someone will knock on your door at noon with a delivery of dumplings. You will need to search and find a letter that is waiting for you at Zhouzhuang Zhen.

I felt a tap on the flap of the tent, I opened it and it was lunch! I opened it and it was not the dumplings. It was my OLDER SISTER! I think I can look like Eli in the book but I looked like me. I said to myself, “How did my sister teleported into the book?” “I don’t know I think she works for the dumpling restaurant.” she said my sister Skyler. I said how come you are here. My sister said the exact same story I said. We both disappeared into the book.

We both rushed I got the dumpling the key was there I went to Zhouzhuang Zhen I saw a letter with my name read it and said.

Dear Ashlyn,

I am the book I transported to your house and founded a letter that said your name I hid it, it said that your Grandpa got cancer and died and you and your family might need to move back to Australia to help your grandma but the good news is that you got your keys and get back and stay where you are and say Memory.

I said Memory and got back to my room but then I found another letter saying you are moving to Australia for 1 year. I was shocked.

My parents and I went to the airport. I read a book on the plane and in the book I was reading and they were one wish I can make come true and my wish was.

It is my end but starts to be a new story.

The Life of War

Carmel School, Kamhin, Dov – 10

On a cloudy Saturday morning in the city of Shanghai China 1744, when the sun was not anywhere to be seen, Michael Larth packed up with hopes to run away from the army. Michael was a harmless person who never wanted to be in danger. As Michael was trying to escape, he got cornered by an Imperial Warrior who took out his scroll and said, “Michael Larth, you have been called to war!” Michael answered humbly, “Please sir, I'm not from here. My father died in London, when I was only three years old and since then I've been traveling around”. Then the Warrior said, “You traveled by yourself?” Michael replied “No, with my two older brothers, but only one is still alive”. “Well you've had a tough life”, said the Warrior, “But you still have to come”. “Please!” Michael pleaded. The man insisted, “No you're still coming, now come on!” Michael gave his last shout before he got whisked away.

The Warrior banged him on the head and dragged him to the horse! Michael woke up in the bathroom and got scared. Suddenly one of the Warriors barged in and said “The emperor wants to see you in the capital”. Michael was scared because these Chinese Warriors were quite frightening. Then he thought about the emperor, which would be much more scary. While he was busy thinking, the Warrior said “are you going to come or am I going to have to drag you?”. “I can walk”, Michael said. “Good, come on”, said the Warrior. Getting to the Emperor was easy but being in front of him was the hard part. When Michael arrived he was melting from fear. All he wanted to do was get out as fast as he could. Then the Emperor looked down and said angrily, “Michael Larth why have you been disobeying my orders?! You must go to war and fight for China!” Michael asked, “why? I'm not from China”, “rules are rules” said the Emperor. “You are the emperor and you can change the rules, can't you?” said Michael. “I can but I don't want to” said the emperor. Michael replied “Please have a heart, I beg you!” The emperor said without a doubt, “I have a heart but it's telling me that if you go in the army Shanghai will be protected”. Michael thought to himself “Shanghai will be protected alright but I won't”. The emperor had enough of this back and forth, and dismissed him.

While he was on the way to join the ranks of the army he thought to himself what would it be like? Again as he was deep in thought, the Warrior shouted “Your room number is 905, like it or love it, it's yours!” and he left without a single sound. Michael walked in then slammed the door and started to cry. He cried and cried until midnight. He peeked through the peephole, but saw nothing, so he slowly walked out of his chamber. A warrior came and said “where do you think you're going?! Get to sleep, you have a big day tomorrow”. “Ok”, as he closed his door and tried to fall asleep. The next morning while they were washing up, the captain said, “Drop your buckets!”. Everyone was silent, “Let's go, it's our first day in training”, said the captain. Michael was worried that if they hated him then they might get a little aggressive. He walked in the training room and saw everyone fighting. He took a step back slowly, when all of a sudden a guy came out of nowhere and knocked Michael right in the tooth. The Captain yelled, “What are you doing you could've killed him!” The men straightened up immediately and they were given guns and gunpowder. The Captain told them to practice shooting the targets. After they were instructed, Michael picked up the gunpowder, loaded the gun and shot the target. Accidentally he overloaded it and shot through the target. The Captain noticed and mumbled, “we're going to need a lot of training”.

Years later in the 1800 century, Michael Larth became one of the best, most valuable soldiers. This was when the Opium War began. A message was sent to the army to prepare for war. The warriors grabbed their jade armor, gunpowder, bullets and rifles. The Captain announced “men battle stance!” When 33 of the best warriors reached the border, the British army fired a bomb and 12 of the Warriors couldn't run fast enough. So only 21 men were remaining. The Captain took out his gun and shot one of the boats and sunk it deeper than a sewer drain. The British docked one of their boats and 78 Soldiers started to attack. The British Soldiers came out of their boats and managed to slaughter 10 men. With only 11 men left, the warriors started to surrender for prisoners. The Captain looked to his good luck charm, “Yunqi, yongyuan”, who gave a massive swing and demolished 32 soldiers. The

British army was mad and wiped out 8 of the remaining Chinese Warriors. Three lonely warriors were still alive. The Captain, Michael and a man called Bojing Hai.

All Bojing Hai wanted to do was retreat. All the Captain wanted to was win and Michael didn't want anything. Bojing ran, the Captain took out his sword and charged and Michael just stood there as he thought why was he here in the first place? Sadly he got injured badly on the arm. But They ended up winning the Opium war, which meant a victory for Shanghai. Then the Emperor came to Shanghai to congratulate and thank the 2 men. He also had something important to tell Michael. "Michael Larth, your father was an Imperial jade soldier and a great warrior. When he died, he asked me to make sure that you follow in his footsteps and today you have made him and all of China proud."

The Stone of Empathy

Carmel School, Lowy, Sahana – 9

Outside our cosy home in the Yellow mountains, I could see the fog rising, it was going to be a very long night. I'm sorry I forgot to introduce myself I'm Caedmon, a green and yellow Panlong Dragon. I heard something behind me so, I turned around slowly and saw my brother playing a trick on me. He always does that. "It's dinner." he grumbled. Suddenly, happy at the thought of food I asked my brother excitedly, "What's for dinner? I can't wait!" "Dinner is cherry blossoms but hurry up or we will finish it before you even come." said my brother. "No way, save some for me I'm coming!" I shouted to him. I stuffed myself with food then started towards the cave entrance when my sister caught me by the tail and said "Don't go to the entrance the Shen Long say it may rain or even flood". "Don't worry about me I'm fine you worry too much" I said. "It's my job since mom left." She said with a laugh then. I on the other hand didn't find anything funny about our mother going away, When she did I was very young I don't remember her but I do know that one day I'm going after her, maybe that day is today...

I flew outside our cosy cave whilst all my family was asleep. I wondered if they would miss me but changed my mind quickly. Obviously only my sister would miss me, I thought darkly. Once I was outside there was no turning back it felt ghastly and creepy being outside alone not being able to turn back. I'm so scared out here alone, not knowing the next time I'll ever see something I recognize. It's my story, my life, so as much as I wish I was safe at home, warm where I belong. I'm not there, I'm here and I'll have to make it work.

Off I go I thought to myself. Since my escape was in the night I decided to stop and look for shelter. After a while I found a nice little cave to rest in; it was kind of creepy there were echoes whenever I spoke and I felt like someone or something was watching me, its like that thing is looming over me getting a glimpse of me before pouncing on me. I wanted to look around and investigate although I knew I should just go to bed and blow it all over something stopped me, then it hit me I had to make myself a bed or at least something that resembles a bed and is comfortable but before I knew it my eyes were closed and I was fast asleep!

My mom appeared and said something I couldn't understand, "... huh ?" I said then woke up with a start. Once I got a good look around I remembered what had happened the night before. My mom was just a dream. Just as I was loosing hope I thought to myself I need to pull myself together so I decided to make a bed I put together a few twigs bound together by some vine. I covered my bed with soft leaves then knotted together a blanket of leaves. Finally, when I was satisfied with what I had made I flopped down on my newly made bed and planned my new life. I pretty much accepted that I can would not return home anytime soon so I thought I would explore around find some supplies and by then I would start to make dinner. I kept on thinking about the legends my father would tell me at night especially the one about the yellow emperor, our home was named after him.

Well, I'm off now. I hope I find some water soon. I'm alive, thanks to a natural spring further down the mountain. Also near the spring I found some fruit trees, so I'm good to go, for now at least... I decided to start on dinner and cut my fruits. After I wolfed down my dinner, I was so sleepy. I fell asleep instantly. I woke up and got to work right away making breakfast I don't know what happened but I really wanted to get going on my morning chores. After I finished making my breakfast I ate quickly.

Once I finally finished my food I decided to go exploring. After all I was going to live here for some time. I stomped out of my cave ready for anything or so I thought until... I saw these beautiful trees and flowers nothing like what I'd seen before. There were magnificent pink blossoms with such a rich color I thought they were

magical. I turned around and saw the most beautiful bright green stone...At first I thought it was jade but soon saw it was way more special.I was standing up close with a magical stone! All of a sudden I regretted all the times I had been even the tiniest bit mean the stone had some impact on me that made me flow with empathy. I wanted to go home so bad but I couldn't, or could I...uhhh that stone really did have an impact on me.

I kept on going to that stone like I was in some sort of trance. Until I had enough I went home head high ready for anything, anything except what was waiting for me.A frowning family."Where were you?"questions bombarded me. I went in my long missed home and told my family all that had happened. The hardships,the happiness, everything. Surprisingly they actually believed me.We never really found my mother or what that stone was but at least we had each other.

Picture of Time

Carmel School, Poller, Asya – 9

Click, click,click another photo of the red Chinese lantern next to the lion statue.Chloe was still looking for that perfect picture for the cover of her new book.Chloe is a famous photographer.She is very kind and she is also very curious.Chloe lived in Shanghai for many years,she never planned to live there but there was a implement opportunity and she got the job and never left.Chloe was born in America she has dirty blond hair and hazel green eyes,you don't often see that kind of people in Shanghai. She looks different from other people around her and she stands out wherever she is.She always has her camera with her whatever happens.She has big cameras,small cameras and cameras with different colours.

Chloe is now off to a wedding shoot in Shanghai.The two people that are getting married have asked her to take their wedding photos and put it in a picture frame three months before the wedding.The reason they are going to be taking the wedding photos three months before,that is what the chinese people do in China.In China the couple rents wedding costumes for the photos.Some couples choose western clothes and some choose traditional clothes.Chloe is going to the Yu garden to take some of the pictures of the couple.She likes taking wedding photos because she likes to see the family members and she likes to see how her photos turn out.

After the wedding shoot she decided to make a book about Shanghai's culture and it's beauty.She will sell this book in America,she wants american people to understand the chinese culture."Let me explain,if you go to China a friend in a good friend but in America a friend is someone you casually meet."I am going to take pictures of children playing and old people playing chess.Chinese people make sure that they have enough money to survive in this world American people spend their money.For chapter 2 will take pictures of lei see,kids putting coins in their piggy banks and grandparents counting their money.In China if you win individually it will relate to the whole group or your community and in America if you win individually it will relate only on you not your group or community.I am going to take team photos and individual photos of people.For my second to last chapter it will be about education in China.In China students work really hard to get a job and have money to survive in Shanghai and I will be taking photos of students in the universities and kids in their school studying for a test.I will be going to my friends house and seeing how they treat their grandfather and I saved the best for last.Family values in China is that the youngers care for the olders and in America you are responsible for yourself.

Ring ring ring...Chloe's mom was calling her but Chloe didn't answer.Amy is Chloe's mom.She lives in Washington DC.She has not talked to her daughter since she moved to Shanghai.Amy was heartbroken but Chloe never had the time to talk to her mother.

Now I'm going to my friend's house.It's a modern house,the house look cozy and comfy in the same way.Most of the time they eat xiaolongbao and mapo doufu.I love xiao long bao it is my favourite chinese food.Yum!I have not tried mapo doufu yet but I think it will be good.

"Knock knock knock."I knocked the door with an excited attitude.Zhe shi shui."Ai expressed in a odd voice.Ai is Chloe's friend she has one daughter named Lihua and her father named Manchu lives with them.She is a very happy person and she is very good at cooking."Ah Chloe good to see you again!"Ai said in a loud voice.""Good to see you too Ai.""Come in Chloe."When I came in I saw a old wrinkly man he was wearing a big t shirt with a girl's face on it and he also was wearing pants,the pants were big and it looked like the man didn't take care of his clothes."Wan zhun bei hao le,diner is ready!"Ai announced. I could smell the food from the living room it smelled like Di Shui Dong ribs,seafood and Shengjianbao.Manchu said,"Let's go to the dining table."he said in a unsatisfying voice.We all sat at the small wooden dining table the food look delicious and it probably will taste amazing.Lihua did not start eating I asked Ai is Lihue ok.Ai said that you have to wait for the oldest person to eat first.I just did what they did because I didn't want to look rude.Manchu started eating and said,"Yan qing."Lihua started running extremely fast and got Manchu what he needed.Lihue sat down and Ai started eating then I started

eating then Lihue started eating. The food was scrumptious I wanted to eat all of the food. Time went by I was done eating and started taking photos of the family. The photos turned out great I got a photo of Lihue helping Manchu.

After I saw how the family treated each other I missed my mom. I rushed back home and called my mom. Ring ring ring... "Hello sweetie I missed you so much" Amy said while she was crying. "I missed you too mom." I said while crying too. Me and my mom caught up a lot. Me and my mom missed each other for a long time and thanks to that family they got us to talk to each other.

Escaping from the War

Carmel School, Ricklow, Noah – 9

I heard the bell ring for the cruise ship from London to Shanghai. I got on the ship. The journey took 49 days. By the time I arrived in Shanghai, I told myself, I'm away from the war, I was in Shanghai streets.

I needed to get to my hotel, I told the taxi driver, "Astor House Hotel". A lot of questions are going through my mind, will the people be nice? I arrived and went directly to my room then I burst into tears. I missed my family.

I got the phone. It barely worked. I rang her number, it was ringing... she answered. The second she answered, the phone went dead. I wish I could just hear her voice again. Before I knew it, I was fast asleep. I woke up the next morning hearing a knock on the door. I answered the door, It was my Mum! I ran up and gave her a massive hug! I told her about my journey to Shanghai and My birthday as well because on the boat I turned 18! We were happy to see each other.

That night, we went out for dinner at Lost heaven restaurant in Gaoyou road. It was a good meal of soup buns. As we left, I heard bad news from my Mum that Dad has been sent to concentration camp. When I heard that news, I was just about to cry then my Mum gave me a hug to comfort me. After that hug I felt a lot better as we stroll the Bund, we passed the famous Shanghai club. It was a nice building, we tried to go in, the doors were locked.

We heard a knock on the door it was a stranger that I didn't know. I recognised his face it was my teacher from my school! That school got blown up from the Nazis it got blown up in 1940 he was my Math teacher. I was surprised so I asked him how did you find me then my Mum asked how are you he said he was staying in this very old hotel with a smile on his face.

The Math teacher was going to answer my Mum's question but this time he wasn't smiling he said that his whole family died. He said that the Nazi killed them three months ago. Later that day we went out to a restaurant called M on the bund we ate Grilled oysters. It was great! By the time we got to our hotel it was nearly midnight so we went to bed. The next morning the war was coming to an end, I was happy. I heard that Germans had left England so I really wanted to go back. I wanted to hear about my father because he was in a concentration camp. I wondered if he was still alive. If he wasn't, I would be miserable for years to come.

A week later, my Mum and I were on a ship back to London. We had heard Dad had survived and managed to escape from Germany then London. A lot of the buildings were destroyed but my dad was alive. I was relieved but now I have no home. Dad and Mum and I discussed it, we decided to move to Shanghai.

A day later we were on a ship to Shanghai, when we got there. We're moving to an old place it was built in 1888 and now it is 1940. We walked to our house. It was rundown but we had to live with the condition. We walked in the house and set up everything. It looked a bit better. We were so hungry we wanted to go out for lunch. We went to Goodfellas Italian restaurant for the best noodles. When we got out the restaurant we were walking down

Xinbeimen street because we could not find a taxi,when we found one the taxi driver barely understood English so we got out and tried to find another one luckily he could speak English. When we got home it was already late from the long wait for a taxi. we fell asleep immediately.

The next morning, we woke up with a buzzing sound it was the radio, so we hit it then it started saying how hundreds of people in Poland were killed. When we had breakfast we kept on thinking about Poland and suddenly while we were eating in Yi cafe a crazy Man started screaming” it’s 1942 Japanese are here take cover” I started getting really scared I never knew about this neither did my Mum.

We just followed what other what every else was doing nothing happened until a Japanese soldier burst into the restaurant everyone kept quiet we were hiding in a secret door that Leads into the street. The soldier kept on getting closer to the door so we went out the back door and rushed back to our house. Some of the people got caught but luckily we didn't,my Dad was so lucky that he couldn't go to the restaurant because he had an injured leg so we had to tell him when we told him he started getting so scared because we live so near to that restaurant.

We wanted to walk at so we walked down to Fuzhou road and hoped we escaped luckily we did but not for long. We got caught but also not for long because the Soldier felt bad for us so he Let us go.

Five years later, I married a man named Bob Morrison. We had a little boy and three more little girls. We love them so much. Their names are Lucas, Olivia, Isabella and Amy. Now they have all grown and have jobs and families of their own. They all live in Shanghai.

We Fought In Silence

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Alcobi, Shelly – 12

I sat there and I waited for the train to arrive. Tears streaming down my face as if the moon was toppled over me. And I, Chiara didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave anyone, anybody, anything. Not mamyte. Not tetis. Not Namai. Nothing. I didn't want to change my lifestyle. Not again. But only this time, I would also be changing my identity, dreams getting smashed into tiny bits, you could never even hope of putting them back together like a puzzle. From today onwards, I was never a Christian Lithuanian girl with an imagination that only I could control and whose given name was Chiara Barkus. A girl who lived up until her eleventh birthday with both her tevai in a warm home during the coldest nights of Winter. That was until tetis, got murdered by them. The Nazis. The murderers. I hate them. They ruined my life along with stealing my tetis's and making my mamyte's life miserable.

Tetis fought with the Partisans until his last drop of blood. He was a good man and he's gone now. Mamyte hides four Jews who go by the names Mary, Charlotte, Marina and Alberto. She says I'm not allowed to know their real names. She sent me out of fear. Out of terror. She was risking our lives. Things happened fast. Mamyte decided. I was to go to the Japanese embassy as a Jewish girl. I was to be issued a VISA for Japan through the man Chiune Sugihara. I was to board a train from the Western Coast of Russia to the Eastern. I was to take a ship to Japan. I was to live with mamyte's friends. After the war was over mamyte would find me. She made me memorize it, so forgotten it would never be. Just before I left home to the journey that's ahead of me, mamyte took off her locket and put it around my neck. She told me to keep it safe. She then told me that she loved me. That she will always be in my heart and I assured her that I felt the same way. Now, as I'm boarding the train, I already miss her. The train ride is a journey of two weeks. Two weeks without sleeping in a proper bed. Without eating proper food. Without being with my mamyte. The atmosphere on the train is blue, much different to the bright yellow I'm familiar with.

Every day on the train felt like weeks. There was nothing to do and therefore there is nothing to write about. Hopefully the sail to Japan will be filled with exciting adventures.

Seconds after the ship had started sailing, the captain announced that the ship was sailing towards a city called Shanghai which was in China. I heard stories about the Japanese invading China. About them being hateful just like the Nazis. Partners in crime, some people may say. Right that second, I understood that I was on the wrong ship, heading to a city which was invaded by partners of the Nazis. The Nazis. While I, Chiara, was pretending to be a Jewish girl to survive in my surroundings while being a Christian. Right that second, I had felt what Jews had been feeling for over three years. I felt fear. I felt scared. I felt hunger. From that second I decided that I was not going to hide. I was going to fight even if I had to in silence. It was a sail of ten hours. I had decided during the hours that to beat them I had to stay with Jews. I heard about the Ghetto before. Heard about the awful. About the nasty. The terrible. About death. But if only I could have understood that the ghettos in Shanghai were their biggest hope of living and the best they were asking for. It gave them a glimpse of hope. Something to look forward to. Something to rely on.

When we had reached the Proclamation Concerning Restriction of Residence and Business of Stateless Refugees. It was also called a Ghetto. It was located in the Hongkou District. Small was the area, narrow roads they were. Later I found out, that it was a mile squared and was made to fit some 40,000 people. I was assigned to "house" number eighty seven. The house was full of Shanghaiese. They said that escaped they had from the Japanese when they invaded. Invaded. The city. The country. They had demolished it. Completely. New world of theirs. Among them. The Shanghaiese. Was one girl. My age she looked like. She introduced herself. Li Zhang. Belonged to her the name. Friends we had become. Almost like sisters while differing in endless ways. Silky black hair she had and dark

brown eyes. While I had blond hair and blue eyes. She looked a lot like most the Chinese people. Same they all looked. Identical. You may even think. And I looked different. From all of them. Every single one.

I talked to Li Zhang. She told me I needed a job. A message she had written on a piece of paper which I was to give the note to a man named Chao Xiang. He worked at a dumpling restaurant, she had told me. 老北方饺子餐馆 the restaurant was named. She had written it on the message up at the top. She explained to me that she was asking him for me to work there as a chef making dumplings. It was one of the most visited restaurants in the Hongkou district. They needed many workers. The reason they had hired me. Jiao Zi. Type of dumpling I was making. Filled dough with meat and vegetables. Delicious. Li Zhang told me to exit the Ghetto early every morning and late every night. She told me this to keep me safe. Safe from the Japanese. I thanked her for her help and waited for tomorrow morning to leave the Ghetto. I left the ghetto to go to the man Chao Xiang. I knocked on the door and a round man opened the door. I gave him the note. He read it and after that said, that he would take me. He then gave me one of his dumplings to taste. It had a juicy but weird taste. I asked the man how to make this, and told him that I have never tasted a dumpling before. He replied and said that he will give me the recipe and that the other chefs will teach me how to make it, and so they did. I mastered dumpling making after a week and was qualified to join the kitchen team. It was hard work. My hands hurt from rolling the dough. I was exhausted. I slept every chance I could.

Around a week later, after I had started to get used to my job, Chen Gonbo, Shanghai's mayor, arrived to the restaurant. He was a Chinese man supporting the Japanese. Everyone was frightened of the man while we were all so honored to serve there. Half a dozen dumplings he ordered. I decided that to really master dumpling making, I had to serve him and do it well. I swiftly made each dumpling. Faster and better than I have better made them. If only he had eaten them and not his suit. The whole tray toppled over. And it was my fault. And I got paid my salary. And I got fired. I ran to the ghetto. Forgetting everything Jiao Zi had told me about the guards. I bumped into one of them he handed me a letter. He said it was from my mamyte. He told me to take it to the Ghetto and only read it there. "Be more careful" he said to me "Don't run to the Ghetto like that it makes people suspicious" He affirmed, and I agreed. I to the Ghetto and opened the letter. Stuck to it was a note. It read:

Hello Chiara,

I am the Japanese Guard Who Gave You This.

I Never Betrayed.

Akio Hatanaka.

This message got me thinking, but I was so thrilled to open mamyte's letter that I didn't bother writing a note back. I opened mamyte's letter and read:

Dear Chiara,

If you are reading this I didn't survive.

What was most important is that I didn't lose faith or hope.

I have three things to ask from you:

1. To return to Lithuania now.
2. To keep the locket I gave you safe.
3. To never lose faith or hope

And so I sat there and I waited for the train to arrive. Tears streaming down my face as if the moon was toppled over me. And I, Chiara, didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave anyone, anybody, anything. Not mamyte. Not tetis. Not Namai.

Changes

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Apelbaum, Mia – 12

It was a lush April morning, in the year 1949, in the exquisite city of Shanghai. Xiao Hu, had been woken up by a loud thumping sound at his door. Every muscle in Xiao Hu's body tensed, he froze, anticipated what was heading for him. Then within seconds, Xiao Hu was gone, leaving only a note on his living room table, for his family.

That week had started off how it would usually, Xiao Hu went to work, and his wife Yi Hu would stay home to look after their daughter, Ming. Xiao worked for the government. Something calamitous was happening. Shanghai was changing, China was changing. Xiao didn't like change, he didn't like how Mao Zedong was making this wonderful, sublime land a communist country. He wanted to fight for his rights. Everyday at work, he would try and convey his points. He would end up getting into arguments. Xiao knew what his punishment for going against Mao would be prison for sure, maybe even death, but he didn't mind. He didn't want to adjust to a new life. That's how it all began.

Yi Hu, his wife, had woken up to a horror. Her husband missing. She felt her stomach twist into a knot. She went downstairs and saw a white sheet of paper on the table. She already knew what was coming. She took the paper, her arm feeling like a weight and was horrified to see what the letter had said. The last words shook her.

"I will come back home eventually, I love you."

"He was gone" she thought to herself. The next day, after all her weeping, she decided to search for him, he must be out there. She knew he had worked for the government, so she assumed that he must have been taken to jail. She was devastated. She knew he did not want change. She wanted to weep, to keep on looking for him. She was almost sure there was no point. She would rather keep on living her life and raise their fetching daughter.

Yi and her daughter Ming, had grown up together and after a couple years they moved to Beijing. Thirteen years had passed since Xiao left, yet he still didn't come back. Life continued. They lived in a modest cottage house. They had oak ceilings, and dark wood plastering their house. Ming had gone to a small public school, five minutes from where she had lived. One afternoon, she had come home with an important assignment, she needn't to learn about her culture and heritage, she had to engage herself with old Shanghai. She asked her mum to tell her tales and stories. Her mum told her the tale of her father. She had left a very important detail out,: the story was about Yi and Xiao. Ming's parents.

The next day, she was treading home from school, when she slipped on what seemed to be a puddle. She ran home to wash her cut. When she opened the wooden drawer to grab tissues she hadn't seen what she had expected. Instead she saw old broken diary entries, confused, she gathered the papers and ran upstairs. She began reading them, they looked as if they had been alive. She was intrigued, she began reading. These papers were written by a man whose name she had recognized. They were addressed to her mother. They talked about how much he had missed her, and how he wants to see her again. She thought they must be from her father. Her mum never spoke of him. All she said was he had gone when she was only a year old. Ming decided to forget the notes, she tried convincing herself the notes were from a long time ago, messages between her parents, nothing of much importance. Although something inside her told her that these papers were very important, it was as if the notes were meant to be in the drawer. That evening, Yi was preparing for dinner, when she saw a white note of two words. The paper read "I am back". Yi was confused, yet she felt a slight tingle of hope.

The next day Yi had woken up looking paler than ever, Ming had a bad feeling. She could see it in her mums eyes. A few days had passed and Ming was walking to school she had noticed that someone was following her, she recognized his face. She managed to cut on a corner and lose him. This happened to her every day for two weeks she would see him then try and lose him. She was scared and confused. She didn't know what to do.

When she had got to school, she was entering the decaying building and saw him from the corner of her eye. She was creeped out she didn't know what to think she didn't know what to do. He had never followed her to school. Before she could process what just happened she was grabbed by the arm. She tried screaming but she couldn't move, his toned arm was pushing into her mouth. She thought she was going to die, she kept trying to kick and scream but she was getting nowhere. He had taken her around the corner of the old school building. He yanked her to a small lush green shed made of straw, 50 yards from the school. She wanted to bolt, to run, to get away but something inside of her told her to stay.

Ming was contemplating whether or not to run, when suddenly the man said four words which changed her life “I am your Father.”

These words stunned her, shook her, she didn't know if she should believe him. She heard truth in his voice but she also heard regret. So Ming did the only thing she knew to do she ran, ran as fast as her legs would carry her. Far away.

When she got home she thought there must be a way to figure out who that man was. The only idea she had was to look through her albums upstairs. Besides if he really was her father there must be a photo. She scrambled through all the photos and papers and found one. It looked exactly like the man she saw earlier today. He had had black silky hair and dark brown eyes, he had a nose that just matched hers. Ming was so confused and startled, she didn't know what to think, she started to cry. All these years of wondering who her father was and he was right there, in front of her. The next day on the way to school her father followed her, except this time she walked straight towards him. She demanded an explanation!

All he said was “I was in jail and now I am out of jail. I was searching for you and your mother for a very long time”.

She could see the hope in his eyes the hope should would believe him and Ming did believe him. The only dilemma he faced was that he told Ming that he was out of jail, when he had actually escaped. The government was searching for him.

When they had got home she told him to wait outside. She came inside and told her mother, everything. As if on cue her mother began to cry, Ming felt helpless. Ming also had told her he was waiting outside. Yi let him in, every step she took she regretted everything. When he came inside he didn't have to explain, Ming had done the hard part for him. Xiao just hugged Yi, he hugged her with everything he had, he loved her and he was back. The next day they had been sitting on the breakfast table sharing memories and talking like family, a happy family.

Days went by, they were together everything was perfect. The way is should be. Then suddenly as if from nowhere the police came thrashing of their door. The whole family heard it and rushed to see what was happening. They were screaming “XIAO. XIAO” he knew he couldn't hide.

He knew this time he could not dodge them. He told Yi these words “I will come back home eventually, I love you” and just like that he was gone. They lost him again. That's when Ming understood the story her mum told her was about her parents. Ming knew he was gone, for a long time.

The Candles

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Cohen, Sarah – 13

I was never supposed to see it.

~

Sunday 14th April 2000 – Miami, Florida

Children dream for their birthdays to come around — the gifts, everything: it gives them importance, a good feeling. They dream of growing up to be whatever they wish to become. I, however, am not a kid. I'm the last living member of my family from back in Shanghai, as I have been for a long time. Although that's my past and I never talk about the past. I talk about the present, the future, but never the past.

"Happy birthday grandpa!" Jenny exclaims as she runs into my room.

My youngest granddaughter and her excitement. The eight year old child is louder than the whole family combined! She is after all my granddaughter, and it's so kind of her to see her old grandpa in his retirement home. Ever since my wife died three years ago, I have lived in a huge retirement home. I have my own room, with my doctor's diploma on the wall.

"Daddy! Happy birthday! Myself and Jenny wanted to wish you a happy birthday before I drop her off to school. So how are you?" my only daughter Lana asked.

"I'm great. How are Lizzie, Georgie and Harry?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer. These days, once you turn ten, you lose interest in your grandparents. I know this from my six grandchildren who have already reached the age of ten. Luckily, I still have Jenny, five year old Connor and baby Chris to keep me company. Of course, I also have my three children visit me three to four times a week after work.

"Sir? Sir? You're fa—" I hear a voice, fading away.

~

"Mama, they're here! The Japanese they're here!"

"Ha Ren, take your younger sister and go to Ling's hair salon; she'll know what to do. Tell her the candle is of no use."

"Mama."

"Go now!"

I was born in 1928 to a big family of six kids. My father worked in the family restaurant, along with my eldest brother, who joined him after he left school. Although now, in wartime, my father is a commander in the army and my eldest brother is a regular soldier along with my second-oldest brother. My twenty-two year old brother Boa Sen runs a secret organization with my eldest sister, to help smuggle Japanese weapons to the army and food to the locals. Me and my sister Lai La stay and help mother at the the restaurant and carry deliveries around the neighbourhood.

"Explain to me your presence, children. Haven't you been told to stay home after sundown? You children become so uneducated. The Shanghainese hold an upright reputation and now you children among others are going to destroy it. So?" Miss Ling asked as me and Lai La rush into the empty hair salon.

"Mama told us to inform you that the candles are no use," I quickly say as Ms Ling's strict face somehow becomes even more sharp than ever before. If anyone can do it, it would be old grouchy Miss Ling.

"Come with me, we'll keep you safe," The old hag says as she drags us through a hidden dark staircase.

"But, Nu Shi, who is this 'we' you mentioned?" Lai La naïvely asks. I don't blame her for wondering: The old hag is not only strict and sharp, but Ms Ling is an only child, not married and has no children. She runs the store alone. I keep a straight face, although I know the woman is about to start 'telling us about the days when children respected their elders and how much of a disappointment' we are.

"Talk only if you're asked, child. The soldiers will expect you to do so," glares Ms Ling, as I wonder why she said soldiers. We arrive to an underground basement, and I stay speechless.

Young soldiers, drinking expensive beer, laughing, like there is no war, no death in the streets, while the vermin Japanese are outside doing G—d knows what to my mother. They're just greedy, those men. I feel the anger through my bones trying to find a reason why they're hiding instead of fighting, especially with the ongoing battle near Shanghai. I look at Lai La, and I see her confusion, as we time traveled to a time that is not 1943, not wartime.

"Children, I want you to meet General Lieutenant Ji. He is a wartime hero. He's from—" babbles Ms Ling. As I lose interest from Ms Ling's speech, I notice the wooden boxes. 'Mei Jia Restaurant', it says. My boxes. One stacked over the other, One bun cut open, with five little wooden pistol cartridges inside instead of its usual filling. I then understand what led me here. My mother was part of the organization and she made us deliver weapons to people.

"Han Ren, go with your sister to rest upstairs in the barn" orders Ms Ling in a rather unpleasant tone. We go upstairs, away from Ms Ling, until we arrive in the small horse barn, filled with hay. We both lay down onto the uncomfortable hay. Lai La falls asleep immediately while I stay up to guard and to think. We had no dinner and were controlled by a mean old hag, but we were going to survive. We would be safe with them. I was gravely wrong.

"Hen Ren, don't stand up, but roll over here, there are two men, and ... and ... one with a gun at your direction!" Lai La murmurs, shaking and scared, as she lay flat under the hay. I quickly wake up and slowly, without sound, next to her, putting my hands on her head so she wouldn't risk being shot in the head.

"Nu Shi Ling said the kids would be here! The kid must 'ave gone in the other barn at the 'ther side of the 'ouse!" the one with the gun snarks. I cover Lai La, hoping that Miss Ling would come in and save us quickly.

"Must be 'rible to have your own mom put you to death like that. That women, a real warrior this war. She doin' this for the army and knows her place and sacrifice in the war. But I mean, she riskin' their life and sendin' them to their death. Their long hair would be making us some good money," boasted the other as he left the barn.

I was heartbroken. Heartbroken that my mother could do this to her two youngest children. She ordered our death. She made us say that we needed to die by coding us as 'candles'. I felt betrayed and guilty for walking right into the trap. I feel I can trust no one now. I must get out of here alive with my sister. The Japanese were coming for the shop, for my mother, for me and Lai La. They knew about us, and Miss Ling's organization wants to kill us. I'm always optimistic, but I cannot see the light behind the shock and horror in this situation.

After they close the door of the barn, we stand up and sneak to the little window and climb out.

"We have to run to the French Concession, which is near the port. It's a 30 minute run, and it's crowded, so they won't find us," I inform my sister as we rush to the main street. It is early morning, and the market is crowded, so we would blend in.

"Lai La! Lai La! Where are you!" We got lost in the crowd, and I am so worried. I look around and I see my worst nightmare: they had her. Since she's thirteen and looks older due to her height, the Japanese caught her. And hanged her. In the city square, along with five other men and three women, one younger than Lai La. And there was my mother. In her apron, her eyes half closed. Tears run down my horrified face as I stare at my dead sister and mom. My mother betrayed me, but it was still terrible to see a rope around her neck ... both of their necks.

~

I come back to consciousness and I remember the nightmare I just felt. "It's not a nightmare," I tell myself, "it was my past, the I had to live, everyday." Although, I know reminding myself of the past is so painful, those years I was in hiding from that organization, all alone, learning after the war that all my siblings were killed along with my father, who was hanged in a city square in Guangxi. I managed to smuggle myself into an American ship, working as a cleaner. I arrived to America with no money and no family. I was alone.

The next day after my strange dream, they sit me down with a doctor. "You show early signs of Alzheimer's Disease. This is the reason to your flashbacks sir. I—"

And I relive it, over and over again.

The War Among Us: A Tale of Two Girls in Shanghai

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Davidson, Hannah – 11

My name is Lisa Weiss. I used to live in Austria. Now I am in Shanghai. I live in the ghetto. It is 1941. My father is dead. My mother and I ran away from Austria. We were lucky to get out.

‘生日快乐!’ My mother sang. It’s my birthday today, my name is Zhang Xiu Ying. As I bite into my egg tart the silky sweetness pours into my mouth. I ask where my father is but I am told the same answer every time ‘He is at work. No questions.’ My father is always at work although sometimes suspicions arise in my head but are quickly pushed to nothingness. I walk to my bed and fall into the deep innocence of sleep.

It is my first time out of the ghetto and I go onto the street. I see a girl with jet black hair and narrow eyes. She is looking too. I look away.

I am strolling on the street. I see a girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. I know she is different. I see she is different. I glance away.

I know there is a war raging in Europe. That’s why my mother and I came to Shanghai. I know that the Chinese are at war with the Japanese and it feels like I am back in Austria: starving, scared and poor.

I am walking home. I see Japanese soldiers marching on the streets and true hatred comes to my heart. Why did they come to my peaceful land? Why have they made war with us? What did we do? I have so many questions raging in my head. My father is working with the war. I have known that for a while. He is going to the Ghetto to see the Jews. I am coming along. I see the girl again with the blonde hair and blue eyes. I say hello and it seems she speaks almost fluent Shanghainese. Her name is Lisa and she comes from a country called Austria. She tells me of the burning synagogues, people being forced to scrub streets on hands and knees, friends sent to distant labour camps. A tear trickles down from my left eye, I quickly wipe the tear. I do not want to make her feel sorrow as well.

She tells me about the Japanese on the streets, the gunshots every morning, the peace rallies. My heart throbs for the girl with the narrow eyes called Zhang Xiu Ying.

I suddenly realize that the war is going on everywhere. The Japanese may march in the streets here and the Nazis may march in the streets in Europe but they all have the same goals in mind: to destroy and kill all who are not the same as them. My father brings me home and inside my heart a strong inner feeling wants me to go and help him fight the Japanese but, with all my willpower I restrain myself because I know my father would not be pleased.

My father was sent to one of the death camps, Auschwitz; they said it was in Poland. I later found out that he was murdered in one of the gas chambers. I remember that day clearly: banging on the door, shouts, screams, soldiers. And they dragged my father away. For my mother, it hit her like a bullet in the heart, a knife in the stomach. My mother howled that night. I found her weeping on the living room floor. But she lived on for me while all she wanted to do was escape our home, so we ran away to Shanghai. I only remember my mother screaming and crying as I watched in silence, screaming inside. I wish this whole war never happened. I wish my father never died and my mother never screamed. But wishes like those are no longer possible.

I wake up screaming. My mother rushes in. I ask her where my father went, she says he went out. I'm concerned, but then my mind travels to Lisa. She escaped from a war much worse than mine. I'm lucky to be in a clean house with a bed while she is in a ghetto full of diseases and probably a tattered blanket. I drift off to sleep. "BANG!" I wake up and check my watch, 5:30am. One hour until I need to wake up for school. I quickly look out my window. I scream in horror. A Japanese soldier is standing over my father with a gun. My father on my doorstep, dead. The soldier runs away. My mother is standing outside the door silently screaming, falling to her knees, tears streaming down her cheeks. I quickly get dressed and run to the ghetto. I need to tell Lisa.

I am at school. I always leave early because the Japanese patrol the streets at 7:00am and they might catch me and take me to the Nazis and reveal my biggest secret, that I am Jewish. I am scared since I found out the Japanese have a connection with the Nazis. I try to stay as far away as possible from the Japanese.

I am at school now. I look around for Lisa and I see her blonde hair hiding behind one of the benches. I walk over. She walks away. I try to run to her but she runs away. I go home and I see my mother knitting on a purple armchair in the living room. After this morning, horrific pictures come into my head, my father on the doorstep, the Japanese soldier grinning like he just won a prize, my father's watch glistening with blood. There are still bloodstains on the step. My grief slowly turned to anger and I decide to contact my father's two good friends, Fa and Chen. I know they helped my father with the war. As I am walking on the street I think about what they will say: "You are too young," "It is too dangerous," "Young Chinese girls like you should be at home and not fighting in the war." Discouraged by my thoughts I turn back and head home.

I rush home to the ghetto. My mother is on her bed, shivering. When she speaks her voice is raspy and quiet and she coughs continuously. I know that she is sick but I don't know what to do. She becomes weaker and weaker and dies 12 days later. I don't go to school in those 12 horrific days, I just watch my mother slowly go, slipping away to my father.

I figured that if Fa and Chen wouldn't listen then I would take matters into my own hands. I took some paint and started making signs. I thought that if I do these small things, it will encourage people to speak out. I hide my signs under my mattress. Soon enough they were done. I decided that I should deliver them to Fa and Chen under an anonymous name.

I am in my bed, without my mother. She is gone. She was my only friend in this crowded mass of people. I cannot be here anymore. My mother's memory comes back to haunt my mind. I pack my things and run out of the ghetto.

I am walking to school when I see Lisa sleeping in a doorway. Soot covers her face and there are scabs on her arms. I wake her up and take her to my house. My mother doesn't care because she is now in a faraway world since my father's brutal death. I help Lisa get ready but she refuses to come to school because she is afraid of the Japanese. I let her stay at home for today. I need to do something for my father. The Japanese cannot hold me back forever. I take my signs and start walking down the street. A few people join me and then I feel a sudden yank on my shirt. My mother is shaking me "What have you done? I am ashamed of you! You are a disgrace! I forbid you to do anything of the sort ever again!" she screams. I see Lisa lurking round the corner looking horrified. This same night my mother took her life. All I remember is the silent noise of her jumping out of the window and a quiet thud as she hit the ground. I feel claustrophobic, sick in this city, I need to get away...I am taking Lisa to the port. Pulling and running I see there is a ship leaving to Vietnam. My savings are just enough for two tickets. I get the tickets and run onto the ship.

What a friend. I am leaving! I cannot believe it! Although grief still suspended in my heart, now that I am free I can do the things I want to do. I am free!

Xueyuan Shanghai

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Effron, Sophie – 13

Something cold trickles down my neck but I wasn't quite sure what it was, when I hear small footsteps and then *SPLASHH!* I lift my head up realizing I'm completely soaked, I notice a bucket next to my bed, "BRIAN!" I scream but there's no point because when I check my phone to see I'm already late for school. I get change, do my hair and get my supplies together in 10 minutes and rush out the door into my car. It usually takes me 10 minutes to get to school but since I'm late there's no traffic. In art class the principal starts to speak into the loudspeaker, "Clara Evans, please report to my office immediately." As I pack my bag a student howls an "oooooooooooo," by the time I head out the whole class has joined in. The art room isn't next door to the principal's office, it takes 5 minutes to get there and each step I can't help but wonder why she wanted to see me.

When I enter she says, "Clara, please take a seat," As I sit I feel sweat dripping down my forehead, "Don't worry, you're not in trouble." She could see I was nervous, "This is good and bad news, sadly Alex Jordan had a car accident and he's broken a leg so he can not make it to Xueyuan Shanghai. All the teachers have thought about it and we decided you should replace him! You don't have to accept but it would be an extraordinary experience and I suggest you accept."

I was speechless, I didn't know how to react especially because yesterday I was depressed and now I'm filled with so many different emotions I wanted to cut out my heart to stop them. "Y.. ye.....yee..yes, YES , yes!"

The principal laughed, "Now I was expecting you to say that so we'll talk about everything you need, first you leave to Shanghai on Thursday and I know it's already so soon but we only knew you were accepted today."

It felt like no one was there, I started to picture Shanghai and all the beautiful artifacts and museums I would visit when I forgot the principal was in the room, "So Clara, yes or no?" I was confused because I was zoned out the whole time I didn't hear a word, "Yes?" The principal grinned, "It's always a better experience with a roommate!" When I left her room it was already lunchtime, I wasn't hungry so I searched the school for Brenda finding her bathroom, "BRENDA!, I searched the whole school for you!"

Brenda grew a sarcastic smirk, "Was this really the last place you looked?"

I sighed, "No, it was the first!"

We suddenly burst into tears and I squeezed her tight she finally asked, "Okay so what's the good news?"

I was silent, "I GOT INTO XUEYUAN SHANGHAI!" I noticed her eyes tear up as she started to cry, I ran to her and shot her a huge hug, "I know a year is long but I promise you it will be over quickly and I will come back for Christmas too." She grinned and hugged me again.

Whenever I travel I have to close my suitcase by sitting on it but this time my suitcase weighed over 30kg so I got my younger brother to sit on it with me and then I could actually close it. I brought my suitcase down stairs, I could tell it weighed too much because as I walked down, my suitcase flung past me and slammed against the floor. I jumped down and pushed my suitcase back up, "Honey, time to head to the airport."

I wasn't ready to leave, I ran up to Brian, picked him up and crushed him to my chest and I whispered to him, "I will miss you so much," He smooched my cheek and at that moment my heart melted. I waved goodbye and shut the door behind me, place my suitcase in the trunk of the car and hopped in the front seat.

I stare out the window as we begin to lower through the clouds, slowly the city starts to appear and I feel so ecstatic my heart skips a beat. When I feel the plane hit the ground I clap, I thought people would join in but as expected everyone in economy turns around. As I wait for my suitcase to appear I notice my group is not next to me, I look all around me but they're nowhere to be seen. When I find my suitcase I search the whole room for them but they're not in the room, I realize they had forgotten about me because my suitcase was the last one and they must think I'm on the bus right this instant. I try not to panic but I scream and a young woman runs up to me and yells, "Wake Up! WAKE up! Wake UP!" as the voice fades I hear a familiar voice continuing to deliver those words, "WAKE UP!" I spring up, Savannah my roommate is leaning over me, "Finally, are you going to get dressed? We're headed to a huge museum in 30 minutes!" I growl, rolling myself onto the floor I leap into the shower and change.

The entrance of the museum was alluring, it was already 2 o'clock when we arrived and the museum closed at 4:30. We stayed with our group as we gazed at the stunning wall filled with art pieces and artifacts. This museum was specifically based on the old Shanghai and across the walls there were many tales and facts about it. We walked past a room I was particularly curious about so I left the group and walked into the room. I noticed this room was not for tourists and it seemed like no one had touched a thing in it. I started to read about Shanghai life in the early years. In the middle of this room there was a wooden table with carved words. I began to read it but my phone fell to the floor, I crouched to the floor and I didn't notice the water on the floor. As I slipped I heard the loudspeaker announcement right before I fell, "It is now 4:30 the museum is closed, I repeat the museum is closed."

"BBZZZZZZ, BZZZZ, ZZZZZ." My phone vibrates on the floor, I throw my hand onto my phone and pick it up to see that Savannah had called so I call her back, "Hey Savannah, why did you call?" She replies back with a sharp tone,

"Clara! OH MY GOD! Where are you?" I was so confused why she asked me that when I suddenly notice that I'm on the floor, I look up and gasp, "Hey Savannah, I, um, I'm in the museum, what happened?"

My surroundings grew clearer as I slowly adapt to a blinding light, "What happened? Clara, you've been missing for 3 days!"

It's just a dream I think, remember when you had a similar dream in the airport. "This is a dream," I finally reply.

"No, Clara this is not a dream. You are stuck in a museum, everyone has been worried about you and some people think you're dead! I'm so happy I called because I was starting to believe the rumors too."

My expression changed and confusion filled my mind. *3 days, I think how is that possible for me to be knocked out for that long?*

"Clara, are you still there? You need to go to the hospital right now!" Sudden movements flow through my body as I realize I'm exceedingly thirsty.

"Okay, thank you so much for worrying, I have to go." My stomach cramps as I pull myself up to walk. I push through the door and limp as my thigh feels like it's been stabbed, I don't focus on worrying about anyone stopping me from exiting the museum. It was empty, opening hour was in 30 minutes but I headed straight for the door, a worker

stopped me before I could leave, “Excuse me, how did you get in? The museum opens in half an hour?” Excuses rummaged in my brain, “Oh I’m so sorry I’m visiting and my friend told me to come now. I thought it was free so I simply walked in but then I noticed no body was here so I might as well get some breakfast and then come back after.”

The woman smiled, “ No worries, this always happens.”

A small water fountain caught my eye, I used all my energy and bolted. The water pours down my throat, as my adrenaline speeds up I figure out the fastest way to Xueyuan Shanghai. I find a public bus to my destination and stare out the window, it starts to pour and I reach for my phone and right before I press the exit button, “Hello? Mom, it’s me Clara.”

The Speech That Changed Shanghai Forever

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Razon, Ori – 14

It was 1928, and after the Shanghai Massacre of 1927 and constant mass terror attacks, the British Regime gave into the pressure. The continuous riots and protests as a response to these acts of terrorism (secretly arranged by the Green Gang, an underground criminal organisation) were ceaseless, and eventually the British reached breaking point. It was up to the leader of the flourishing Gang, Yan Tao Ming (who was secretly leading an operation involving the trade of opium to sustain the gang economically) to secure the Green Gang's position as the leaders of Shanghai. It was up to his skills of persuasion and propaganda to rocket his gang into success. Will his skills be enough? Or will he crumble under the pressure of having the power to transform the path Shanghai will go down forever?

~

Ming counted the moments to his speech. Every second felt like centuries, and one mistake, one wrong word or move, could bring the whole thing down; and so, as the previous British Prime Minister said his remarks and stepped off the stage, it was down to Yan Tao Ming. He stepped up, anxious yet surprisingly confident. Ming was wise, he understood that to successfully gain control over Shanghai he had to please the people, and to do so he had to persuade ...

"The unjust British regime has fallen, and it is now up to us to decide the path our beloved city of Shanghai will go down. This revolutionary act will go in the history books, and with it will come a new era. This time in history acts as a mere stepping stone in Shanghai's history for us to once and for all live in happiness and prosperity, and after much pondering and many discussions the conclusive decision has come to be that from this point on, Shanghai needs to be run by The Green Gang.

Now dear comrades, don't let our title fool you. Many have 'assumed' that we are the ones responsible for the horrible acts of terrorism we have been victims of. However, don't let this hatred for Shanghai fool you. Don't you see it my dear friends, it is the British who have caused this all! They not only planned these attacks but also fell under the pressure of suffering the consequences. Our rule, together with prosperity, will bring a body of government which will stop at nothing to please our people and fulfil their needs. Yes, I say 'our people', because we are one, we are a family, no matter how much the British try to prevent it.

Now, the British are bringing up the topic of the defense of the country, and how we need to have a proper body of government with experience. However, we have more experience than any other, and when there was a need for defense and for us to fight, what's very ironic is that The BRITISH THEMSELVES were the ones that hid behind our shadows, while we fought and risked our lives in order to defend our beloved country. Now comrades, The British will say that our memories are flawed, that I'm lying, that I'm manipulating you, but the truth is, our biggest enemies aren't the wars and defense which come with sustaining a country, but rather the British and THEIR regime. Time and again it is evident that the British claim that something happened for their benefit when in reality the majority remember differently.

You know what, at least when the British weren't here we were a single unit, we worked as a team, and we were one big family; now, because of the British and the British only, we have been divided. They stripped you of your rights, and you questioned nothing. They began increasing taxes whilst none of the money went into improving OUR lives,

and you questioned nothing. They decreased average salaries, and you questioned NOTHING. It's time to rise up, and TOGETHER, as a FAMILY, we need to cast our eyes beyond British deception. They have deceived US, and this revolution is an act of the people, and it is my number one priority to represent you.

Our children and grandchildren will look back at this moment, at the decisions we are about to make, and we have to make sure that we set our nation down the best path possible. We have to make sure that they can be proud of us and, and if you aren't going to do it for yourself, at least do it for them — so that they can have what we didn't, and that is a caring, just and understanding government.

Now, although many of us are viewed by previous authoritative figures, particularly the British, as evil or mischievous, in spite of the fact that many thought of us as a criminal organisation, we are here FOR OUR people, we are a family, and we have to continue the path that Weng, Qian Jian and Pan Qing set us on.

And I know, there have been rumors that we have been involved in illegal trade and specifically with opium. However, I assure you that those accusations are nonsense! We need to take action! TOGETHER! Before matters begin to intensify. I am certain that you, being the most talented people in the world, are the only nation who have the appropriate skills and qualities to properly cooperate with us to conduct a successful and balanced government. This decision will spark into one of the greatest political revolutions in human history, and all I need is your trust and faith.”

The crowd burst into a deafening applause. This speech shocked the British authorities, and despite accusations of it being complete nonsense, people believed it, and there was nothing the British could do. They were no longer in power, and this game-changing speech was about to morph Shanghai's history forever. Shanghai was about to spring into chaos, but little did the people of Shanghai know. And so, the word hit the street, and The Green Gang were the so called “heroes” of Shanghai.

Previously, while the British ruled, they constantly spoke of ending tyranny and to once and for all live in peace. However, as Ming's gang increasingly gained power, the words of the British didn't inspire them, but rather pushed the gang to seize the opportunity and gradually establish themselves as the oligarchic leaders of Shanghai. They understood that to successfully reach a point of complete control over the people, they had to win over the people through means of propaganda and persuasion. The key to the gang's approach to persuading the citizens of Shanghai was their ability to manipulate language to suit the demands of the situation and the audience. Whilst hiding the truth, they'd use overly complex words and ideas that make the people feel as though they are unable to join the discussion on an intellectual level (since education in Shanghai at the time wasn't the best). When necessary, The Gang also oversimplified language, and put signs up on the street stating that “the gang is always right” and “follow Ming”. Additionally, The Gang's ability to manipulate the truth and convince the people that the decisions they are making are for the people's benefit acted as one of their major persuasive tools. When they increased taxes just so that they could have more for themselves, for example, they stated that it was going into improving the economic state of Shanghai, thus convincing the people to support their selfish judgement.

Over the course of their rule, they constantly brought the people's attention to the massacres at the time of the British, repeatedly stating that no one would ever want to go back to such a time, and if one would complain, he would be silenced by the thought of going back to such a period of despair. There were posters covering all corners of the street stating that “Ming is watching you”, and through sparking the fear of both going back to the time of the massacres and the idea that someone is watching over you at all times, the Gang managed to gain increasing control over the people and their actions. Crime decreased dramatically, but the ones who fought against this injustice had to face dreadful repercussions, and were caged on the street as displays of the consequences which come with disobedience.

Years passed and the people of Shanghai transformed into the Gang's puppets, they would do anything Ming would demand, and if they opposed they would suffer. The Green Gang had once and for all gained complete control over Shanghai, and as bad as the situation was, the citizens of Shanghai brought this upon themselves. Despite the Green Gang's authority over them being a decision made by themselves, people would look at prisoners caged up in cells on the street, and they would look back at themselves, and the truth is, they couldn't tell which was which.

The Deep Sleep

Carmel School Association Primary, Gefen, Ella – 10

Chapter 1

Flip gasped awake from an unsettling dream and, after reminding himself over and over again that he was safe, he took a glance at his older brother, Greg, laid down and drifted back to sleep.

The two brothers lived together in their underground hole to avoid being devoured by tigers, like all the other worms on Forestina. Unfortunately, their parents weren't that lucky.

The next day, Greg woke Flip and yelled,

“Flip, we’re moving!”

“YAY!”

“Yeah! Let’s go!”

Flip grabbed his things and put them in a leaf.

“Where are we going?”

“Shanghai, Earth.”

“How are we getting there?”

“Spaceship, we’ll order one online.”

Once they had the spaceship parked outside their house, and Greg had read the piloting manuel, they took off.

Chapter 2

A couple days after they had taken off they found themselves stuck on a horrendous planet captured by aliens. They had simply landed here because they had needed to refuel but before they finished, a bunch of aliens, who didn’t speak English, chunked them into jail cells.

All of a sudden there was a high pitched noise that sounded faintly like a trumpet, then they saw what must have been the queen because all the aliens that were guarding them ran up and bowed.

“Flip, do you still have that key-shaped choker-necklace that mum gave you?”

“Yes, why?”

“Give it to me.”

Flip handed over his choker—necklace. Greg stuck it out of the thinly spaced bars and unlocked the cell. Greg then unlocked Flip’s cell.

They tried creeping out but...

“The spaceship!” yelled Greg.

The aliens heard him and they all came charging at them. They ran for it but the aliens caught them. They slammed them back in the cages and put the spaceship and the choker—necklace in a safe room.

Chapter 3

After a week of sleepless nights the brothers were tired, grumpy and desperate to escape the prison cell but they had tried *everything* and *nothing* had worked. They were also quite hungry, prison food was disgusting. That evening Greg was getting quite impatient and rolled around in his “bed”.

“Owww!!” yelled Greg, because he’d jumped up and hit his head on the ceiling and a book had fallen out.

“What is that?” asked Flip.

“Flip this is a book about the alien species keeping us hostage! We’ll use this book to find out the aliens weaknesses and strengths. That way we’ll be able to escape.”

“Thank goodness you... Wait,” remarked Flip suspiciously. “Why would they hide a book in the ceiling all about *themselves*, they’d be helping *us* escape.”

“Good point. I’ll check out the inside.”

But the book was in English, and they found a letter. Greg read it to Flip:

“Dear Reader, I am probably dead right now but I was once a prisoner in this prison and I wrote this diary so that any other prisoner would be able to escape. Let's read the rest tomorrow I'm exhausted.”

“Good night,” said a very excited Flip. They both got a good night sleep that night.

Chapter 4

The next day the brothers were very cheerful and started reading. “*Tell the aliens that you would like a calendar and a watch so that you will know when your birthday is (there is a dictionary in the back of the book in case you can't speak Litigious). Then on the night of the full moon at exactly 9:28pm all the aliens will fall into a deep sleep and*

only awake at 10:43am the next day. Concealed in the small rock on the right is a key that will open cell, tap the rock 3 times to find it. Once you are out of the cell go to the safe room (the password is 3691 2158) and get whatever you came with. Then open the security gate by saying the password "Tomatoes are delicious for 10 mins" in Litigious and run to the gate. The moment you are outside the gate take off and you will be safe. But remember that the only thing that wakes the aliens is the sound of happiness. "

"How about we ask for the calendar and watch when they bring us dinner," suggested Flip.

"Good idea, then we can escape ASAP," agreed Greg.

So that evening, when the aliens brought them dinner Greg asked for a calendar and a watch. 2 minutes later the aliens came back and gave them what they asked for.

"Tonight is the full moon!" exclaimed Greg.

"YAY!" said Flip.

Chapter 5

That night at 9:28 all the aliens fell asleep and Greg had removed the key from the rock. He put it in the keyhole and it clicked open. They proceeded down the corridor to the safe room.

"3691 2158" Greg typed and he swung the door open they grabbed their bag and spaceship and then Greg said,

"Lienta rep bodfrish micj 10 oik."

"Yes!" Flip yelled, forgetting the thing that wakes aliens.

That moment the aliens began to stir.

"RUN!!"

"My choker-necklace!"

It was still in the room!! He dashed past the guards grabbed it and ran. Then the gate began to close. Flip and Greg slipped under the narrow crack while the aliens crashed into it.

They were off.

Chapter 6

"Greg, what is Shanghai like?"

"It used to be a fishing village and in 1930 it was the biggest trading port on Earth and it had a wall around it. In some places there were western settlements but the Chinese still wanted to live there so that is why Shanghai gets along very well with other countries."

After days of traveling they made it to Shanghai. They landed outside their hotel. They were shown to their room and they fell asleep straight away.

Epilogue

At breakfast Flip and Greg thought they saw...

“Mum, dad!” they yelled.

“Flip, Greg!” their parents replied. “You’re here. I knew you’d make it!” cried their mum.

From that day forward they were the happiest family ever.

The Symbol

Carmel School Association Primary, Golovsky, Milly – 10

Li Xiu Ying, unable to sleep, held her mother's crown in her hands, tears streaming down her face. It had been just over a year since her mother's passing, now all she had was her brother and father, both of them barely paying any attention to her. Her mother's passing was not the first loss the family and kingdom had experienced in recent times, with her younger sister going missing when playing in the castle garden a few years earlier. She was just seven.

As she gripped the crown more tightly she noticed something she had never seen before. A strange carving engraved into the sides. It looked like an ancient language but she did not know what it was.

She made her way to the royal library, where bookshelves spread across all the walls holding all the knowledge and stories within them. One book looked familiar. She opened it and out fell a frayed, seriously damaged, ancient map. Even in this state she could tell it was the castle grounds. Looking closely she saw a mark near where her mother's grave now lay.

As she arrived at the grave, she glanced upon the precious Azaleas tree bending over it, almost like a shield protecting its friend. Memories flooded into her head and took her back to happier times when her family were all together. As she looked around trying to work out what the marking on the map could be, she noticed a rough marking on a nearby tree.

She moved closer and could tell immediately, the marking matched the one on the crown and book. As she placed her hand gently on the marking, a faint rumble came from under her feet growing gradually louder. Then as suddenly as the noise had begun, it stopped. The floor below her shattered, leaving her falling deep into the unknown. Darkness surrounded her as she continued to fall, with the constant spinning making her feel dizzy. As she landed with a thump, the map still in her hand, there was complete darkness. She had fainted.

What felt like hours later, she woke and it took her a few moments to recall what had happened. Even though there was not much light, she seemed to be in an underground cave with many tunnels running off in different directions. Though mostly silent, there was a very faint noise, which sounded like the song of a young maiden. Following the sound down one of the passageways, it got louder, meaning she was definitely going the right way.

She found herself at the end of the tunnel, the singing louder than ever, but no way in. Discouraged but determined, she started looking for another way in. Tripping on an unseen stone, she fell to the ground. Scrambling over to it, she pulled on it revealing a trapdoor. The door was moldy and practically falling apart. Sliding herself through, she landed gracefully into a lighter room, where singing could be heard from all around. It was a beautiful sound. She could smell the scent of fire burning. She stopped in her tracks and darted behind a stalagmite for there, around the fire, were dwarf-like creatures. Goblins. They were greenish with scaly skin, fluff sticking out of their pointy ears. Then behind them, in a rusty cage, was a girl sitting cross-legged, singing. For a second she thought the shadows were playing with her, but then she realized, it was her sister.

Shocked but utterly amazed, she screamed and the goblins began towards her. She had to do something, but nothing came to mind. The goblins got nearer until one of their bony fingers wrapped around her shoulders and pulled her from her hiding place.

“Looks like someone is sticking their nose in our business,”

“Someone is going to get locked up tonight.”

Two of them grabbed her by the arms, shoving her into the cage right on top of her sister.

“We’ll decide what to do with you later,” they said in unison.

The two sisters had a long awaited reunion full of hugs, but knowing they were locked up by the goblins meant they couldn’t be truly happy yet.

“Zhang Li, what happened to you?”

Zhang Li explained how when she was playing in the castle gardens the goblins had come, blindfolded her, then shoved her into a bag. She had lived in a cage on their food scraps and little water.

That night when the goblins were sleeping after another of their feasts, the girls noticed the lock to their cage did not seem to be properly closed. Slowly and quietly they edged the door to the cage open. Li Xiu Ying thought their best chance to get out was to try the trapdoor. The problem was that it was above them. Zhang Li had seen the goblins use the stalagmites to step up on things and thought that might work. They found one with some sharp ridges they could use as steps and managed to reach it. Quietly they went through the trap door and ran back down the tunnel through which Li Xiu Ying had come.

When they reached the areas where all the tunnels met they were unsure what to do. Li Xiu Ying noticed that one of the tunnel entrances had the same symbol as the crown above it. They approached the entrance to the tunnel and saw some steps leading up. The tunnel seemed to go on forever, and the girls were so tired, but they had to continue. At last they got to the top, realising they were back at their mother's grave.

They couldn't believe it, they were free. They raced back to the castle as both sisters were cheerful and relieved to be back home. In the courtyard they found their brother and father. They were astonished and overjoyed to see the girls. That night the king held a ball of joyfulness, in honor of his daughter's return. Happiness returned to the kingdom of Huaxia.

The Ice Serpent in Shanghai

Carmel School Association Primary, Hasofer, Asher – 10

1970, Shanghai

Jordan Whitewater had just arrived on a grassy green island. After jumping off his boat that had just sunk while swirling viciously. His sister Amy sadly died while on the descending ship. "No no god please no noooooooooo, why Amy?!" Shouted Jordan. Jordan could remember the times where they played in the fields and hunted rabbits with bows now it was all over.

He didn't know where he was, but he read a rusty and moldy sign that read 盛山島. Jordan didn't speak extraordinary Chinese but he understood the word, Sheng. Suddenly he felt an agonizing slice on his back, he'd been stabbed.

The next day he was in a silky and warm traditional Chinese suit. Also, he had a bloody bandage on his back. Jordan felt a toasty hand on his shoulder.

"Hello, I'm May."

"I'm Jordan thanks for stabbing me"

"I didn't stab you," denied May.

"Where am I," said Jordan.

"You are on Shengshan island, but let me tell you one thing... this island has a myth." "What myth?" demanded Jordan.

"There is a serrated and sharp sword on the highest point on the island. This sword is the strongest in Shanghai, it's survived the battle of Shanghai. The sword is stuck in the ground much like the sword in the stone," Exploded May

"How does this supernatural story affect me?" said Jordan.

"Well at the conclusion of the myth there is a prophecy that states, a man with family in the grave, can be brave and detach the sword to enter the icy serpent's cave."

"What makes you think I'll do this" asked Jordan.

"The serpent will release carbon monoxide killing all of the 6 million people in Shanghai. Poor and rich alike, it will destroy all rickshaws and workers in power plants causing explosions and Shanghai to fall to its doom."

"This is too much for me tell me this later when I am ready," said Jordan.

The next day

They arrived in the training room Master Wong held out his hand and Jordan shook it "I'm Jordan mate, I am the lord of the dingoes."

"Does he think that just because we're Chinese we are stupid. Anyway I'm master Wong Xi but you can call me Wong also I stabbed you" Wong said with a poker face.

"Why are we in a training room also why are there so many beautiful peony flowers here."

"Suddenly a hand grabbed Jordan he was thrown to the ground with an Osoto Gari which is a classic judo move." "Owww" shouted Jordan. "Lesson one of your training never trust anyone."

After 4 years

Jordan was a black belt in most martial arts, also he was able to wield and use a katana. But he had to train more in boxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and krav maga. "Congratulations Jordan," Said May "You've mastered multiple martial arts with ease now we'll test you. As you know the only people on the island are you, master Wong Xi and I. But now I will introduce you very briefly to

High master Chong Li," Blurted May. "Hello 先生 Jordan Whitewater," Roared Chong Li.

It was 9:30 am when the battle had started

Chong Li started with an osoto gari which is a classic judo takedown. Jordan was being flung down to the ground and at the last second where his head was opposite to Chong Li's. He wrapped his foot around Chong Li's and rolled rearwards.

At this point, he was mounted on Chong Li with a move called a forward mount. And in the blink of an eye, Jordan had Chong Li in an armbar.

He was tapping out meaning Jordan had won "I WON!" Jordan shouted

"Well done 白水 you have bested me, thankfully I lived," Exclaimed Chong Li.

"Am I allowed to fight the serpent now ya old hag?"

"Not just yet, obviously you wouldn't know because you have the brain capacity of an ant," Ranted Chong Li

"First we must go to the highest point on the island, that point is around a kilometer north."

And so they started walking and walking and walking. Once they'd walked 900 meters a mutated Mesobuthus scorpion crawled up Jordan's neck. And after about three seconds of it being on his neck he had been stung, he'd just realized that he had been bitten by the creature that can paralyze, PERMANENTLY! It was a blue scorpion with yellow patterns going down its back. It felt like the scorpion's stinger jumped at him. But he could see the sword so he used all his might and muscle to pick the sword up. He'd done it, also handed the sword to Chong Li. At this point Jordan's face was purple and he knew he would die, Suddenly Chong Li stabbed the scorpion and with one slash the scorpion was dead.

However, Chong Li did a charm and healed Jordan. But Chong Li quickly fell into Jordan's arms it was clear that Chong Li gave his life to save Jordan's.

3 Hours later Jordan started walking east like Chong Li told him to and after about 10 minutes Jordan saw it he saw the cave. Jordan felt a feeling, he felt fear and anger but most of all he wanted to stop the dragon from releasing carbon monoxide on all of Shanghai. Then it was there, the vicious, savage serpent that was turquoise and dark green but mostly scaly was there. Jordan tried to lacerate the serpent by stabbing the serpent in the top of its head and then rotating the sword. But the serpent expected it and fired a blast of pointed and serrated ice fragments at Jordan. He had been hit by one it the chest and was bleeding hastily. The serpent knew this was his opportunity to kill Jordan so he launched himself at Jordan. But Jordan slashed it at the last possible second and killed it. Jordan fell to the ground with cold, emotionless eyes.

Jordan was dead.

The Legend of the Golden Dagger

Carmel School Association Primary, Lable, Ben – 10

Prologue

1216 Shanghai

Emperor Xuanzong was yelling at his servant to get the dagger. The rumor was, that inside the curved, ornate handle of the golden dagger, was an elixir so powerful that if any living creature drank it, they would instantly inherit the gift of immortality. Emperor Xuanzong desired it more than anybody in China. A local farmer, An Lushan, had been entrusted with the dagger and knowing its overwhelming power, had hidden it, in a place he was certain no one, not even the all-mighty emperor would ever find it.

Friday December

5th 2016

Aguda had just finished his favorite history class. Today's topic was the golden dagger.

“Class dismissed and don’t forget to study for the test on Monday,” Mr. Suzong boomed. After class, Aguda approached his teacher.

“I’m fascinated by this mysterious golden dagger. Can you tell me more about it?” Aguda questioned.

“Of course I can tell you more about it, but if you are really interested in finding out the secret history of the dagger, you should seek out my uncle Jie Fu. He is the master when it comes to ancient Chinese weapons. He works at Jade Buddha Martial Arts Studio,” Mr. Suzong replied.

Saturday December

6th 2016

“Jade Buddha Martial Arts Studio, please,” Aguda directed to the taxi driver. Within minutes they were there. Jade Buddha Martial Arts Studio was in the Shanghai Tower on the 57th floor. As the doors on the 57th floor opened, Aguda saw an old man sitting in an empty white room, meditating on a rug. He could almost smell the dust in the air. The man was wearing a purple robe and seemed utterly unaware that someone had entered the room. Suddenly with his eyes still closed, the man said,

“Welcome to Jade Buddha Martial Arts Studio, Aguda. I am Jie Fu.” Aguda was shocked. How was it possible this random man knew his name?

“Hi Mr. Li, your nephew Mr. Suzong suggested that I come to you for information on the golden dagger. He said you know your stuff when it comes to ancient Chinese weapons. Can you help me?” asked Aguda. Finally, Jie Fu opened his eyes and whispered,

“I have been waiting for you many years, Aguda.”

Sunday December

7th 2016

Aguda woke up and could not stop thinking about what Jie Fu had revealed to him the day before. As he paced up and down his bedroom floor, he remembered the prophecy Jie Fu had told him. The prophecy stated that if your tea leaves were red, you were the chosen one to find the dagger. Jie Fu had told him to go to Mend Feng Tea factory to check his tea leaves. He had a feeling it wasn't him with the millions of people in China. After all, the odds were 14.35 million to 1.

Tuesday December

9th 2016

Finally, Aguda got the courage to go to the tea factory. He was laughing to himself on the journey, certain he was running a fool's errand. He arrived at an enormous steel building that looked at least one hundred years old. He opened one of the big red doors, and what greeted him inside was a sea of workers completing every facet of the tea making process from withering the leaves to rolling them and finally drying them. It was a sight to behold.

Suddenly a tall man called out, “AGUDA!” With a jolt, Aguda was reminded why he was there. “How does everyone know who I am?” he asked himself. “Come with me,” ordered the mysterious tall man. Aguda dutifully followed the man through another door at the back of the factory.

They walked for what seemed like an eternity down a dark old corridor. Finally, they reached a vault like a door. The man whispered, “You know the code.” “What code?” Aguda responded. “You know the code,” the man repeated and walked away. Aguda thought really hard about what it was. Just when he was about to give up, it came to him. A memory came to his mind as clear as a crystal ball. Two years ago Aguda and his best friend Bobby Chong were messing around with secret codes. They were translating their names into numbers. “1,7,21,4,1,” Aguda shouted. Quickly and with a searing feeling of excitement, Aguda started to unlock the vault. With a final click, the vault door hissed open and he stepped inside. Aguda opened the vault and saw a man sitting on a long purple silk couch with a bowl in his hands. “Are you ready to take full responsibility of the dagger?” the man said in a deep voice. “Yes, Sir,” Aguda replied. He looked in the bowl, and said to himself, “This is going to be a start to a new life.”

The Time Traveler of Shanghai

Carmel School Association Primary, Mogelof, Jack – 11

Chapter 1

It would be the last time I would have to worry about paying bills. The black and white checkered flag is reaching out to me. I can almost feel the smooth golden trophy placed into my eager hands. I push the pedal down harder, gaining more speed by the second. My hot and sweaty hands grasp the wheel harder as I prepare for the final stretch. I see the crowd of anxious fans staring down at the line of cars behind me. One hundred meters between me and my destiny. Ninety meters. I can hear the cars on my tail, fighting for their last chance at victory. Fifty meters, I concentrate more, push the pedal even harder.

Forty meters, thirty meters, twenty meters...

I hear the muffled voices of nurses and doctors. I open up my eyes, all I see is white. I am on an old, hard bed. One of the nurses comes over to me when she sees I'm awake. Her clothes are wrinkled, but her smile lights up the whole room.

"Good morning sir," She says in a sweet, soft voice.

"Where am I?" I ask.

"Oh you're at the Shanghai General Hospital," she replies.

"Wait, How? What happened to me?" She opens the file cabinet next to my bed, grabs a beige folder, and says,

"We don't know, but you were lying down on the street when our Buick ambulance came and got you."

"Lying on the street? That's weird and did you just say Buick? Aren't those kinds of ambulances from the late 30s?" I say, confused, thinking back to my history classes in 7th grade.

"Yes, but we're in the late 30s."

“What’s the date?” I ask nervously.

“August 13, 1937.”

Chapter 2

I open my mouth to yell but nothing comes out. My brain goes fuzzy. All of my crazy thoughts plunging their way into my head are like a wall, blocking my mind from telling myself to calm down. I shut my eyes and take deep breaths, trying to isolate my brain from all those voices and thoughts, but they keep pouring in like a waterfall.

I think I blacked out from all that madness happening inside of me. I lift my head up from the crumpled sheet of the pillow on my hospital bed, taking a look at the old clock beside me. It is morning. I get up from my bed, and I take a walk around the spacious hospital room, thinking about what I had heard, the horrors I had been told.

Chapter 3

A sudden flashback powers its way into my mind. A computer pops up on the lap of an eight-year-old James Tallahassee, me. The computer screen flashes a family tree website on the clear 2005 Window’s screen. Jamie Tallahassee. My great-grandfather, an undercover agent for the newly renamed FBI. He lived a short life. A good one though. On an undercover business trip to Shanghai, on August 13, 1937, the Japanese invaded. My great-grandfather was killed.

I stop daydreaming. My great-grandfather isn’t dead yet. I can save him from the Japanese invasion, but how?

Chapter 4

That morning, I leave the hospital. From my Grandma Jenny’s stories, I knew that Jamie had landed in Shanghai last night. I booked a flight for Jamie and me to England for tonight. I’m sure Jamie is at the Sannabereli Finance building now, the only branch his company, Tallahassee Financials, have here.

I hail a rickshaw. The coolie pulls the bright, red rickshaw over. He is wearing a conical hat on his head. The seat complains when I sit down. The coolie starts pulling the rickshaw and we race through the streets of Shanghai to the office.

Chapter 5

The office is a beige colored building with a double door entrance. I make my way to the entrance and head in. I see a board, "Tallahassee Financials 2nd Floor." I walk up. I can't believe it. I am going to meet a dead relative. A little freaky, but very exciting.

I step into the office I see about thirty people walking around in the cramped office area. Everyone is as busy as a bee. I rush over to a man writing something down on a notepad.

"Excuse me sir, but by any chance is Mr. Tallahassee here?"

"Yeah," the man replies, "He has a very tight schedule but he has an opening now. First door on your right."

"Thank you," I reply.

I walk to the door and knock. I'm so nervous, I am going to meet my dead great-grandfather.

"Come in," A deep voice calls out. I open the door. My eyes stumble upon a carbon copy of my father. Beautiful blue eyes, long brown hair, everything.

"Hi Mr. Tallahassee, I'm James," I say, "I am here to warn you about something."

"What?"

"The Japanese are going to invade Shanghai in two days."

"If this is true, how do you know?"

"The truth is I'm a ti..." I stop myself. I decide to lie, "I went to Japan a week ago, and overheard the military planning a deadly attack on Shanghai."

“Hahahaha,” he laughs at me.

“Seriously, you need to come with me.”

“I’m not sure about this.”

“Do you want to know how I know you? What do the letters FBI mean to you?” I could see the recognition in his eyes.

“Ummm,”

“Come, I think we can catch the 7:00 PM flight.

Chapter 6

I am on an old plane sitting and chatting to my great-grandfather in disguise, heading back to England after saving his life. I have so many things to tell him. Our conversations will be endless. But what’s next in store for me? Will I ever get back to my own time? Will I get a job in England, buy a house and start a family and be happy? Will I ever race again? Who knows, I’ll just have to wait until time unfolds.

Old Shanghai

Cheung Chuk Shan College, Cheung, Ho Man – 12

Old Shanghai is a crowded city. There are many buildings and nightclubs. Citizens will go to the nightclubs when they were free. They always listen to Chinese folk music and chat in the nightclubs. Fishermen catch fish near the pier and one of the fishermen is called Max. This is his journey below....

One day, Max had caught a lot of fish and he is returning to the old shanghai pier with his boat. Max is a poor fisherman. Although he catches a lot of fish, he receives very little money. Max lives in a small village on a mountain with his family. Unfortunately, a policeman suddenly came out and said that he needed to arrest Max. Max is surprised that is why he is wanted. The police say he steals others fish from the pier. At that time, Old Shanghai is a corrupted city, yellow; gambling and drug abuse is common. Max thinks that someone must want him to die!

When he is in prison, he finds his best friend Ming to help him find out who did this. Ming helps Max escape from the prison and they finally find out that there is a greedy fisherman called Riu. Yiu wants to have all of Max's money and he sets a trap for him.

Ming and Max catch Yiu and take him to the police station. Yiu admits what he has done and Max is finally discharged. Ming is a great person and he becomes the head of the Police. Old Shanghai is returned to peace and there is no crime anymore. Max works harder and finally becomes a rich man in old Shanghai.

During this period, there is no yellow; gambling and drug abuse anymore. Old Shanghai becomes a well-developed city and Max builds many schools for the poor children and provides free education. Nowadays, those schools and buildings became historical buildings and people can go to visit them and know more about the history of Max.

Old Shanghai

Cheung Chuk Shan College, Chow, Nicky – 12

When I opened my eyes, I was shocked to find that all the things around me were unfamiliar. The old style houses, the small shops and the roads, which were still being built...

“Why am I here? I uttered and suffered from an acute headache. I remembered I was doing my revision at home for my coming history exam. When I was revising the history of old shanghai. I fell asleep and rested for a while. When I woke up I found myself standing on the road of a place... a place that was not Hong Kong. Why am I here? I had no idea.

I ran aimlessly to the street. To my amazement, although I had been to that place. I found the scene around me familiar.

“Oh! That’s Old Shanghai!” I was surprised by the idea that came to my mind, but I had no idea about where there was. I was scared to death, since I didn’t know how I could get here and how I could go home again. On the other hand, I was excited since I had the opportunity to travel to Shanghai. When I was running along the street I felt hungry. I searched for the bag and found that I had no money.

I was disappointed and helpless. Suddenly, a paper came in front of me. It read “Congratulations” you have the golden opportunity to travel to Old Shanghai. If you want to go home just press the button on your mobile phone.

A girl at the stall saw me, and invited me to have some noodles. “I am sorry, I don’t have money to buy anything apologizing, and I decided to leave. However, the girl said to me with a warm smile, “Never mind I will give you some noodles for free.”

I was touched by this warm-hearted girl I gave her my mobile phone and asked for her phone number. When she saw my phone she said, “What is this?” I suddenly realized that I was in old shanghai and not modern Hong Kong. When she pressed one of the buttons on my mobile phone, I was blocked in complete darkness. Then I lost my consciousness...

Old Shanghai

Cheung Chuk Shan College, Yeung, Ho Ting Jessica – 13

Once upon a time, Vanessa who lived in England went to Old Shanghai for vacation. She arrived at the pier and paid for the ticket. After a while, she boarded a huge and magnificent ship. She put her luggage under the chair and fell asleep.

An hour later, she woke up but there was still a long way to go. She checked the ticket and realized she needed to stay on the ship for three days. Therefore, she decided to join the party on the ship that night.

At about 7:00pm, Vanessa went to the dinning hall. The party had already started. There are lots of people who wore elegant clothes who were dancing around.

Although the hall was full of people, Vanessa felt very lonely. No one danced with Vanessa; she just walked around and ate some food. Suddenly a young man appeared, he chatted to Vanessa. They even started to dance together! After the party, they went back to their rooms separately. On the way, Vanessa felt really happy: she was in love. However, the next day Vanessa couldn't find the man again.

When Vanessa arrived in Old Shanghai, she put her luggage in the room, and visited a traditional restaurant. She ordered a lot of tasty dishes, including Shanghai noodles with beef and Shanghai style dim sum, she a wonderful meal.

After that, Vanessa looked around to pay the bill, she found the young man who danced with her on the ship. She walked towards him and said; "I thought you're not in Shanghai because I can't see you on the pier." The young man looked up and smiled, then said: "Well I'm here. I am Jeff. I had a great time with you that night; do you want to visit Shanghai? We can join a walking tour together. "Yes please" Vanessa replied. At last they fell in love with each other and enjoyed their Shanghai adventure.

Embers of the Past

Chinese International School, Lam, Ralph – 13

The air was heavily scented with ash and charcoal. He saw a burnt down house, with jet black vines streaming down the pillars, its gothic style ruined by the collapsed roof and windows that were now gaping holes on the side of the house. Jacob paused and considered the consequences of walking into this run-down house, but being a free spirit he eagerly continued on.

There were antiquities around the house including a fireplace in the main hall. A chime resounded throughout the house. In the corner there was a grandfather clock, the pendulum still swaying from when its master abandoned it. Beside the grandfather clock was a large portrait of a large, chubby man who was in a tightly fitting suit. Seeing the antiques excited Jacob and he walked around the house, taking pictures and storing them for a later date.

Several stones in the floor had been knocked out of place. Jacob stumbled forward over a rock. Under the rock was a small hole with a dusty leather-bound diary inside. The pages were yellowed, looking like a small breeze could blow them away. Without reading the diary, Jacob flipped the pages, deciding it would be more appropriate to read it at home, so he tucked it away in his backpocket, forgetting about it while taking photos of the estate. As he stepped out of the estate, even though it was the hottest day possible, he felt a unnaturally cold breeze brush his neck, as if there was something following him. He whipped around, only to find the dank estate looming behind him. As Jacob stepped out, he found himself back in the modern city.

Jacob got home and sat on his bed. Suddenly, he felt as if there was a rock in his pocket. He reached his hand into the pocket and took out the diary, remembering that he meant to read the contents of the book.

My brother is following the Chinese traditions too tightly, they are keeping him away from a world full of possibilities. If I had stuck to those ancient traditions, I wouldn't own one of the biggest banks in Shanghai, and the only bank that actually cooperates with Westerners. He spends too much time and money on our family. If he continues to go down this road then he'll be in the same position for the rest of his life...

Jacob's eyes snapped open, as if he were just given life. He wondered what had woken him and in the distance he could hear the rattling of the doorknob. He rushed outside to confront the enigma that had somehow invaded his home. He found a white figure, but apparently the figure didn't know how a lock worked and was desperately trying to escape. The figure looked over their shoulder. Jacob realised that it was a little girl and she had a dark black hole where the eyeball should have been. Her skin matched the traditional white Chinese robes that she wore. She whipped around, facing Jacob, revealing her appearance. This was when Jacob gasped. One half of the girl's face was intact, while the other half was lacking skin and was horribly scarred, as if it were a melted candle. Instead of a black hole for an eye, there was a hole through her face.

The little girl was blown away as if she were made of dust. As she was dissipating, Jacob felt the same unnaturally cold breeze he felt at the estate. He was brought back into his reality when the diary fell out of the air, hitting the ground with a thud in front of the door. "Why does she want the diary?" thought Jacob and felt faint, stumbling back to bed, falling asleep as soon as he hit the pillow.

When he woke up, he reflected on his supposed dream that he had last night, but as he stepped out of his bedroom, he froze. The diary was sitting where it landed the night before. He picked it up, staring curiously at it, trying to figure out why the little girl wanted from the diary. Instead of exploring the city, Jacob sat down to read more of the diary.

My brother has been pestering me about lending him some money for his daughter to attend school, even though I have supplied him with a job that pays enough for his daughter's school fees. If he wants a better life, he will have to work for it and earn it...

Jacob read the diary from day to night, he put down the book and heard the rattling sound of the doorknob. Jacob quickly ran into the living room and there was the girl, staring at him with her distorted face. Instead of disappearing into the air, she jumped at him while screaming with a pitch that could have shattered windows.

Jacob's vision went dark and was clouded by a heavy fog.

He could see a window and through the window there were two men. One was the large and chubby man Jacob saw in the portrait, the buttons were straining around his waist. The other one was wearing a traditional Chinese robe that was twice the size himself, as if the man was the coat hanger for the robes.

At one point, the thinner man held up his stick-like arms up in front of him. His veins were like snakes slithering under his skin. It seemed that the smaller dishevelled man was becoming frustrated to the point that he could not contain himself and jumped at the portly man in front of him. Out of nowhere guards grabbed the dishevelled man by the arms and just as he was being dragged away Jacob saw a hand smack the window with a force that vibrated the glass and the form of the vision began to change.

Jacob's eyes began to blur and when the black fog cleared he saw the house, its grand stone walls looking like teeth in the pale light of the moon, except whoever he was ran to the back of the house and slowly opened a small wooden door that was presumably a servant entrance. There was a sound of small, bare feet slapping against the hard stone floor as they hurriedly yet quietly ran through the corridor and up the stairs, stopping at a tall wooden door.

The door opened with a quiet creak and the pitter-pattering of feet stepped inside. Under the blanket of a posh bed slept a figure that was actually the portly man from the article and the vision. Beside the bed was a oil lamp. A small hand reached for the handle. The lamp began to shake in their hands, showing the raw emotion they contained. The man's eyes fluttered opened. He noticed them holding the lamp to his face. He spat out the word "You!" but it meant nothing. Overwhelmed by emotion. They threw the burning oil lamp at the portly man, the glass shattering on his face, pelting it with a mixture of oil and fire. Causing untold agony.

As the room began to burn up, the vessel that Jacob was looking through just stood in the center of the room, watching the flames. The fire began to grow fiercer and hotter. Jacob could feel the heat rising, yet it yielded no reaction. The unknown person just stood, letting the fire consume them.

Jacob whipped his head up, beads of sweat on his forehead. It felt like the fire had occurred in his room. The sun shone on his forehead. It was the first time in hours that he had felt the comforting warmth of sunlight against his pale skin. He opened the diary yet again and read the final entry. The handwriting was scrawled, as if the writer was attempting to communicate through hieroglyphics. Jacob could sense raw emotion through the words.

After I locked away my greedy brother, I saw in the window his blasted daughter looking at me maliciously, as if I was the one who was wrong. Your father was the one tried to assault me...

He decided that the diary was the main cause of all his troubles. He thought to himself “No one should endure this, the past should stay in the past and nobody should know about this story of pain and death.” He travelled back to the burnt down house, the last one he was going to visit for a very long time. He intended to place the diary back where it belonged and leave it be.

He approached the same stone that he had found the diary under, but when he lifted it, the ground collapsed beneath him, revealing an unknown cellar below. Jacob fell into the dank cellar where the whole house began to collapse on top of him entombing him in the house itself. As Jacob was repeatedly pelted by rubble, in the distance he could hear someone giggling, the giggling of a young child...

The Revenge of Victor Lai

Chinese International School, Lee, Catrina – 12

There was once a man named Victor Lai. He was a sexual abuse convict and accountant. He had a son named Joey Lai. Joey was his only son and Victor loved him very much. When the summer came, Joey would always drive his father's minivan to the summer house in Shanghai where he would spend the whole summer vacation.

Once when Joey was driving to his summer house, a taxi driver Juan Chen lost control and crashed into Joey's minivan where Joey was killed. When Victor heard about his son's death, he vowed to kill Juan. Victor stalked Juan for over ten years since his son's death and finally found Juan in a night club called Hollywood Shanghai. After Victor located Juan, he pretended to be a chemist and snuck into a chemist store.

"Oy you shopkeeper!" said Victor "I wanna have a bottle of chloroform. C'on I'm 'n a hurry."

Victor took the bottle of chloroform and zoomed off towards Hollywood Shanghai. He recognised Juan at the nightclub and soaked Juan's napkin in chloroform. After 20 minutes, Juan fell unconscious against the floor. Victor picked him up and carried Juan into his minivan. Victor drove to the summer house via Highway 2. He saw a policeman patrolling the border.

"Hey you, man with the moustache, I've gotta check your identity card and your van please." said the policeman.

Victor handed him his identity card then he quickly stuffed Juan's limp body into the trunk of his van and let the policeman check his van. The policeman found nothing illegal and let Victor continued his car. When they arrived at the summer house, Victor dragged Juan into the house and bound his hands and legs with ropes. Victor left the house and spent the night in a hotel and when he returned the next morning, Juan was already awake.

"I reckon that you 're hungry, ay? I will give you a piece of 'lly stale bread and y'll shall finish it." Victor handed him a piece of mouldy stale bread and gave him a jug of water.

Juan ate all of the bread as he was very hungry. Victor had decided that he wouldn't kill Juan but would let Juan suffer in pain and the first thing to do was to starve him.

Meanwhile, Juan's family was frantic because Juan didn't return home after his night at the club and they decided to call the police. The police investigated the night club and questioned different people if they had ever seen Juan.

A man who reckoned he saw Juan said "I was drinking some beer and suddenly a man fell unconscious against the floor. Then a tall black man with a moustache carried him out to a black minivan and drove off."

The police thanked him for his answer and went back to the police station for further investigation.

At the summer house...

Victor was deciding what to do to make Juan suffer when he heard police cars in the distance. Juan also heard the sirens and was very happy, but Juan's happiness turned into horror when Victor grabbed Juan by the neck and made a phone call to his mates telling them to send a boat to Yangshan Deepwater Harbour where they would put Juan

on the boat.

“Get on the boat you retard!” Victor said and he and his mates pushed Juan onto the boat.

They all stayed on the boat for 6 whole days as there wasn't enough food on the boat for more than 6 days. On the 7th day, Juan and Victor returned to the summer house.

“Oy Juan, I am gonna kill you today 'cause I'm fed up with you you filthy retard!” Juan trembled with fear and begged for mercy but Victor was determined to get revenge as Juan killed his son.

Victor chopped Juan's limbs off with a axe, then he burned the cuts with a lighter. Victor thought this still wasn't enough, so he threw Juan's limbs into the fire where they were burnt into ashes. Victor shot Juan with a single bullet in his head and left Juan's body in the summer house murmuring “Sucks to be you!”

Later that week...

Police were assuming that Juan had already been murdered by this “tall black man with a moustache” as the man in the night club had described Victor. Again they searched the country side where Victor's summer house dwelt. They found the little summer house and was surprised to find blood splattered on the path leading to the house. They were almost certain that it was Juan's blood on the little path leading to the summer house. They banged on the door but no one answered as there was no one in the summer house, so they bashed the door down and what they saw was terrifying.

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Juan's body was under the desk, dried blood was splattered not the walls of the house and a bullet was lying on the ground next to him. The room smelled disgusting, a mixture of blood and burnt flesh. Everywhere was cold and hard like the mind of Victor.

The police carried what was left of Juan's body into the police van and drove off towards the police station. On their way back, they came across a black minivan and they saw a tall black man with a moustache smoking a cigarette inside the van. They immediately recognised the man as Victor Lai, the sexual abuse convict. They knew it was Victor who murdered Juan.

Victor saw the police cars coming towards him from the summer house and immediately jumped in the car and sped off into the distance. The police chased Victor's minivan all over Highway 2. Victor found out that he was low on petrol and he was devastated as the police were right behind him, chasing him wherever he went.

Victor had a great idea but it would involve killing himself but he didn't care as he had already killed Juan. So he set the plan in action, he stopped his car abruptly and the police car crashed into the minivan. Victor was thrown against the rear window and the policeman inside the car were tossed around the car as the police car flipped over.

The next morning, a truck came by Highway 2 and found the police car and the minivan lying on the side of the highway and called the ambulance. Victor Lai and two policeman died from the car crash and the chief police closed the case of “The Search of Juan”. And that was the end of Victor, Juan and the two policeman's life.

~THE END~

Jim: An Adventure in Old Shanghai

Chinese International School, O'Sullivan, Christopher – 13

Winter blew past Shanghai with a cold breeze whipping into his face. The crowds of people that made up a great portion of life in Shanghai forced Jim alongside the Bund river, almost pushing him over the decaying fence. Having found one of the rare spots in which one could remain still without being pushed to hard, Jim stopped to look around. Being both a central hub for tourism and trade, tourist boats and freight ships travelled along the narrow, winding river, dodging each other and sounding horns frequently. Behind Jim, cars sat in traffic jams right the way along the side of the river, trying to get past one another at every opportunity, as they attempted to reach their destinations in the fastest manner possible. Jim stepped back into the endless sea of people, only to be shoved further up the riverbank. He let the people carry him along, rather than tiring his legs further. However, he had a particularly speedy man walking behind him, causing him to stumble, and lost his balance. Before he knew what was happening, he was falling. His stomach lurched up, but his body was going down.

Jim was clueless as to what he landed in, but whatever it was, it wasn't water. It most definitely was not water. He felt himself spinning around, lurching sideways and flying upwards, almost going upside down. The entire experience was extremely disorienting. After what felt like hours of endless violent movements, Jim was thrown out onto a riverbank in an entirely different world, but at the same time, one which was seemingly similar. The river remained bustling, but this time with something different. Instead of large, metal tourist boats and giant ships hauling tonnes of goods, old, worn merchant vessels cruised along the river, bringing exotic items into Shanghai, and carrying local goods out. Steamers ferried people from place to place via the river, and the once busy street contained little more than a few horse-drawn carriages. Jim, still slightly disoriented, looked around. The township was strangely familiar. The streets were laid out exactly as they were in the Shanghai that Jim knew, and the river retained its winding path. Jim, who was absolutely confused, walked cautiously up the road that should have had a building that Jim would have lived in should he have been in new Shanghai, a skyscraper overlooking the Bund. Instead, a worn out wooden shack stood in place of that skyscraper, looking as if it could collapse at any moment.

As a horse-drawn carriage rattled passed Jim, he started to realise where he was. He recognised where he was because he lived there, in that very place – a few hundred years in the future. He had seen pictures of this place in a museum, but it felt very different seeing things in colour, as opposed to black and white. Now he knew what life in the 16th century really looked like, not what it was said to look like. The buildings all looked unstable, the roads were covered in dirt and wherever Jim went the stench of horses followed him. The little paint that was put on buildings was peeling off, and nobody seemed bothered to fix it. In fact, countless people passed Jim, and they didn't even bat an eyelid at the smell of the horses, or the buildings in desperate need of repair. They were somewhat similar to the people that would push Jim next to the Bund, or, in some cases, into the Bund, in that they seemed fixated on getting to their destinations, and nothing would distract them, regardless of its importance.

Jim walked onwards down the street, but after a few minutes of walking he is was stopped by a wall. A massive wall. Jim looked up to see the humongous cobblestone structure towering above him. It was by far the largest man-made structure in the entire town, but it was not obvious why it was needed. It seemed to have no purpose other than to keep any potential invaders out. Jim looked behind him. It had just dawned on him that he had no way of returning to his real home, in new Shanghai. He looked around him. The sun was setting on the endless sea of wooden shacks, making Jim really think about how he would get home. He came to old Shanghai in a way that even Jim wasn't entirely sure what had happened, but he vaguely remembered getting pushed into something by lots of people. Perhaps if he walked into another large crowd of people, he would be able to get pushed into something and potentially get sent back to his normal life. But where in this ancient city would he find such a large group of people?

It was sunset. People would definitely be walking around now, probably going home after work. Jim walked along the side of the wall, looking for people that would be doing that. After about fifteen minutes, Jim stumbled across a group of people that looked to be walking towards the wall. When they reached the wall, Jim began following them, trying to stay as close to the centre of the group as possible, hoping to get pushed into something that would enable him to return home. Strangely, the group turned towards the wall, and walked through a large hole in it, which Jim suspected was a gate out of the city. They crossed an old wooden bridge going over a large moat, with no fence stopping them from falling in. Jim was precariously walking along side of the bridge, almost falling into the moat. Jim looked up at the wall behind him, and did not notice the narrowing bridge in front of him, causing him to fall into the moat.

After what felt like hours of falling, Jim hit the water, but what he landed on was not water. Like before, he landed in some sort of strange, slimy substance, and he was thrown upwards, sideways, and spun around in all directions. Jim remembered this from before, and knew what was happening, so was slightly less disoriented and confused than he was the first time he was sent hurtling through time. After a while, Jim was thrown out onto a road where the moat would've been should he have been in old Shanghai.

Jim looked around him, and immediately knew that he was back in new Shanghai. After what felt like months, but what was really nothing more than a day, Jim had arrived home. As happy as he was to be back, a part of him missed old Shanghai. In the few hours that he spent there, he had developed a liking for the old city, and sort of wished he could return.

It was starting to get late, however, so Jim returned back to his real house, not the old wooden shack that it would've been in old Shanghai. As he lay down in his bed, he began to reflect on his day. Jim never thought that he enjoyed history, but seeing what it was really like centuries ago opened his eyes a bit more, and led him to discover plenty of new things that he never would have thought of doing in the past. As much as he wished he could return, Jim was glad to be home, which made him just as happy as he would've been if he had stayed in old Shanghai. He was happy. And with that, he fell asleep.

A Haunting Discovery

Chinese International School, Paulus, Veronica – 11

Xiang Li, a United Kingdom citizen born in Shanghai, looked out onto the horizon from the airplane, thousands of feet into the air and wondered what was down below. Little did he know that he would find out very soon. Towards the end of his flight from London to Shanghai, the plane jolted, sending everybody into a wave of panic. Even before the flight attendants sat down and the oxygen masks lowered, Xiang had an ominous feeling that the plane and everybody in it were in trouble. Suddenly, the emergency doors flung open and Xiang was plummeting through the sky, his life flashing before his terror-filled eyes as he watched the plane twirl and twist down to the ground in a fiery descent.

A constant buzz ran through Xiang's ears, his head both ringing with his pulse and throbbing with pain, and every part of his body aching. Nevertheless, Xiang was alive and in relatively good condition in spite of the fact that he had just fallen out of a plane. Others were not so lucky. After gingerly climbing out of the tree that had saved his life, Xiang walked for a few minutes in the blistering, midday sun and came across a woman lying motionless, limbs stuck out at odd angles, skin flayed and laying in a pool of splattered blood.

Hours later and still in pain, Xiang came across a city that looked oddly familiar, much like the photos his grandmother used to show him of her daughter, Xiang's mother, with his father. In the photos, they were young and looked like they were in love. According to his grandmother, Xiang had not seen his parents since he was five years old. This is because his father was convicted of being a murderer in a gang, notoriously known for killing women and children, eventually sending him to his death. As soon as possible, Xiang's grandmother and mother applied for UK citizenship in an attempt to flee Shanghai. However before the move, Xiang's mother supposedly committed suicide due to the depression caused by her husband's death. Years later, his grandmother (knowing what really happened) told Xiang that his father had been misunderstood and had a good heart, and told Xiang that his mother must have been killed because she would never have left her son on purpose. Xiang believed this with his whole heart.

The closer he got to the city, the more the pain subsided until it was completely gone and Xiang was inside a busy, bustling city. Scarlet lanterns hung from the rooftops, scents of delectable delicacies wafted up into Xiang's nose and suddenly, like an awakening from an ambiguous dream, he knew where he was. Old Shanghai. After Xiang's realization, he walked aimlessly through the crowded streets wondering how he could have been transported back to Old Shanghai. But then his eyes locked onto something that Xiang could not ignore. It was a boy in threadbare clothes who looked exactly like the child in the old photos his grandmother had shown him of his father as a young boy. Suddenly the boy turned and ran down the cobblestone street, grabbing something from a shop along the way and leaving Xiang alone. That night a very confused Xiang slept on the filthy ground of the city, listening to the murmurs of strange voices and sounds of soft footsteps which created an odd yet soothing melody that lulled the exhausted man to sleep.

An intense, searing glow shone down from the sky, waking Xiang up from his deep sleep. Yet something seemed different about the city. Many of the structures that had stood just a day ago looked much older as if they had aged many years. Still waking up from his sleep, Xiang rubbed his eyes and once again saw a man that mirrored his father trying to pickpocket someone. However he, like the buildings, looked much older. Before the man could even think about fleeing, Xiang grabbed his scrawny, stick-like arm and threatened to turn him into the police unless he told Xiang who he was. Reluctantly the man told Xiang his name – Qing Li. It had to be a coincidence, thought Xiang,

plenty of people in China had the same last name as him. Despite this, the more Qing told Xiang about himself, the more Xiang could see the resemblance between his father and the man.

As the two men walked through the cramped streets, a deafening sound emitted from a rambling, ivy-coloured tram that was making its way through the city of Old Shanghai. Pervading the alleys (which sent a swarm of shivers down Xiang's spine for he had always had an irrational fear of them) was the stench of sour milk and vinegar which guided the two men to their destination. As they hurried through the unkempt wreck that was the Bund, Xiang heard wisps of chatter like ransom, murder, kidnap and death coming from the walls of the buildings surrounding him. Arriving at the rotting structure, Xiang saw drunk men inside violently fighting after arguments had broken out. Various debris and human waste littered the floor where a rug would have normally been laid out if the owners of the place had been at all worried about cleanliness or comfort. Like a bolt of lightning hitting him, Xiang realized something. He was in a place full of gangsters. Gangsters that would kill innocent women, men and children for money, respect or even pleasure! But surely his father wasn't one of them. However, in between horrifying, wretched nightmares throughout the night, Xiang wondered if his father was a killer. The bloody nightmares were so perplexing and petrifying that they left Xiang with beads of perspiration pouring down from his hairline and tears streaming down his face like the burning balls of fire found in hell, the very place that all of the men that he had seen earlier that day belonged.

Huge, somber thunder clouds met in the dark, dank sky above the city of Old Shanghai and released a deafening rumbling; lightning attempted to scorch the earth with its vivid, blazing bolts and water gushed down from the heavens above where the gods were sobbing. Miserable and sullen, Qing's mood suited the weather exactly, for he had to go out and search for something after a sleepless night. Qing had gone out numerous times in the past week to 'search for something', returning hours later, looking exhausted, to the small, dingy hotel room they were sharing. Feeling a little bit suspicious, Xiang decided to brave the harrowing weather with its pouring, bucketing rain and follow Qing to wherever he was going. As Xiang would soon discover, it was a decision that would scar him for the rest of his life.

Tirelessly sprinting through a maze of narrow alleyways and streets, while the amount of rain falling slowly decreased, Xiang chased after Qing for what seemed like forever, all the while wondering where they were going. After Qing stopped running, Xiang took in his surroundings. Murky and dingy, the alley smelled and looked the same – absolutely disgusting. Putrid water had eroded the once decent looking buildings that shielded the cramped alley from any sunlight. A vile stench of rotting eggs mingled with the scent of human waste in Xiang's nose. The eerie silence was interrupted by the occasional scuttle of cockroaches along the filth-ridden concrete ground and walls. Covered in a cold sweat, Qing paced back and forth and muttered to himself until a woman and a child arrived, dragged by two huge, vicious looking men. It was Xiang's mother and Xiang as a young boy.

On her knees and begging for forgiveness, Xiang's mother was terrified. But through her uncontrollable sobbing, she managed to scream "run!" to her five year old; immediately a single tear was shed from his huge, dark brown, almond-shaped eyes as he fled from his mother. Grabbing the sword that hung from his belt, Qing slowly cut every toe and every finger off of Xiang's mother's hands and feet, all the while shouting "did you really think you could take my son away from me?!" In an instant, Xiang understood everything about his wretched life. The last scream of Xiang's mother echoed throughout the alley, but it was louder and longer inside of Xiang's head. It would haunt him forever.

Xiang's eyes fluttered open. He was in a hospital and his grandmother was at the side of his bed. Xiang sputtered the whole story to his grandmother, who nodded and tears streamed down both of their faces as they embraced each other in a long, tight hug. Years later when Xiang had a family of his own, he'd often have flashbacks about his awful

discovery that was too horrific for words. Even as he fell asleep in the peaceful countryside halfway around the world, his mother's screams would ring in his ears, ripping apart what was left of his soul.

Below the Trapdoor

Chinese International School, Wong, Nikki – 11

“‘I’ll go outside to play,” Huiling said, picking up the metal pail. She held the bucket with two hands and dashed to the door.

“Stay within Shanghai’s defensive walls!” Biyu, her mother, reminded her, but Huiling was already out the door. “Will that stubborn girl ever stop and *listen* to me?” she muttered to herself.

Huiling walked across the lawn and past the well. She strolled past the pond and the playground. Only when the defensive wall was just inches away, she stopped. Huiling never did this alone, when her father was there, they would go out the gates to play with the moat water. But now that he was busy with his new job, she craved that time so much. For safety her mother forbade her to go out the walls, but it seemed pretty safe.

Huiling took a deep breath and with all her might she pushed the heavy wooden gate open. The view was just as pleasant as it was before, emerald green mountains, calm willow trees and blue skies with white clouds. She crossed the bridge and turned to her left. The moat was still full of waves turning and churning every so often.

“From here it looks normal, but...” Huiling whispered to herself excitedly, “When you take a closer look...” she scooped the moat water into the pail, “It’s full of fish!”

She beamed at the squirming little lines of fish swimming around in the green-blue water in the pail.

Then suddenly the lights went out.

Huiling woke to a soft murmur of unrecognisable words. She rubbed the back of her sore head, then realised she wasn’t by the moat anymore, but was in....somewhere else. The ground rocked slightly, shifting her to the side. There was a slight humidity and saltiness in the air, it was all so unfamiliar.

Suddenly, a door opened up revealing two raggedy men holding a knife each. They grinned at her evilly and whispered something to each other. Huiling froze, she could feel every hair on her body stand up in fear.

“Don’t kill me, please!” Huiling begged in tears, she thought about how worried her mother was.

“You.... *there!*” shouted the tallest raggedy man, pointing to somewhere on the other side.

When Huiling didn’t move an inch, the shorter man started sharpening his knife with a rock, and showed a blood–thirsty look on his face. She immediately got intimidated and scrambled to the wall on the other side. The men walked towards her, clutching their knives in their hands.

Huiling leaned back against the wall and realised it was a little unstable. She pushed against it harder and harder as the men got closer and closer, hoping behind it was open land so she could escape. The wall cracked a bit, but then the men heaved her up and away from the wall.

The men pulled open a trapdoor on the floor and rolled her into the dark hole.

She landed with a thump on the hard wooden floor, and realised she was surrounded by dozens of women squatting on the ground groaning with pain. They stared at Huiling curiously.

“New prisoner, eh? I’m Chen by the way,” Chen said glancing down at her with pitying eyes, “We’re all like ya, lost, hungry, cold, not a good place here, not a good place.”

“How do we get out of here?” cried Huiling, wishing she’d never went out the border walls in the first place.

“We’d all be gone if we knew,” sighed Chen as the others nodded in agreement.

Chen was clearly upset, Huiling didn’t want to bother her with more questions so she kept her mouth closed.

“Maybe the new prisoner can try it again!” suggested another woman, she pushed Huiling under the trapdoor.

“Yeah! You’ve got more energy than all of us, jump’n crack it open!” yelled Chen facing Huiling.

Huiling swung her arms up, bent her knees and jumped. She busted the trapdoor open, but then the trapdoor closed as one of the guarding raggedy men closed it.

“That always happens,” a few of them groaned.

“Why don’t we try at night?” suggested Huiling, “Surely they’re off duty.”

“Last night, one of us managed to get out,” recounted one woman, “But we heard a scream and it was silent again.”

“And she never came back,” sniffed Chen.

They all sat down thinking about how to get out (or in Chen’s case, weeping), and before Huiling knew it, she was fast asleep on the ground.

Huiling awoke to the sudden faint light coming from in between the walls. Then an idea struck her.

“Wake up everyone,” yelled Huiling, “WAKE UP!”

There were a few groans coming from every corner of the room.

“When I was up there,” Huiling said pointing upwards, “There was an unstable wall that cracked a bit.”

“So what’re ya tryin’ to say?” asked Chen.

“I’m saying that we break the wall,” said Huiling pointing to the wall in front of her.

A few women just grunted and rolled their eyes, then simply went back to sleep. However the others were considering the idea and stayed standing.

“So we just run into that wall?” asked Chen.

“Yes,” replied Huiling, “Everyone, we all run into that wall when I say ‘go’.”

The women standing up nodded and stared straight at the wall ready for the command.

“Three, two, one, GO!” shouted Huiling and she started running.

The others also started running at their full speed facing straight to the wall. They crashed into the wall, but it didn’t have the slightest crack in it. They looked at Huiling in confusion, wondering why the wall didn’t break.

“Okay, let’s try the other wall,” said Huiling feeling embarrassed pointed to the other side, “Three, two, one, GO!”

The women ran into the wall as fast as they could. They felt themselves crash into the wall and fall on their faces onto a rough, sandy surface. It took a few seconds for Huiling to realise that they were lying on a beach and that there were splinters of wood scattered everywhere. She turned around and saw an enormous boat with a large hole on the side.

“Can’t believe we’re outta there!” screamed Chen with her eyes bursting with excitement.

“Yes,” agreed one of the women, “But where are we?”

Huiling looked around and thought that the beach was quite familiar, in fact she remembered playing in it before. She squinted her eyes and saw emerald green mountains and calm willow trees in the distance. She glanced up and saw a blue sky with white clouds.

“*That can’t be,*” muttered Huiling, “*Can it?*”

Chen heard Huiling talking to herself and asked, “What, are ya alright?”

“This is Shanghai,” breathed Huiling, “Just outside the border walls.”

One of the woman’s eyebrows went up and the corners of her mouth looked as if it could touch her eyes. Her eyes glittered and sparkled with surprise.

“*The* city of Shanghai?” she gaped, “I’m so close to home!”

Many of them nodded, saying “so am I” or “me too”. Some ran across the beach out of sight, others ripped large pieces of wood from the ship and either used it as a raft out at sea or started building...things.

“Chen,” said Huiling trying to grab Chen’s attention.

“Yeah?” replied Chen.

“What are they building?” asked Huiling.

“Huh, what? Oh *them*,” said Chen, “I guess they’re buildin’ their homes – like I should be doing.”

“But, why?” inquired Huiling curiously.

“Some of us lost our homes along with our family when those terrible people attacked,” Chen frowned trying to hide her tears.

“I’m so sorry Chen,” said Huiling.

Chen shrugged and started walking towards the boat to get the wood scraps. Huiling sighed, hoping that her own home was still there. Then she suddenly thought of her family and realised she should find her way home.

“Well, I’ll be finding my way back home now,” shouted Huiling waving at Chen, “Farewell Chen.”

Huiling walked towards what looked like the defensive walls in the distance, and heard a quiet “G’bye!” from far behind. She turned around and spotted a small figure waving at her, she waved back.

The fog slowly parted and Huiling could see the defensive walls clearly. Huiling pushed open the heavy wooden door with both hands. She sprinted towards her home, sighing with relief. Huiling opened the door and saw her mother on the floor, sobbing.

“*Huiling!*” cried Biyu, “*Never* do that again! I found your pail outside the defensive walls, I *told* to stay within the defensive walls!”

“Sorry,” Huiling said, “I’ll never do that again.”

As Biyu sighed in relief and went to boil tea, Huiling lay down on her bed. She reckoned that she never felt so tired in her entire life. Soon enough, she closed her eyes and fell fast asleep.

Raid on Shanghai

Chinese International School, Xia, Emily – 12

The Pirate Lord slammed his dagger down onto the table, the wood cracking under the pressure.

“Chusuke,” The word felt like a death sentence. Chusuke knew what was about to follow. Chusuke had seen many pirates subjected to the task in the other cities they had plundered, but he had never dreamed that it would fall upon him.

A suicide mission.

Alas, he had tested his limits for too long. The taut bowstring that was The Pirate Lord’s hate for him had been released. The arrow was directly headed his way.

“Chusuke,” The Pirate Lord intoned, “you have to break into the city of Shanghai to open the gate for us. Fail, and you’ll never see your sick mother again. You have three days, now go!”

Chusuke gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. The guards of Shanghai fiercely protected their hometown from wokou pirates. Then, his mind bucked like a proud, wild stallion refusing to be broken in. No, he would not give up, he’d survive.

“Understood,” he said, “I’ll leave at midnight.”

“Why, you’re shaking.” The Pirate Lord sneered, “After all, you’re the spitting image of your Chinese father. Your Japanese mother should have chosen better.”

Chusuke’s eye began to twitch, and his hands trembled, but his face remained blank and empty.

Good pirates never show emotion.

“Understood,” he muttered again, “I’ll leave at midnight.”

Chusuke slipped the small skiff onto the water. He slung the bow over his shoulder, and patted his arrows. He drifted across the waves, gliding toward dark, walled city.

Gazing up at the sturdy stone wall, Chusuke unslung his bow, and drew a heavy broad tipped arrow. He took a deep breath and nocked it. He could stop now, Chusuke knew, but the thought of his bed ridden mother back in Japan dispelled the notion. If he failed, the wokou would punish humbly murdering his defenceless mother.

Pause.

Draw.

Loose.

The arrow arced through the darkness, the cruel iron tip reflecting the moonlight. It was the only pinprick of light

admist a sea of shadows.

Chusuke despised the Pirate Lord, and hated pillaging the villages he had come across. But he had never cared for anything but his mother. His kind, gentle mother who had consistently risked the wrath of soldiers to keep him from harm.

Thwack.

The arrow had landed in the gnarled old tree, securing the rope. Chusuke grunted, and started to climb. The rough stone dug into his hands as he pulled himself up. Then, he gasped as he poked his head up over the city view.

Even in the dark, Chusuke could see a garden. Slender willows swayed in the wind, and the rippling ponds were filled with golden fish. Their scales glimmered in the bright moonlight, like twinkling stars upon a dark night.

“Beautiful,” Chusuke sighed, and with that, the world released a huge, shuddering breath in return. The arrowhead loosened, and the rope started to fray. He cursed under his breath, hurling himself over the parapet.

Crack!

His shoulder rammed into the edge of the wall, pieces of rocks shattering everywhere. Before Chusuke could even recover, he slammed into the ground below, scattering dust in all directions.

“Ugh. I knew I shouldn’t have admired the view hanging from a flimsy piece of thread,” he groaned, tasting iron in his mouth.

But it was too late to regret. His shoulder was doused in ice, with sharp tingles running through his entire arm. Chusuke shuddered, lava coursing through his veins.

“I’m doomed,” he thought, “there’s no way I can complete this mission!”

A cloaked figure melted out of the darkness, and hobbled toward him. Chusuke stiffened.

“W—who are you?” he stammered.

A worse thought occurred to him, “Are you Shinigami? Am I dead?”

“Sleep,” the figure whispered, and Chusuke faded into the abyss.

Darkness.

A sliver of light pierced Chusuke’s eyelids. Something was wrapped tightly around his midriff.

Struggling against his bonds, Chusuke opened his eyes to find his legs tangled in the folds of a blanket. He bolted up in his bed, slightly embarrassed, and was painfully reminded of his wrenched shoulder.

“Ah, you have awoken.”

Chusuke spun around, flailing his arms as he face planted onto the bed. So much for a crazy, blood thirsting pirate. He raised his head and scrutinised the old lady standing beside his bed.

“What happened?” he asked. His mouth was dry, and his head felt heavy with exhaustion.

The old woman smiled gently. Chusuke felt slightly foolish that he had mistaken the kindly old lady for the God of Death.

“I am Kun, youngling. You’ve been severely injured with a dislocated shoulder.”

Chusuke managed a grin, “Thank you for saving my life!”

He didn’t add that if she hadn’t discovered him, the guards would have thrown him in the dungeons.

Kun looked at him severely, “Who are you?”

Chusuke smiled, aware that only his Chinese heritage had kept Kun’s suspicions at bay. “Oh, I am just a visitor from a nearby city. May I go out?”

She chuckled, and shook her head. “You’re not well enough. You need to rest.” The words stung, and failure settled over him like a horrible stench. He grimaced. “Now, don’t look so glum.” Kun chided him, relenting, “I will take you out tomorrow. You’ll love it!” Chusuke nodded like a marionette. He wasn’t sure that he wanted to love the city that he would destroy. “It’ll be fine,” he thought to himself, “after all, I’ll only be familiarising myself with the place.”

The outside world was completely different. Japan had straw cottages and fertile grounds. Shanghai was colorful, with walls rising up and majestic temples in the background. People chattered and laughed, and the marketplaces were cheery. Chusuke’s mouth watered as he smelled cooking rice.

“Is that a ravine over there?” Chusuke asked incredulously. He had never seen a gorge in the middle of a city before. Kun laughed again, “Oh no. That’s the Senshui hall. It’s called the Grand Rockery, created with yellow stone.”

Chusuke could only gape at the dark, mysterious caves. Moss grew between the cracks of rocks, and beautiful statues were delicately carved with exquisite detail.

“I’m going for the mountain peak!” he screamed, arms straining. Kun hurriedly ran to his rescue as his shoulder failed him yet again.

After that, they went to more peaceful sections. Each section was separated by intimidating dragon walls, with gray ridges depicting a terrifying dragon head.

Chusuke avoided the eyes of the menacing dragons. He felt guilty that the shimmering coast view was dwarfed by the stone walls encircling the town, constricting the free bird inside an invisible cage.

“The only reason they built the wall was because of the Wokou. It’s all our fault.”

He closed his eyes, and wished that he was not a pirate. He glanced at the sky, remembering the threats the Pirate Lord had laid. His mother’s time was ticking, and his hourglass was running out fast.

“Come, child, you need to visit the City God Temple!” Kun beamed, startling him out of his reverie.

A massive temple stood in the center. More fearsome dragons were perched upon the curving rooftops. Chusuke

shivered as the dragons' silver eyes gleamed in the sunlight.

"You will fail," they seemed to say, "Shanghai will never fall to you."

"Hello, Kun," a priest greeted them, "have you come to pray?"

Kun nodded gravely, and beckoned Chusuke to three figurines.

"These are the city gods," she murmured, "kneel and let us pray for good fortune and peace."

Chusuke sank down and immediately started praying for guidance on his soul. He was starting to grow warmer to the strange town. He felt small amongst all the residents who genuinely believed that love and goodness existed.

Back in the house, Kun dressed his wounds carefully and helped him to bed. She reminded him of his mother, silent, but caring.

Despite Kun's attempts to soothe him, he still remembered his mother's frail body, and the black pirate ships waiting for him to pull open the gates.

The sun was rising, and the city skylines were awash with hues of fire. The sight rekindled Chusuke's flame of determination, yet he felt dampened and sad. He gazed at the old woman dreaming in her rickety chair, reminiscing about all he had seen from Shanghai.

"All those innocents do not have to perish. I still hold the decision to save my mother, or to save countless lives." Chusuke thought. He padded out, and saw the dark clouds gathering over the horizon. The wind was howling like his swirling thoughts inside. Kun's kindness might not be repaid in kind.

Dawn was breaking, and the pirates were coming, and the guards were asleep. This was his chance to open the gates, yet strangely, Chusuke wanted to protect Shanghai from being corrupted by the pirates. He wanted to scream out his confusion at the world, but he continued to wait, calm and serene.

Good pirates never show emotion.

Walls

Diocesan Boys' School, Cheng, Yee King Ethan – 14

1267: A New Change

I rubbed my hands together, my breath a cloud of white mist hovering in front of my face. The chill was starting to sink in, melting into my skin, my flesh, my bones.

I glanced around, letting my eyes absorb the pretty white scenery. There was no one, of course: it's the middle of winter.

But this was the last time I could come out of my village freely.

A group of government officials came down last week, informing us that they would be planting a new town government here, while defensive walls would be built around us. "For our own protection", they said. Us villagers protested, of course: we're perfectly satisfied with our life now.

"Sometimes, sacrifices have to be made in order for advancement," the sweet-mouthed officials had told us.

The water was icy cold, with piles of snow stretching out into the horizon. I could barely see the dim lights that is the fishing village where I live in. It wasn't big and fancy like the ones near the capital (which I've never been to, though occasional visitors speak of large, lavish populations full of precious stones and beautiful houses), but small and meagrely populated, with a town centre, a school and a marketplace, while the neighbourhood extended for only five to six streets. It was quiet and peaceful: exactly the place where I would want to live in for the rest of my life.

"Lee." A voice calling my name. I turned around, catching sight of my old neighbour, Lin-Xu, paddling slowly towards me, his small fishing boat bumping into mine. I smiled.

"Admiring the scenery, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Considering this is our last chance allowed out here, I guess we better make use of it."

Lin-Xu leaned backwards in his boat, his feet resting on the edge. "I honestly can't understand why they would wrap our village up in this... stone wall. Why us? There are plenty of better towns out there."

"Don't forget we're one of the best fishing ports in China," I reminded him. Following suit, I leaned backwards, tucking my hands behind my head, staring up into the blue and grey dome.

"Sometimes, sacrifices have to be made in order for advancement," I heard myself say.

A group of birds flew across the sky, while snow began to fall.

~***~

1856: A New Era

Oh, how I hate those foreigners!

Those stuck-up British brats, who think that just because their government defeated ours in that Opium War, they were allowed to do anything!

Is planting drugs in our country not bad enough?

I pushed my way through the crowd in the market of the British Concession, which was mainly filled with merchants surrounded by the desolate who are in need of opiate, ignoring the whimpering of the addicted and the shouts of the sellers: “Only silver is accepted!” “2 pieces of silver for a box of opium! Extra 3 pieces for taking a whiff now!” “Hey you, over there, keep your filthy hands off my stock!”

Finally escaping the horde of people, I left the marketplace and the smell of burning opium behind, and set off in the direction of the Old City. As I passed by the British and French buildings, I noticed a couple of foreigners staring at me with curiosity. I sighed; they probably haven’t gotten over the fact that we Chinese are now allowed into the Concessions. The sun was setting, casting a warm yellow glow; the sky could go dark in a matter of minutes, for it was the winter solstice.

Reaching the gates of the walls, I bowed to the guard, who opened the heavy doors for me.

The world within the walls was completely different from the one outside: the Old City is comparatively more disorganised and dilapidated than the newly-built Concessions. Broken down houses dotted the landscape of the City, while the streets were worn out from centuries of walking; with the recent inflow of refugees from northern China, more and more temporary accommodation littered the alleyways. This meant more people to feed.

Yet there is something we have that the outer world doesn’t: family.

Families have lived within these walls for centuries; children have grown up, met their other halves, built their own family, and lived out their lives in here.

“Lee!” My wife’s voice shook me out of my reverie. She was running out of our small family house, carrying our baby in her arms. I hugged her tightly.

My gaze fell upon the crowd at the City notice wall.

“What’s that?” I broke away from our embrace.

That’s when I noticed the tear streaks in my wife’s face. “Don’t go,” she pleaded me. “Please, for the sake of our family, don’t go.”

I stumbled backwards, my heart pounding. My wife began to cry earnestly.

I broke into a sprint, my head spinning. My house disappeared behind me.

I had an inkling of what this might be. God, they’ve been talking about it all year... I should have at least prepared for it... Though what is happening now might not be what I fear...

I reached the wall, fighting among the crowd to read the words pinned onto the stone. In a split second, my world collapsed.

It was exactly as I feared.

My eyes flew over the words “war”, “England” and “conscription”, my heart growing heavier by the second. “Sometimes, sacrifices have to be made in order for advancement,” the proclamation read.

The Second Opium War has started.

~***~

2006: A New Legacy

I lightly brushed my hand across the cold stone walls of the Old City of Shanghai, the dust falling apart at my fingertips, as if the wall was crying along with me over its loss.

Slowly, I traced the outline of the wall with my feet, the soil swirling in the air. The wall was shorter than I had expected: my grandfather, whose family origins date back to Shanghai, had told me about a large, circular stone wall that surrounded the Old City. “Someday,” he had said, “long after I’m dead, I want you visit our hometown for me. Treat this as my last request.”

Yet the walls, those ancient, historical walls, have already been demolished, leaving only two sections left, the only testimony to the centuries-long history of Shanghai.

In the wake of its destruction, the walls have left behind its circular shape in the form of streets: large bustling streets full of shops and tourists like me, admiring the fusion of old and new architecture living next to each other: behind the old temples and the old buildings from the Ming and Qing dynasties were modern, ugly buildings from the twentieth century: high rise apartment blocks and hotels, buildings which look no different than the ones of the same franchise around the world. Yet these two completely different styles have completely integrated into each other: new and old coexisting as one.

I followed the big traffic roads downtown, into the more modern area of the city. Here, skyscrapers mainly dominate the landscape, though I could see a sign that wrote *Yuyuan Garden*, with most tourists walking its direction. Curious, I stumbled along with them.

The traffic slowed down behind me; with a start, I realised that I had entered a pedestrian-only area. The place was now teeming with tourists, all of them walking towards the direction of the Garden.

“Lee!” I heard my name amidst the chatter. Turning around, I found myself face to face with my former classmate. After a warm greeting and catching-up, he asked me whether I was going to visit the Garden, then revealed to me that he was a part of the restoration group there, and even offered to give me a private tour of the area, which I happily accepted.

He took me around the complex, explaining every rock and tree, every pavilion and ornament in full detail. The scenery was spectacular: it was as if every element had its own purpose of being there; without it, the landscape would not have been complete. The level of craftsmanship in the buildings astounded me, yet I couldn’t help but marvel at how the entire Garden gives you the impression that you’re in an area away from civilisation, even though it’s in the middle of the City.

Finally, he showed me the Currow ancient stone, one of the main centrepieces of the Garden. We spent a few glorious minutes just staring at the stone, admiring its pored surface, thrown into relief by the evening sun.

“It’s such a pity that most of the Old City has been demolished,” my friend said suddenly. “This Garden is one of the few items still remaining from the past.”

I stared out into the horizon, taking in the scenery. “Sometimes, sacrifices have to be made in order for advancement,” I said. “Some point in life, we’re all going to move on, aren’t we?”

Wall

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Sonia – 12

'General Seido, Unit 4 Patrol 1, stationed at the Eastern Water Gate has been caught just as the firing signal was issued. Statistics have recorded 160 dead from using Strategy 107a, currently leaving us with 1,500 men,' Captain Akihiro reported gravely.

'What?! What happened this time? Caught? What do you mean caught?! Well, tell them to be careful! Just stop coming back reporting bad news, just stop.' My dad sighed in frustration and helplessness. He paced around the room with anger, then squealed in delight as a sudden idea emerged.

'Kazuki Seido! Come at once!' My father roared. I quickly scurried to him, not even daring to look at him.

'Yes, Father,' I answered, staring down at his exceptionally large feet.

'Go, go to the Chinese City, spy for me, be back when you can. Find the weakest link into the Shanghai City Wall. Do not come back empty handed. You should have mastered your Chinese by now,' he commanded.

'Yes, Father,' I replied, and promptly scurried away.

When I went back the corner of the crowded bedroom I shared with five others, I moaned and cried on my bed. I was sure my father was the worst dad there could ever be. Isn't asking an eleven-year-old to spy on a dangerous city, just like sentencing me to death? But there was nothing I could do, so I packed my bag, preparing for a long and harsh journey, grabbed my binoculars and was ready to go.

Off I went. It seemed as if days had passed, but I was still in the middle of nowhere. Just as I was about to wear out, starving and out of breath, a sudden glimpse of a town caught my eye. As I got near, I saw a huge wall circling the city inside of it. That must be the Chinese City of Shanghai! Relief brought a slow smile to my lips, and it worked its way across my face and into my eyes.

When I finally reached the gate, my palms were sweaty, I was beaten up by the long journey, yet I knew my guard should be up as I crossed the gate, hoping that there would be no questioning, and luckily, there wasn't. I was both so relieved and tired that while walking through the gate I tripped over some rough rocks, lost my balance, and tripped. I felt a sudden shake like an earthquake, then, blankness.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a comfortably warm bed, I tried to sit up, but my head started throbbing so bad that all I could do was lie back down. When a middle-aged man, presumably the owner of the house, saw that I was awake, he immediately called for a girl named 'Mei' to come assist me.

'Thanks, but where am I?' I asked Mei as she helped me up. She frowned and shook her head. I asked again, but Mei just replied in very complicated Chinese, I couldn't catch her words, they were swirling around me and I had no time to process them.

'I was walking home from a tailor delivery when I heard a piercing shriek, I immediately looked to see you lying near the Old Western Gate Laoximen on some sharp rocks, moaning in great pain. I took you to my father's tailor shop where I lived. You were unconscious for a day or two, and I was extremely worried about you. For some time, I thought you had gotten into a coma, thank goodness you're alright!' Mei explained briefly and in simple Chinese. I felt a surge of warmth work its way through my body – that was the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.

As we chatted and got to know each other more, Mei came across the question I had long dreaded. 'Kazuki, don't mind me asking, but why are you in the City alone? Where are your parents?' Mei wondered.

I paused for a moment, and I felt my heartbeat rising. 'Well, my dad does business around the world and I tag along to every city he goes,' I lied. 'He just tells me to hang around and meet him back on the ship usually after about two weeks.' Mei nodded, as if she understood, and deep down, I felt truly ashamed of myself, lying to a friend I had just met.

Mei was very kind to me. She tendered to my every need as I recovered and helped me improve my Chinese. We had fun sharing secrets and acting like long-lost friends. An afternoon could pass by in a flash when we just sat there in the tailor shop, watching passers-by, taking turns imitating their walking pace, position and style, giggling at each other's imitation. We became great friends, the closest companion I had ever had, really.

One night, I suddenly remembered the real purpose of me being in Shanghai – to spy for my father. How could I have possibly forgotten about that? I felt guilty, but come to think of it, I had been gone for about weeks, and if he really worried about me, he would have sent one of his minions to come get me, so I doubted my father had been concerned about my safety, seeing the fact that all he actually cared about was his fame and reputation. As these thoughts went through me, my guilt lessened, and I gradually fell asleep.

When I was well enough to walk again, Mei asked, 'Do you want me to guide you on a tour around the city to see what it is like inside the Wall? It's pretty amazing.' I delightfully agreed as this was the only part of my journey that was related to my task, and taking in some fresh air would be great too.

As we went for a stroll, Mei took me to a nearby graveyard. 'Kazuki, my cousin Xiu and her family lost all their possessions and were killed when the Japanese pirates raided their home few years earlier.' As Mei was retelling this dark part of their family history, tears filled her eyes. I tried my best to comfort her but in actual fact, I felt horrible that I sort of hurt Mei and I was too ashamed to tell her my genuine role.

We proceeded and went to a small traditional Shanghai tea house. I was speechless when Mei opened the door to the restaurant. It was old Shanghai at its best with mesmerising chandeliers and classy aprons. We had a nice cup of tea to soothe both of our feelings. When the waitress served our tea, she rolled up her sleeves, revealing a conspicuously rough scar on her right arm. Out of curiosity, I blurted out, 'What happened?' pointing to the waitress's scar. She sighed and explained 'Few years ago, I was caught by a Japanese pirate, and by that time the City was in ruins and they had started killing everyone they saw. I was frightened and I knew death was near. I was still a child back then, and I shrieked so loud that it annoyed them, so they just cut my arm deep, told me to shut up and let me go.'

I bit my lips, and nodded gravely, and my stomach turned upside down.

It was twilight, and it was about time I left. Mei asked like an anxious mother, worried about her child, 'Are you sure you know the way back? Be careful, it's dark out there!' I assured her that there would be no problem.

We hugged, and as we drifted apart, she reminded me of the Japanese pirates down west and banned me from going there. I grimaced and nodded, hating myself for not having the courage to confess, yet grateful that she truly cared for me, unlike my horrible father.

No matter how hard I tried to keep all this emotional struggle inside me, Mei smelled something fishy. She saw my uneasy face, and asked unsteadily, 'Are you ... alright?' I felt horribly ashamed but managed to force out a strained yes.

Tears started to stream down my face uncontrollably, I just didn't know what to do. Telling Mei the truth would leave her heartbroken, but would keeping it from her make it any better? I doubted that. She was the only person who really cared for me, and she deserved better, did she not? How could I betray the only friend that I ever had? How could I? I heaved a sigh, wishing all this drama would just disappear. I took a deep breath, opened my mouth but not a single word came out. Mei was puzzled, but understanding, seeing that it wasn't something I was eager to explain, she didn't push it any further.

I wrapped my arms around Mei, looked at her for the last time, and hastened my pace, away from her, away from Shanghai, away from the Chinese City.

The Red Lanterns

Diocesan Girls' School, Chiu, Anna – 13

“L^{et's} go.”

He took his father's hands and dragged him to the fields, filled with lanterns hanging on the branches, leaves of bright red, draping all over. He ran all over the trees, hands flying, grabbing the pieces of paper hanging from the lanterns. His eyes scanned the pieces of paper, his veins were pumping with adrenaline. The sheets of paper, secrets of the universe, mysteries waiting to be discovered. His father grabbed him by the shoulders and swung him to the side. They landed on the grass with blades of verdant sticking to their clothing as they both lost themselves forever in their own laughter.

His father cleared his throat.

"You know, I will be leaving home for a while."

Distracted by the red lights, and lost in his thoughts, he could not comprehend what his father had just said. The thoughts of him leaving seemed distant like a million miles away, the prospect unimaginable.

"Hmm... okay."

His father put his hands on his shoulders and looked on with shining eyes as if staring into his future. In the dark field, his obsidian eyes were the only thing that could be seen. In the silent night, their shadows were cast onto the banks of the river nearby, this was their imprint, washed away easily with time, but it would be forever imprinted in his mind.

"Be brave and protect your mother for me."

"I will."

He smiled, nodding. He had always wanted to be someone like his father, to be able to protect someone he cared about. Their pinkies entwined, the words exchanged were buried by the seas of infinite laughter.

They spent the whole night in the fields of youth, forgetting everything.

A slight drop of rain came from a cloudless sky, falling, falling, falling and landed on his back.

★

"Come on, don't let go of my hand, you are going to get lost."

He gripped her hands tighter, as they walked through the busy streets of Shanghai with the smell of hot steamed bun lingering near, the lanterns that hung on the rooftops dimmed.

He clutched the corners of her shirt, afraid to let go. The loneliness suddenly became overwhelming, he remembered the last summer he had spent with his father six months ago guessing the riddles behind the back of the crimson patterns and the red circles that decorated the buildings. Suddenly his eyes started brimming with tears, it was suffocating.

"Where is Daddy?"

"He is fighting for the country, remember?" She reminded in a soft tone. "He is at war."

"Is he a hero?"

His innocent question made her pause, her eyes darkened, she stopped in her tracks. The grey storm that had been brewing in her eyes stopped too, calming as she said with utmost honesty, with an almost sharp tone.

"I'd rather he be a coward and come back than play a superhero."

He didn't understand, then, the separation. He simply grasped her hands, hoping to at least ease some of her worries.

The lanterns on the buildings dimmed.

★

"You know the Japanese are coming closer to Shanghai, they just defeated the first squad. The soldiers of our homeland have been defeated." The rumours flew all over Shanghai, cautious whispers and cowering gazes filled the streets. The lively, festive decorations were taken down, different shops closed, in fear of what was about to come.

"The Japanese have conquered the outer walls, they are coming," the old woman whispered, as if scared someone would overhear her.

Then as if on cue, the screams of foreign words, came to his ears. The gun shots pierced the dead air. People ran, the streets were complete chaos, with flailing arms and shoving bodies.

His mother pulled him away from the crowd, away from the markets and led him into their home.

He remembered her words, "Hide in the cellar. Don't come out okay?"

He had cried, tears rolling down his face, yearning for her to come back. She pulled him into her arms, humming a melody under her breath, lulling him into sweet slumber.

"Don't worry. If you count to one hundred, I will come back."

"One, two, three..." He counted putting the corresponding fingers up slowly.

"Goodbye, my boy," She touched him on the forehead gently and tucked his stray hair behind his ears. The pattering sound of her footsteps echoed in his head, her long shadow, cast on the floor. She turned and stopped in her tracks, smiling as if nothing could ever be wrong.

He smiled back, waving his hands frantically, hoping that she would come back. Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. The screams upstairs were getting louder as he placed his hands over his ears, trying to block out the piercing sounds. He crouched down and curled up into a ball. Fifty-three, fifty-four, fifty-five. The counting made him lose track of time and place, it was soothing, a gentle lullaby. Seventy, seventy-one. The counting was a way to forget— sometimes, he had to remind himself to breathe. Ninety-nine, one hundred, why? Why? Why isn't she back yet? Why? A wave of panic washed within him.

It was at that moment that he knew, he knew the melancholy of separation, the feeling his mother had felt. It felt like the feeling had always been inside of him, waiting to be discovered.

The door creaked as he slowly pried it open, peering out cautiously. The silence filled his ears was haunting, a broken record repeating the same tune, over and over again. He walked out to the streets, gripping a nearby lamppost, it was wet. And when he pulled the hands back, he noticed they were stained with blood. He stared at his crimson hands, shaking, tears hitting the ground in droplets. The bodies lay there dead, silent, eyes rolled to the back of their heads, they were dolls broken by the cruel hands of humanity. Their blood splashed all over, the Chinese flag torn and tinted with hints of blood. The new flag waved unwaveringly amongst the pile of bodies— a white cloth with a round stain

of blood in the middle. The once busy streets of Shanghai – the noisy chattering, the faint scent of steamed buns that used to warm up the cold gist of winter wind, the traditional bundles of silk draping all over – shattered.

He stopped, finding his mother in the lying masses.

"Mommy."

She had trails of red all dripping from her mouth, her skin was pale in the wavering light of the lamppost. The purple bruises on her arms were prominent even in the darkest of all nights. Dried blood covered the deep cut on her arms, she smiled amidst it all.

"Live on, bravely." Her soft voice left him in a trance.

These were the last words she had ever uttered, before shutting her eyes for an eternity.

His eyes, the narrowed orbs, once filled with a fire of hope, now ignited with a lust for revenge. He clenched his fists, furrowed his eyebrows as he stared at the cracked pavement, the trail of broken dreams left behind him. He smiled. The rain hit his back relentlessly, the cold feeling spreading all over his body. He threw his head back and laughed.

Perhaps it was grief or the unwillingness to comprehend the situation but at that moment when it felt like he had nothing left and he was only a shell of himself. The only thing he could have was laughter and he laughed and laughed until he cried.

A slight drop of rain came from a cloudless sky, falling, falling, falling and landed on his back. The tears blended with the raindrops as he vowed that he would never let anyone ever feel this way; to ever stand in the world and never see the beauty, to ever feel its emptiness, in the familiar streets of old Shanghai. At home.

The red lanterns on the buildings dimmed.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Diocesan Girls' School, Kwok, Tina – 14

The walls stood tall, looking over the disheveled city. A short girl, with long jet black hair, stood in the hustling and bustling market. Her dark brown almond eyes squinted as the sun shone brightly onto her face and her thin lips turned into a frown. He was supposed to be here ten minutes ago. She scanned the crowds, and impatiently tapped her foot. After a few minutes, a boy, in his early twenties, rushed towards her. The girl abruptly straightened up and stood taller.

“Here's the information you need. Don't fail me,” and with that, the boy rushed away, disappearing into the crowd, until he was a dot in the distance. She tilted her head upwards and beamed excitedly before quickly hurrying home as well.

When she got home, she gently placed the envelope on the cluttered wood table, and made herself a cup of tea. Sighing, she moved her picture of her parents from the messy tabletop to a nearby shelf. Her heart ached as she looked at her parents. They were smiling at each other when the picture was taken, oblivious to what was going to happen to them. Tears threatened to spill out. Scarlett forced herself to look away as she took a seat at the table. She started to read the papers in the envelope. After a while, rain started pouring outside and the raindrops plopped on the window panes. Scarlett read on, with the steady rhythm of the raindrops soothing her frayed nerves.

“Okay... a girl and a boy... clothes and food...tonight at twelve,” she murmured as she read on. She read the document for a couple of times, and took a deep breath while putting the documents neatly back into the envelope. She then went to take a relaxing bath, and changed into a new outfit with her hair tied up, holding a sack.

Walking into the kitchen, she grabbed a few pieces of bread from the countertop and munched on one, putting the rest into her sack. Within minutes, Scarlett finished her piece of bread. She then reached up to the overhead cupboard on her tiptoes to reach for some clothes, which she dumped into her sack as well.

“Clothes...check. Food...check.”

Peering out from the kitchen window, she saw that the sky was already dark. Clouds were drifting in the sky, obscuring everything from her view. The soft glow of the moon cascaded down like a soft piece of fabric draped across the sky. Deciding that it was time, she put on her scruffy old shoes. After peeping out multiple times, she tiptoed her way out and gently closed the door behind her. She then quickly but quietly ran to the alley behind her house. The pungent smell of sewers engulfed her and she had to hold herself back from choking. Syringes were littered on the floors and rubbish was scattered everywhere. A few crickets chirped from nearby trees and a gentle breeze blew, rustling the leaves on the trees. Goosebumps formed on Scarlett's arms. She pulled her coat tighter around her and kept on walking.

Suddenly, a beam of bright light sliced through the darkness. She panicked and hid behind some old boxes. The light got brighter and brighter while footsteps became nearer and nearer. Scarlett held her breath, not trusting herself to keep quiet. Her heart thumped and thumped.

“I swore I saw a person hide behind these boxes,” a gruffly voice echoed in the empty alley. Scarlett’s heart sank. There was no way she was not going to be found. The owner of the voice kicked the boxes around her as her heartbeat increased rapidly. The beam of light jumped from one spot to another, as her heartbeat continued to race on. Then, the light shone directly onto her.

“Aha! Found you. Hands up or I’ll shoot!” the voice yelled. Scarlett stood up, knowing she was caught. She turned around and faced the owner of the voice. She could faintly see that he was a bulky man with a scruffy beard and a bald head. He was wearing black from head to toe and on his face was a menacing glare. Beside him stood a slightly taller and slimmer man who bore a similar glare. He was also wearing black from head to toes.

“What are you doing here at night?” the taller man demanded. Scarlett gulped and took a deep breath. She froze, thinking of an answer.

“I... I... I’m a nurse at the hospital and I just finished my work,” she replied.

“Why did you not use the main roads?” the man continued to question her.

“This road is...is...closer to my home.”

“Are you sure? This alley is surely not close to anywhere.”

“I’m sure... It’s along...”

“She’s just a young girl, Bob. I don’t think she means any harm. I bet she can’t even kill a fly!” the bulky man snorted. “Women these days are so useless. They just rely on us, right girl? Let’s go, man!” The two men marched off further into the darkness. Scarlett stood rooted to her spot for a few seconds, before breathing a sigh of relief.

“That was so close...I can’t believe that they thought I’m so useless.” she muttered angrily. After walking for what felt like ages, Scarlett finally came to a halt. She walked up to a shabby old building and knocked on the door five times. The door creaked open to reveal a young girl whose cheeks were sunken. Tear stains ran down her cheeks. An even younger boy peeped out behind her with a look of fear until he realised who she was.

“Here you go,” Scarlett whispered as she handed her sack to the girl, “everything is going to be alright in the end, okay? Stay hidden and tomorrow, a guy will come to fetch you to a safer place. I’ll see you there. Take care.” The girl looked up, her doe eyes watering, she opened her mouth but nothing came out.

“I know you miss them a lot, and it’s okay. I’ve gone through that too. It will get better. I have to go now, it’s getting late, but I’ll see you again, very soon, I promise.” Scarlett then slowly turned around and walked back to the path she originally came from. A gentle breeze blew and she looked up towards the sky. Surprisingly, the clouds had parted only to reveal a bright star, bravely glowing in the dark sky by itself. She thought to herself, maybe it was very insignificant, but it braved the darkness to light up the sky to its best ability, and that was what really mattered.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Diocesan Girls' School, Ng, Krissie – 13

His eyes, shimmering in the darkness, bore into mine. Just like that day, the day we met, I was captivated by it, drawn by its hidden pain. His eyes, azure like the sky, were now dimming. His lips trembled, sweat dripping from his forehead as he panted for breath.

“I... I...” He whispered, clutching my hand tighter.

“Hush,” I replied, pushing my free hand onto his wound, trying to stop the blood flow. Blood flowed freely from his stomach, covering my hand in red. Tears threatened to fall, but I strained to hold them back, focusing instead on my task at hand. I had to be strong for him, for *us*. Yet my eyes betrayed me, and soon they streamed down my cheeks, dripping down onto my tattered clothes.

Far away, a horn blew, and shouts filled the air. Footsteps padded against the ground, lights flickered amongst the trees and smoke filled the air. They were getting closer, we had to leave. Gritting my teeth, I stood up slowly, trying to lift him up as well. But we would not budge. Instead, he unwound his hand from mine, and murmured, “Go.”

“What are you doing? We have to leave!”

No, I am not going to leave him alone, not going to leave him to die.

He grunted as I tried to drag him along with me. “No,” he murmured. “Go, they are coming for you.”

Now, the shouting was getting louder, clearer. More lights shone amongst the trees, smoke was filling the air as soldiers with torches came closer – hunting for us.

I shook my head, yearning to clear my muddled thoughts. Crouching down, I reached for his shoulder, only to be pushed away, albeit weakly. Eyes dark with fury, he growled, “Leave, now. Before it’s too late, don’t look back, don’t come back, just leave.”

Stunned, I stared back, not believing a word he uttered. His voice, though vicious, had a trail of agony mixed in it. Deep in my heart, I knew well that he would not make it, would not survive.

Out of the blue, a light shone into my eyes, blinding me temporarily. “You! Down on your knees, hands in the air, now!” A soldier came, eyes hard and cold, gun in his hand, a torch in another. A hand gripped my leg, and I looked down. His cerulean orbs glinted dangerously in the dark as he cocked his head slightly into the deeper part of the forest, signalling me to leave.

I would regret, I knew. However, I turned around and ran. My legs were on fire as I rushed into the woods, stray branches cutting my knees and ankles as I ignored the frustrated cries of the soldier. I tuned out the obstreperous gunshots that rang in the air, which were followed by a familiar howl of anguish. Tears streaked down my face as I dashed on into the unknown darkness, not daring to stop, not wanting to be killed.

Run. Don't look back. Run. Don't come back. Run. Run. Run...

His voice resounded in my head as I heeded his words, and soon I reached the edge of a cliff. That was when I turned back, that was when I allowed myself to cry it all out.

Emotions poured out like flood, drowning me in the midst of the tempest. Grief, for his death; rage, for my cowardice; relief, for my escape. The chain that held all my emotions in my heart was broken, and for the first time, I was free.

I looked down, noting the sea of fire surging my village. My home. The once familiar city of Old Shanghai was gone, devoured by the Japanese. There were once banners flapping in the sky, and rickshaws pulling across the streets. I would look out of the window and into the endless sea, at the ships parking at the port. There was also this statue of an angel, standing gloriously above all buildings. But now, they were all burned down. I seethed at the thought of the Japanese destroying everything in their sight, killing all men and taking women and children back to their camps for experiments.

I lied down on the ground, tilting my head to look up at the sky and I engulfed in my thoughts. Where had it all gone wrong? The plan had been simple: to escape. We were supposed to leave, quietly, to seek for a new life beyond those camps, to live together until we die of old age in each other. Where had it all gone wrong?

I could still remember it, the first time we met. It was he who changed my life, he who led me to look for the beyond, he who taught me to dream, dream a life of wealth, a life where we can be truly together; away from war.

His eyes were what caught my attention. They held not pride for what his fellow people had done, nor happiness at the sight of the bloodbath, nor amusement at the sight of us tortured. Instead, they hid the hatred, horror and bitterness locked deep within. He watched, face stony as his fellow people whipped us and sunk us into water tanks, but his eyes were a different story.

That was how I knew he was different.

He would take us into tents instead of cages to lock us in; he would sneak extra food for us, sometimes potatoes or beans; he would tend to us when we were hurt, secretly at night. His face was always indifferent, his mouth a thin line as he showed no emotions. Yet his eyes would betray his real thoughts and feelings, his actions showed how he much he regretted for being helpless.

That was how I knew he was special.

He was a few years older than us, since he was not sent into the field. We were only children, he a teenager. Unlike us, he was trained since childhood, patriotism drilled into his head. It was a miracle that he was not brainwashed, that he could empathise enemies, that he could still treat us with respect. Sometimes at night as he stood guard, right outside of the tent, I could make out whimpers and sobs, though muffled and quiet. There were times in the morning that his eyes were puffy and red, his face still decorated with tears.

That was how I knew he was just a child.

That day, the Chinese retaliated, and the Japanese took their resentment out on us. Dumping us headfirst into water tanks, shocking us with electricity; then whipping us. That day, they were monstrous. The camp was filled with shrieks of terror, whimpers for help and begging for mercy. It only worsened. All that time, the soldiers bore sick and twisted smirks, the face smug, inflicting inhumane agony on us. That day, blood seeped and splattered on the ground, sticking to our clothes. Not even one spot was left clean. Soldiers would patrol around, shooting randomly multiple times at the crowd, laughing at the sight of cowering, helpless villagers.

He, however, remained silent throughout the day, unable to look at us in the eye. As he led us back to our tent, his azure eyes hazed with disgust – but not at our wounds, at his own people. That night, he brought us a bucket of water and a platter of potato, which we dug in furiously, not sparing a single drip of water. He watched, eyes clouded as he snuggled in some blankets for us.

Warmth. That was what I first felt. As he passed them out, his eyes trailed down to my injuries – the whiplashes and cigarette burns. Just like before, his eyes glazed, darkened into black, and for a moment, he gripped the blanket tightly. “Thank you,” I muttered, softly as so not to provoke him.

That got his attention. For a while, his eyes drilled holes into mine, searching them, as if trying to find my ulterior move. Finding done, the corners of his mouth turned up a little, and his eyes brightened.

That was how I knew he was not a monster.

A long ‘hoot’ broke my thoughts as the owl took flight, rustling the trees as it flew into the air. The wind picked up, causing my hair to billow behind me. A faint bell ring clanged in the darkness, and I glanced down my neck, calming slightly. There it was, swaying in the wind, the gold necklace with a bell on it. As it danced, the gold glinted in the darkness, shedding little flutters of light on the ground. Cradling in my palms, I allowed myself to lean against a tree trunk, relaxing as I watched the hypnotic waltz of the bell.

I could still remember, the times we spent when we were alone secretly, looking out from the tent and into the sky. The times when we escaped the camp, through short but the best times of my life. We searched for a place that would belong only to us, that was peaceful and painless. That was what we yearned for; but I never told him, I had already found that place— his heart.

Dazed, I trailed my fingers over the bell. Engraved on the bell, was the name Ozamu Dazai – the angel who saved me from hell, who healed me from my pain, who sacrificed himself for me in exchange for my life.

He is my angel, my angel Raphael.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Discovery Bay International School, Alexander, Jasper – 12

The constant chatter of people hung around the streets of Shanghai. The clatter of wagons in every direction, and the shouting from the thousands of market stalls. But in one house, in this wonderful city, everything was far from wonderful...

"But, please, this is all we have; all we know!" Begged Lee's mum to the landlord,

"I'm sorry, you haven't been paying your rent for the past four months," exclaimed the landlord, Hyu.

Lee was sad, his lovely apartment had been swiped away from him...

"By tomorrow evening, you are to be out of this house! No exceptions, no excuses!" Shouted Hyu

"But..."

"NO buts!" Interrupted Hyu

"Where will we go? Where can we go?" Asked Lee's mum, Vanessa,

"That is your decision," commented Hyu...

Quickly, and full of guilt, Hyu left... Vanessa and Lee were full of despair, anger and sorrow... A long silence occurred, they were both, evidently, shocked at the thought of living in a completely different place in twenty four hours. But the question glooming over them like the shadow of a building, was, where would that place be?

It was time for Lee and Vanessa to get some well-needed sleep to get them ready for tomorrow, they still had to pack and at least have a rough idea of where to go! They couldn't afford anything in the heart of Shanghai, and had no family in the whole of China to house them! The only option was either to live as a fishing family or to work on a field...

The morning dawned, the sun was shining like a glimmering jewel on the streets of Shanghai. But Lee and Vanessa were busy packing to leave this city full of Black, White, Eastern and Western people. Lee was packing a blanket, a couple of old clothes, a teddy and a picture frame which had a picture of him and his Dad, Zai, who had unfortunately died two years prior on a boat accident. Vanessa was packing virtually the same, plus some Toothbrush's for the two of them.

It was time... They had packed their bags and were ready to set off to the nearest Paddyfield they knew!

One, two or maybe even three hours passed until they arrived... A large, dark haired man, with blue eyes, came up to them on the rim of the field.

"What are you two people doing out here on a Sunday afternoon?"

"We need somewhere to live, even if it's as a hard working slave on your Paddyfield!" Whispered the urgent Vanessa,

"Well, no man in the correct state of mind would reject some healthy, positive slaves!" The man exclaimed,

"Thankyou!" Shouted Vanessa and Lee,

"You shall be selected a cabin tonight, and start work tomorrow," The man said "So go and get your food and drink from that large building over towards those cabins,"

"Ok, sir!" Said Lee,

"James, call me James,"

Lee and Vanessa walked away with, for the first time in days, a gleaming smile on their face. They at least had somewhere to live and eat; even though, it was no where close to being ideal!

They arrived at a humongous building with three tall men dressed in thick black clothes, they had a small knife in hand and a nasty, grimacing smile on their face... Lee entered the building first, and then Vanessa, they could smell the warm, overpowering smell of soup. Hot, Vegetable Soup was being served to the forty or fifty unfortunate slaves who had a hard worked during this, scorching day working on the Paddy Field.

"What are you waiting for? Come and get your soup," Shouted a man who was serving the lovely food,

"Ok!" Exclaimed Lee who was evidently overjoyed at the sight of soup,

Lee and Vanessa walked over to where the food was being served... But, Lee thought Vanessa was following!

"Mum!" Shouted Lee, who hoped for a response!

"Lee!" Shouted Vanessa, who hoped for a response!

"Oh, there you are, I was getting panicked," said Lee who finally saw Vanessa.

"Goodness me, just get your food!" Exclaimed Vanessa,

Vanessa and Lee grabbed the nearest bowl, and, extremely greedily, ran to the serving station and got some well needed soup. The soup warmed their lips, their mouth and even their whole body... The warmth ran from head to toe, left to right, in side to out. A smile covered the faces of Lee and Vanessa. They were so happy to be living somewhere, even if they had to work harder than ever on this farm!

"Come here!" Shouted a man who was looking at Lee and Vanessa

"Ok..." Said Vanessa

"This shall be your cabin, you have a small basin, a hard pillow and three small blankets," said the man "what are you waiting for? Go and put your belongings in their!"

They walked towards the cabin, they stepped inside, a small basin, a hard pillow and three small blankets were the only things in the small room. They edged towards the small, rough blankets which were in a messy pile in the corner of the room.

This was their new home, their new wooden shack... It was now time to go to sleep in the shack; when they woke up tomorrow, they would be SLAVES. It suddenly dawned on them, they were now not free to do what they wanted, to eat what they want and to do what they want. Days passed, weeks passed maybe even months, and Vanessa had started to regret the decision of working here. It was a 9 to 12 hour shift of the day, where Lee was rarely given positive feedback even though he was so hard working! In a months time, there was to be a annual trade of slaves from all around this region of China! Vanessa was looking forward to this, as she might live somewhere better... While Lee was sad, he was staring at the old photo of him and his dad... But, as he knew, this wasn't a time for dwelling, it was a time for hard work for hopefully future freedom. Another couple of weeks passed, it was time for the trade.

All the hard working, hunched over slaves gathered into the area of the field which could access the road! The traders were here! Vanessa and Lee slowly strolled over, and saw tens of slaves traders which were: Black, white, rotund, slim, woman and male. The amazing amount of people was outstanding! Vanessa peeked at the traders, and here eyes gazed at one, a tall, tanned man with a slim face and a gleaming smile... She recognized him! She was sure she had seen him somewhere... Zai! No, it couldn't be! He had died three years ago, hadn't he? This was impossible, Vanessa was keeping quiet to Lee, as if she said anything, he wouldn't believe it! Vanessa, as slow as a snail, edged towards what she thought was Zai. He wouldn't recognize her.

"Excuse me, what is your name?" Asked Vanessa,

"Zai!" The man answered,

"Did you fight for Chinese against Japan two years ago?" Vanessa asked,

"Yes, I fought on the boats when we got hit by a kamikaze plane and hundreds of people died, but I, luckily survived!" Exclaimed Zai,

"Did you marry someone called Vanessa?" asked Vanessa

"Vanessa? Yes, I did! She was a lovely lady until I came back from war and she had left," said Zai who was getting emotional,

"I am Vanessa!" Said Vanessa,

"Vanessa! But your skin is tanned and you look so different from working hard in sunlight, but I know this is you, I can see your beautiful eyes which haven't changed " Shouted Zai,

They embraced in a warming hug and Lee joined in, Zai wasn't dead! This was a moment they had been hoping for for years

"I own a small house in Shanghai, do you want to live with me?" Asked Zai

"Yes!" Said Vanessa

Within minutes, they were on a carriage riding back to Shanghai! They arrived! Vanessa was confused, this didn't look like Shanghai! There were tall buildings overlooking them, and no small corner shops!

"Wow! Shanghai has really changed!" Said Lee,

"Yes, indeed it has!" Replied Zai,

Lee and Vanessa were shocked to see Shanghai, they never thought that in a million years that they would be back living a free life! The hard work of being a positive minded slave had paid off. The contrast of the old Shanghai was so much different to Shanghai now.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Discovery Bay International School, Arons, Cynthia – 13

Mei Lin Shu walked home with her twin sister, Wei Yong Shu. At home, they went up to their room to start studying. Wei sat down and opened her books. Mei dropped her bag down and sat down. There was a sealed letter on her desk. Mei picked it up and turned it over. The front was blank.

“Wei, did you get a letter?” Mei asked

“What kind?” Wei asked. Mei shook her head.

“Never mind.” The letter was sealed shut with a red, delicately patterned seal. Carefully, Wei undid the seal and pulled out the paper from inside. Unfolding it, she admired the elegant writing. She started to read, her eyes widening.

July 12, 1937

Dear,

The Whangpoo River is being frequented more by warboats. It must be an indication of what is to come. You know, today, I caught a really big fish. I made a lot of profit. Earlier, these soldiers came by and told me that I had to give up my job here to fight in the army as they didn't have enough people. They said that it was an order from General Chiang Kai-Shek. They expect me to leave in a few hours. I'm sorry I can't write anymore. I hope this situation gets better and I can visit you again. Until then, I will keep writing to you.

Yours Truly,

Ah Cheng Fa

“Wei...? Today is the 8th of December, 2016 right?” Mei asked. Wei looked at her strangely.

“Yes. It is. Why?”

A week passed by as normal but Mei couldn't get that letter out of her head. That week, she got another letter.

August 13, 1937

Dear,

I'm sorry I haven't been able to write for a month. They took me to a training camp. I recognised a few people and even saw our neighbour. I was told that every male had to fight in the war. Things here are looking bad: the Japanese have come from the sea and are already coming down the Yangtze River. It might not be long until they come here. We must be prepared. As usual, I went to the temple and prayed to Guan Yu to give us good luck during the war. I hope he hears my prayers. I promise I will try and make it out of this war alive. I will see you again.

Yours Truly,

Ah Cheng Fa

Mei gaped at it. Hastily, she rummaged her bin and picked out the other letter. She compared the handwriting and the name of the person.

“It’s another letter. Written by the same person,” Mei said. Wei took it from her and read it. She frowned.

Mei received five more letters in the next week. She stored them in her drawer and waited until the end of the week to read them.

August 14, 1937

Dear,

I have heard talk that the Japanese forces are advancing towards us, using the river. We will have to fight soon unless our walls protect us. I hope it does not come down to us fighting. I doubt our chances at defeating the Japanese army. They are making us train more frequently and for longer periods at a time. I touched the water from the river. It was warmed by the sun.

Yours Truly

Ah Cheng Fa

August 21, 1937

Dear,

I have heard rumors that they are just outside our walls. We are not allowed to go out of the walls, the generals say that it is too dangerous. The people are suffering. We are suffering. Yet we still have to fight. I’m hungry. I want you to come back and make some of your special dishes.

Yours Truly

Ah Cheng Fa

August 28, 1937

Dear,

This morning I woke up and saw the sunrise. It was very beautiful. However, there is a lot of unease. The Japanese have been too quiet, I fear that they are planning something. Soldiers have been deployed to the immediate insides of the wall in case of a breach. I am not as experienced so I have been put at the back in case there is an emergency. I am grateful for that. It means I have a higher chance of survival.

Yours Truly

Ah Cheng Fa

September 4, 1937

My prediction was right. The Japanese have broken through the Northern gate. I have heard talk that they are fighting our front lines right now. Things are tense here in Shanghai. Everywhere I go, there is nobody outside. Everyone's scared. They're hiding. There's no laughter, no joy. My time will come soon. I hope I will see you soon.

Yours

Ah Cheng Fa

September 11, 1937

Another wave of Japanese warriors have arrived. My time to fight will come soon. It is inevitable. We are losing and badly. There have been so many casualties, I stopped counting them. Today, my shoes broke. It makes me wonder. What conditions are the people in the front lines facing? The ground is rough.

Ah Cheng Fa

The letters kept coming. Mei received four in a week. At the end of the week, Mei and Wei sat down to read all the letters that had piled up on her table. She had stored the other ones in a pack, tied together.

September 18, 1937

Our section of the army has been sent North to keep on guard. We have to protect Dachang. It is the only way we can survive. The Japanese army still haven't come this far. I hope it stays this way. I asked for new shoes but they said that they couldn't give me any. They didn't have extra. I have blisters on my foot.

Ah Cheng Fa

September 25, 1937

I heard explosions close by. The fight is coming to us. I will protect Shanghai with my life. As you know, it was where I was born and I will die here too if I have to. Last night, our barracks stayed up playing card games and gambling. We didn't have anything to gamble apart from a few apples. Can you believe that? Gambling for apples. It was fun anyway. I lost.

Ah Cheng Fa

October 2, 1937

We had our second battle today. It wasn't that bad. We fought using the hand grenades. From afar. We didn't have many casualties. Just a few injured people. I hope our luck stays up. I still keep praying every time I go to sleep and wake up. Yesterday, in my sleep, I could still hear the explosions. They're loud.

Ah Cheng Fa

October 9, 1937

The fighting has been intense this week. The Japanese armies are overwhelming us and they are on the verge of taking Dachang. We still fight though. My friend got shot today. He died a few hours ago from too much blood loss. I still grieve for him. I miss you.

Ah Cheng

This time, they only received three letters.

October 27, 1937

The Japanese have started attacking from the South, past Hangzhou. I'm sorry I haven't written as much as I should have, we have been too busy, trying to fight off the Japanese. They finally took Dachang. Now all we have to defend is the South of Shanghai. Luckily, I haven't been injured yet except for a few unavoidable scrapes and bruises. I asked for bandages but they said that they had run out. There are too many people to treat.

Ah Cheng

November 3, 1937

We have been moved down South. Most of the other soldiers have been moved out of Shanghai. They have gone to try and fight for Suzhou Creek. We are the only ones here. People have lost faith. Most of our original army has been defeated. I am losing hope. I stopped praying.

Ah Cheng

November 10, 1937

We are still fighting desperately against the Japanese. Right now, I have a break before I have to go back out onto the battlefield. I don't have enough time to write a really long letter. They are calling for me now. I have to go. I miss my bed. I miss sleep.

Ah Cheng

Then there were two letters.

November 13, 1937

I got an injury to my head and my leg. I was shot in my leg then I lost consciousness and hit my head on some nearby rubble. I have been sent to the infirmary for a quick recovery. The war is not over yet. I will get better soon then I will fight again.

Ah

November 15, 1937

The injury is healing up nicely. Or at least that's what the medics say. I hope I get better soon. Maybe I can be deemed injured then I can come and visit you. I don't want to fight anymore. I am tired.

Ah

Then there was one.

November 20, 1937

I am still injured. I will be fighting again. I feel like this will be my last letter. I am sorry. I am tired. The water is cold.

Then there were none.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Discovery Bay International School, Fernley, Sam – 12

I stride strongly through the crowded, narrow streets. There are many old, beautiful, colourful buildings either side. I can see bright reds, deep browns, shining yellows and cool blues. I walk against the flowing river of people, like a salmon swimming up-river. They are heading towards the luxurious centre of town; I am heading for the city. I march on, seeing less and less Western dressed tourists and more and more traditionally dressed locals. I hear the distant rumble of construction spoiling the idyllic setting. There are no street lamps now. I know now that I am in the rough part of the new city. I feel uncomfortable. There are sorrowful drunks beating each other up, shadows everywhere. Then there are the whisperings about the sharp, glinting knives.

Creeping onwards, careful not to attract attention. “Arghh!” screaming, I smell fresh blood. I hurry to get away from the screaming. A wiry man looks at me strangely as I gingerly tiptoe past. Finally I am where I want to be: the place I know to sometimes be a treasure trove. Sifting through the pile of rubbish at the back, hoping to find something to sell (who knows where it has come from, but I am not asking!). I pick up a small piece of quartz. I need something more precious. I dig deeper. Then I find it lying there. A stone Chinese warrior, the length of my forearm. The beautiful carved hair is long and tied back, it is holding a staff. When I pick it up, it is smooth as if it is polished. It’s ruby eyes glint with anger. “Hey!” shouts a deep vicious voice, “What are you doing?” I turn round. I am faced with a muscular eight foot giant. He is an immovable mountain towering above me.

“I ... erm I, I, I a, a, am ... erm here erm for erm I am here to get some stuff out of the trash,” I stutter fearfully. I try to escape. Thud! Knocked onto the ground by a firm fist.

“You’re not going anywhere,” he growled. It sounded like a heavy object being pushed along gravel. I haul myself back up, not wanting to be caught. There is a gap to run through, can I beat him? am I small and fast enough? Whoosh! Through the gap and running. The buildings rise above me creating a concrete canyon. Racing to the night market in the modern city, hoping to disappear into the crowds of stalls. In amongst the hustle and bustle. Running strongly through crowds of hanging fabrics, people and carts.

Sprinting until I tire, I start to jog, crashing over carved oak wood carts, they are getting in the way. I smell the fresh fruit, incense, dried fish and much more, people shouting at me as I race past. I knock into child wearing beautiful dress. She cries out, people turn, they are disgusted but I cannot stop. A short distance and I turn a corner. I’m exhausted but I’ve lost him. Safe. Standing there panting for breath, sweat pouring from my face, my heart pounding in my chest. I can taste the salt dripping down my face.

The street lights light the alleyway and I am alone. I ask an old stall owner for the nearest antique expert. She tells me it’s on the other street, the street where all the neon lights are. I amble over, not sure whether I should go in or not. It is decided, I am going in. Stepping inside and it's like I've gone back in time, it's like old town all over again. It smells damp, musty and old, but also homely. I shuffle up to the counter. There is an old man, he has deep set eyes, wrinkles. “Good evening sir, could you kindly tell me how much this fine statue is worth?”

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Discovery Bay International School, Gordon, James – 12

January 9th 1993,

As I get up this morning, I notice the sun smiling down on me whilst hugging me with its warmth. I look out the window and for the first time in my life I feel different. It's like my eyes are opening up to a new concept of seeing things here in Shanghai for the very first time. I see the contrast of the village around me and the modern-day buildings standing tall into the crystal, clear sky. Nowadays, the only thing really separating the city and the countryside is our ever-faithful river. I think to myself, "How long will it be before there is no more left of the incredible old Shanghai?" Hundreds of villages have already been overrun by the city. All the natural scenery will be gone and missed not long from now. The upcoming generations will never experience the true beautiful culture of this amazing habitat.

I walk outside and step onto the nature that surrounds me. As the moisture of the grass soothes my feet I hear the chirping sound of the birds in the early morning (the sounds comforting my ears). Then I gaze up and see the huge cranes looming menacingly over the buildings in the distance. Cars, buses and a seemingly never ending parade of vehicles. The overpopulation and huge billboards are quite simply overwhelming. I smile to myself, thinking how happy I am living in a peaceful environment rather than that noisy city traffic! It was hard to live knowing inside, that my village would eventually one day also turn into a noisy city over burdened with traffic. Brushing the thoughts aside, I go back into my house and get ready for work. Packing my day bag, I hear a frantic banging on my front door. I quickly run over to open it wondering who or what it could be? My neighbour, a long-time resident of our village, appears at the door. "Look at the news!", he yells, passing me the newspaper. It says 'Lang Hai village' (my village) is to be turned into Shanghai's biggest water park with work starting as soon as April 3rd this year! I rub my eyes hoping this can't be true. It's like my earlier thoughts had just come immediately to life. This isn't a good start to my day.

It turns 8:45am as I get onto the boat to go to work in the city. I can't help but anger myself over the newspaper article. Thoughts raced through my mind. "Where am I going to live?". "The city?" "I hate the city." Surely they can't take away my home. I look again at the newspaper and I noticed some bold text in the bottom right corner. It was a notice from the government, 'We have all legal rights to put a water park in this area.' Now I'm really in trouble. All of my villager mates and I, are going to have to split up and live somewhere else. I begin to remember about all the great times we have had at the village and how soon I am going to have to abandon my childhood home. The special lake I used to always splash around in when I was a kid, the trees I used to climb with my parents when I was younger. A lot of really good times. The boat hits the jetty with a thud and the jolt brings me back to the present moment. I get off the boat and head towards my office.

As I walk out the lift I am greeted by my boss. "You've been working really hard lately and I would like to show my appreciation by giving you a promotion!" "Thank-you boss!", I responded excitedly. He shuffles me into the lift and we head upstairs. As the lift door opens, my eyes begin to water as I take in the luxurious décor. I'd never seen anything this grand. Wow! I thought to myself. The place was huge, absolutely massive.

The boss takes me to my office. It was like a house. All polished and nicely laid out, unlike my old tacky office. He shakes my hand again and leaves. It's so quiet up here and soon my thoughts begin to drift back to the fate of my hometown. Once again I mourn the fact that I will have to move out of my village in only two months. Although I continued to get quite emotional about my village, I do manage to get on with my work and before I know it the clock strikes 3pm and my work day is over. I leave the sanctuary of my office and begin walking down the loud city streets.

Here we go again I thought. Vehicles driving past me with terrible gas smells. I'm going to miss the nice natural smell of the village I think to myself. Dawdling slowly down the street I spot a woman crossing the busy road. Suddenly I hear a bang and a loud screech and look up to see a truck veering out of control towards the woman. Instantly I jump out onto the road and tackle her onto the pavement as the truck slams into a shop front in a shower of glass and noise. Phew! That was close I say to myself. "Are you ok?" I ask the woman. "Thank—You so much for saving my life." she says gratefully. I pick her up and she is OK apart from a few small scratches. She kept thanking me until the ambulance eventually took her away to the hospital for a check-up. I didn't have much to say and not a lot of time to talk because my boat was leaving at 4:00pm and I really wanted to get back home.

When I arrive home everyone is still 'up in arms' about the news. Some people here at the village can't afford a new home in the city and there is very big panic. I go back into my house and not very long after I get a phone call. I pick up the phone "Hello" I ask. "Hi, I am the woman you saved earlier today. My dad is the Mayor of Shanghai and would like to meet you?" I'm stunned! I had just saved the mayor's daughter. After I caught my breath, I replied that I would.

"Yes sure, when would the Mayor like to meet me?", I asked. "Tonight at 7:00pm. We will have a limousine pick you up at the ferry pier at 6:45pm", she replied. "Thank—you very much, I will be there." Having dinner with the Mayor; Wow, that's one thing to tick off the bucket list! As well as riding in a limousine...

At 6:45pm exactly, I walk out the ferry terminal to be greeted by the shiniest limousine in the world. Two bodyguards approach me and very politely invite me to get into the car. It was amazing. Glasses of champagne stacked on the shelves and the most comfortable sofa in the world with gigantic legroom.

After the incredible ride we reach the mayor's house all too soon.

"Please come in", invited the mayor. I couldn't believe that I was in his house; it was a mansion. As we eat dinner he talked about many things, but mostly thanking me about saving his daughter. I politely nodded but I didn't really think I was a hero. Nevertheless, I did enjoy being here with the Mayor and his family.

I finish the scrumptious, lip smacking food. As I'm just about to leave the mayor asks me, "Is there anything I can do for you?" "Actually there is one thing...I'm not sure if you can do anything about it...but today I heard on the news that my village, 'Lang Hai village', is to be turned into the world largest water park. My whole village is quite upset about it. It would be absolutely amazing if somehow we could keep our village...?", I ask hesitantly.

There is a long silence in the room. Finally, he responds. "That is a lot to ask. We have been planning this for a very long time now. However, young man, since you did save my daughter, I will find a way for it to be arranged."

As I leave their house thanking them, joy starts running up and down my body. I have a sense of calmness now as I enjoy the rest of my evening. The very next morning, I wake up as somebody knocks on my door again! I open the

door and it's my neighbour again. He shows me the newspaper like last time except this time the newspaper says James Gordon (my name) saves Mayor's daughter and his local village. All the villagers are happy again as I become famous on the headlines of the Shanghai news.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Discovery Bay International School, Sullivan, Hannah –12

“They never!” Grandma exclaims, clasping a frail hand over her downturned mouth. Looking up from my scatter of dolls, I notice the sizeable newspaper rattling in my Grandma’s grasp.

“What happened Grandma,” I say, “Did someone come to harm?”

Lost for words, Grandma slowly points at the article which had caused her such a fright. I strain my eyes to see what it could possibly be: ‘*Shanghai temple of 200 years to finally be taken down and replaced with 7/11 store in 1960.*’

Exasperated, I groan, “Grandma it’s just a temple. Besides, we could do with a few more 7/11 stores around here!” Why would an old temple like that matter anyways? It’s not like Shanghai as I know it will come to an end due to this.

“No, Miss Bella Rosa Yeung! It is not *just a temple!* It is a holy place to Buddhists like myself. It is a sight where I would go as a child to look on with awe. It is also where your father and your Uncle Dan went as children on weekends. And...” She halts. A few awkward seconds pass before a small droplet strolls down her crinkled skin, like that of morning dew on an autumn leaf. She gently touches a bent finger to her heart, then raises her head to look at me. “And it is the place your Grandfather was buried last August.”

Gasping, I feel my eyes pool with tears. I loved my Grandfather more than words could express. Last year when he had died of heart failure, my Grandma and I shared equal pains in *our* aching hearts. Mentioning his name always claws at the unhealed scars, drawing fresh blood – fresh pain.

“Grandma... I – I’m so sorry. What can we possibly do to stop this from happening? I stutter, my voice a mouse’s squeak. Grandma shakes her head at me.

“Before we know it, old Shanghai will be long gone; replaced by flashy buildings and expensive shopping malls,” The old woman mutters, “It’s up to your generation to do something about it.”

With a determined look on my face, I nod my head. No one will stop me from saving Grandfather’s legacy...

“Excuse me Mister?” I holler, pushing my hands uncomfortably hard against my cheeks to project my voice. The streets of Shanghai are bustling with hurried men and women dressed top to toe in expensive finery. Several signs dangle from tall apartment blocks, flashing advertisements in bright, neon colours. Occasionally, the odd food-delivery-bike is parked at a corner, wafting the delicious aromas of noodles, sweet potato and dumplings to the eager crowd. I see all these sights of new things, big things, bright things; but seldom do I see the ancient wonders my Grandma has become so fond of.

I remember my fifth birthday with my family as if it was yesterday: Mama and Papa woke me in the early hours when the sun was still stubbornly lying in bed. They softly sang to me as I stretched my tired limbs and scratched my sun-kissed cheeks. Soon after, they fastened me in the back seat of the car and hinted for me to drift off during our long ride. This I did, and by the time I awoke again, my father was pulling our small black car into my Grandparents’ gravelly driveway. The dear old lady stood at the door, her limp grey hair pulled tightly into a bun. In a navy blue,

velvet jacket and skirt, her skinny frame stood ready to embrace us in her waiting arms. My Grandfather stood close by, one arm around his wife, another extended to wave as he smiled.

“Come to Grandma, Bella!” Grandma sang, crouching down as I tottered towards this kindly lady who I loved more than words could ever express. Unless you have had the privilege of hugging my Grandma, you have never experienced what it feels like to be truly happy, and have warmth creeping into your heart. Anyhow, later that night, Grandma and Grandpa told us the stories of when they had walked through the streets of main Shanghai, and seen all the many temples, statues and offerings.

However, looking around now, all I can see are expensive tourist attractions and hurried business men and women. The man in front of me, Mr Lok Chang, is the manager of the building project due to take place on the Temple my grandparents loved so. Perhaps he’ll hear me if I shout loud enough?

“Sorry – Mr Chang over here?” I repeat, frantically waving my hands to receive his attention. Slowly, the Chinese millionaire spins his head towards me. Judgingly, he eyes me up and down and laughs.

“Sorry dear, I haven’t any candy on me.” He mutters, then takes a long stride into the distance.

“Please Mr Chang! I only wanted to ask about your new project... Why must it take place?” I plead, shoving a path through the opposing crowd. The man stops, allowing me in turn to stop and catch my breath. Then, with a swift movement, the man looks me directly in the eyes.

“Because, child, Shanghai is a growing city, we have no need for useless temples anymore! We’d be far better off with a few more shops,” He concludes, raising his hand when I open my mouth, “Now go find your mother.”

“This isn’t the last you’ll see of me!” I shout, teary eyed and emotional. So what if I was a child? I could make a difference. I *will* make a difference!

“Well what would you say!” I grin to myself, my four-year-old grandson staring up at me with big, round eyes.

“Whad is id Gwanny?” He mumbles, his gorgeous lisp cradling his speech.

“Look at this Jimmy. Can you see the big letters on my phone?”

“Yes. Whad does id say Gwanny?”

“Temple. Can you say ‘temple’ darling?” I coax, lifting the dead weight of my little angel onto my lap.

“Twemple?”

“That’s right. See it says ‘*Temple of 256 years to be protected by Shanghai International Nature resorts, after 56 years of protest lead by Miss Bella Yeung.*’”

“Whad does dat mwean?” Jimmy mumbles.

“It means, Jimmy, that New tales of Old Shanghai have just begun...”

Old Shanghai

Dulwich College Beijing, Lee, Bryan – 15

I walked among the deadest trees and stalked the silent bodies.

No one could be heard. There was no one left to hear. Everyone, everything, is so absolutely... dead. Of course, they tend to be when I'm around.

Around me were monotone buildings, formerly sleek, now dusty. The streets, once clean, were now smeared in blood and dirt and glass and urine. Vehicles, flipped upside down, breathing out smoke. A picture of a crippled and ruined utopia.

The walls, however, remained standing, and remained as glorious as before.

They were so high in length and so wide in width that I could not see any end to it. I was at a far distance from it, and yet they seemed as crisp as clear an image can possibly be to an eye.

A mortal eye.

After admiring it I walked into the direction of where a giant shadow is cast from the highest building in the area, a towering titan whose height rivals its city's walls. The tower was jet black like the rest of the buildings, and its condition was spectacularly worse, with the glass that formed its outer shell missing from half the building, revealing the ruined skeleton within. Inside were nothing but ash and bones scarred grey, and an occasional object of color that set the contrast between the glory of its former condition and the reality of the present.

As I walked, my feet felt the tickle of broken glass piercing through the bottom of my shoe and slightly into my sole. The architect's obsession with glass was no doubt fascinating and stylistic, but was also unnecessarily useless. Sure, it looked pleasant and sleek, but a society as fragile as this one was going to break sooner or later, and the glass simply helped with it. Broken glass also hurts a lot.

As I went nearer towards the giant entity that was the high broken tower of glass, the more glass there were on the ground, all of them glimmering with a faint hint of scarlet. The majority of the glass were half stuck into the very dead bodies of the city people, with some of their eyes wide open, and teeth stuck to a twisted frown that almost resembled a smile. The bodies were easy to avoid. They were large in comparison to the pieces of glass and so were no trouble for me. All you had to do was step over them.

That was when I saw him. He was sitting on a partially glassless area of the ground and was leaning against the main doors of the giant tower. I was still far away from the tower, but upon making my discovery, I sped up my journey and in no time, made my arrival.

He was bald, revealing scars on the bare skin on his head. One of his eyes was covered with a piece of cloth, crudely ripped and crudely taped on using duct tape. He was wearing a business suit, and for some strange reason there was no blood or scratch or glass on it at all. He was holding a cigarette with his gloved right hand.

As I approached he looked up and saw me, gesturing with his hand to acknowledge that he was aware of my presence. He put the cigarette in his pockets, along with his hands.

"Where had you been?" he spoke. His voice was half shattered.

"What happened?" I asked.

“You know what happened. Everybody does.”

“I don’t. Tell me. What happened?”

He looked down for a second, shook his head, chuckled, then looked up.

“I made a mistake. Simple as that.”

I paused, to act as if I was considering his answer.

Then he shook his head again, and chuckled once more, and sighed.

“Let’s be honest. You and I both know that this was more than a mistake. This was a massacre,” he said, and he closed his eyes and leaned his head onto the main doors on which he was leaning on.

I remained standing as I turned around and turned my head to observe my surroundings, with its piles of corpses, blood and glass. There was smoke in the air, and yet no fire could be seen. The city looked deadlier from here. What remained of the buildings were aged, with their black color fading to a dull shade of gray.

“It was my idea, you know? To build this... this city. It was as if I was reenacting every single science fiction story ever told, of great utopian cities which fall into the state of dystopia. However, you would not believe this, but... but it worked. I founded this city as an independent state of the world, a state which will surpass all others in technology, science and art. And you know what? It was that state. It was what I dreamed it would be. I mean, look at my arm. My right arm. Blown off, detached, in the bloody war of ’89. And yet, look at me now! I’m...”

He took out his right hand from his pocket, and with some struggle took off his large black glove using his left. His right arm was revealed to be made of glass. It was transparent and reflected light, and due to its transparency, I was able to see the machinery in the arm operating, twisting and turning what seemed like millions of mechanical components, that made up for his arm.

“Beautiful, isn’t it? It’s made of glass. Just like this city. Pure. Clear.”

He put his arm back into his glove and returned it back into his pocket.

“Fragile,” he continued. “But... that’s not the point. What you witnessed was a technological marvel... And we have more... Flying cars, pills to give you super strength, even robot dogs, wearing cute little red ribbons on the neck. So you ask, if this city has become what it had meant to become, then why would it fall?”

He laughed so hard I could see traces of tears in his eyes. And then he pointed at the giant titanic walls.

“Because... It’s because of these bloody walls. Look at them! There is no need for them! Technology or not, these walls are useless! Why do you think this internal war got started? Why do you think all those people died? Why do buildings fall? It’s because one day some people asked questions that we never answer, like they always did. And these questions ask about the walls! ‘Is this a prison?’ ‘An experiment we are being kept inside of?’ ‘A declaration to the world?’ ‘Are we alone?’ And what do questions do to people? Usually? In the end?”

I remained staring at the walls.

“Death comes,” I answered.

There was a bird flying over our heads, far up in the sky. It soared from behind us, and continued onwards towards the end of the wall. It left a loud cry.

He remained on the ground, sitting. He took off his suit jacket. The bottom part of his shirt was revealed to be drenched in blood. Tiny traces of grass surrounded the wound.

“The walls... do you want to know why, I put them there in the first place?”

His question did not interest me, like all the other puzzling questions that were asked to me so many years ago.

“I put them there... because I had to. Most of the land that covers this city... it used to be part of a place called Shanghai... and before that, the Old City of Shanghai. A utopia of the past... is now relived in the future. There was something compelling about the old state of the city. And so I researched, and I found out about the walls, and how they used to use them. And so I knew I had to put some walls here. Just so people would know what this city was. Just to know... its name. Do you know its name? What's it called?”

He took his cigarette and breathed in for a long time, and coughed. “Go ahead,” he said with a crooked voice. “Do what you're here to do. Take me.”

I stared at him.

And then I advanced towards him.

He closed his eyes and dropped his cigarette.

“I'm not here for you.”

My answer caused him to open his eyes slowly.

“No, that can't be true...”

He then closed his eyes once more, and muttered, “Stop playing around and just end it all already.”

“No,” I answered. “It's not your time yet.”

His eyes remained closed. “Please...” his voiced trailed on.

“No. I was just here to see... to pay my respects. I have to go.”

He didn't reply. His eyes were closed, and his body was dead.

He was asleep.

I felt my scythe in my robes. It was lively in a place like this. I walked back the way I came from, and proceeded on the path to take me out of the crumbling city that was known as “Old Shanghai”. The path was still as broken as before. The corpses remained silent. I passed a little robot dog wearing a cute little red ribbon on its neck. It was dead.

The sun had never shone as bright as it did today. The sky was as blue as the ocean and the birds were chirping a pleasant melody of joy and happiness. The winds were crisp and cool.

It was the start of a beautiful morning.

Two Cities, One Home

Dulwich College Beijing, Li, Michael – 10

On the crowded railway platform of Vladivostok, Russia, two twins stood hand in hand, gazing into the hazy distance. It was the year 1918, the height of the Russian revolution. At dawn, they were woken by the steady rattling of gunfire. Their parents—the only people who could tell them apart—sent them away for fear of their safety.

The incoming train ground to a stop, jolting the twins back to reality. Reality, the cruel, callous, coldhearted world around them. They were jostled into the train's open door as the morning wind howled around them. The rhythmic bumping of the train rocked them to sleep, and they awoke to a speaker blaring over the din: "This is the Shanghai Station."

They disembarked, wandering aimlessly until they sat down on the side of a main road. One of them held a sign: "We are homeless children from Russia. I am Stanislas, and my twin brother is Vanya. Please take us in. God will be gracious to you." They were both blonde, wearing ragged clothes. Their faces were grimy with dirt.

A fallen leaf whistled past them. They huddled together, lost and alone.

When they woke up, the two brothers, Vanya and Stanislas, would be in two completely different worlds, each not knowing what happened to the other.

"Master Vanya, your breakfast is waiting for you downstairs. I will leave the menu here." The submissive voice of my butler drifts into my half-asleep mind. I eye the menu; although its exquisite handwriting displays lavish delicacies, even the daintiest dishes taste the same to me now. Wearily rolling out of my feather bed, I stagger into my overly-perfumed shower. You may think this is luxury, but luxury soon becomes routine.

As I get dressed, I stare wistfully at the crowd of carefree children outside, shouting and running freely. How I wish I could be one of them. "Master Vanya, which books would you like me to pack for your trip to Nanking? Remember your father has an important meeting there."

But he isn't my real father—he was only the one who found me and took me in. I have heard this story many times already, for my parents love to tell it to the guests.

"We were travelling home from a monk who claimed to have the power of bestowing children to couples, when we saw a small, ragged figure sitting on the side of the road." Here he often ruffled my hair, "We promptly concluded that this was the very child who had been given to us. And now, he with us, in the ZuJie"

But I have never told them about my earliest memories. The honk of a train, the warmth of another hand, the pulse of a heart beating along with mine...

A familiar voice, loud and gravelly, pierces my vivid dreams of warmth and food.

"Stanislas, get up and start your chores! Grab a bun and get to work!" My uncle yanks me from the pile of rags I sleep on. Rubbing my eyes wearily, I snap back to reality, the poor dusty ghetto bathed by the dawn light.

Although I have become a rickshaw driver, I still work in the house. Feeding the chickens, I stare longingly at the massive crimson compound – the ZuJie –towering above our little village. A high wall separates us from them, the uneducated from the educated, the hungry from the full, the poor from the rich.

Mother has told me that I have a twin brother, who was huddled next to me when she saw us. Because she needed some help in the family, she decided to adopt only one of us. I was chosen because I looked stronger. Sometimes I wonder where Vanya is now.

“Don’t dawdle, boy!” I cringe and go back to work.

Yesterday I ventured to the so-called ‘dangerous world’ outside, so Mother increased the security and now I have two butlers. I hate being chaperoned. I hate that every second of my life is planned for me. I hate being cooped up in this ostentatious cocoon. I must escape to somewhere free, like the ghetto.

Impulsively, I walk out the door, leaving behind luxury and routine. I don’t look back.

Pulling rickshaws is tedious work. The muscles on my shoulders are sore, and blisters are forming on my bare feet.

“Hurry up boy!” My uncle yells. I sigh, unwillingly rolling out of bed. Grabbing a bun, I rush out the door, wincing as my unhealed blisters contact the floor.

After many hours of rattling wheels and raspy voices, I stroll around the ZuJie, chewing on a bun for lunch, all the while looking for my next customer. Suddenly, I hear a female voice calling, “Vanya! Come here at once! Didn’t I tell you to stay inside just three days ago? Come here immediately, you mischievous rascal!” Then I realize – the woman is addressing me. I turn, and see a plump figure shaking a stubby finger.

But who’s Vanya?

Then it strikes me. My little brother. Vanya is still alive, and he lives... in the ZuJie? Blood rushes up into my face. *My brother is alive.*

“Yes, I’m coming!” I say, not believing my luck.

I walk out calmly, towards the ghetto, towards freedom. Lost, I carelessly stroll into the maze of gray wooden huts. Suddenly, to my right comes a shout, “Hey Stanislas, you need to go back to work soon!” To my amazement, I see a stocky, bearded man shouting at me. I blink. *But I’m Vanya, not Stanislas? Who is Stanislas? My brother! He is still alive?* My brother, Stanislas, part of my real family, is still, still... alive? My bubble of blissful recollection is popped by the man’s gruff voice again, “Go to the rickshaw center! You’ll be late for work!” Stanislas works already? I rush towards the center, grab a rickshaw, and suffer all day. My sore back aches from the weight of the rickshaw, my arms are limp, while my feet are filthy from the dust on the roads.

I relax, enjoying the hot, sud-filled water caressing my back. This is truly luxurious.

“Vanya, it’s time for dinner dear!” I sigh, and step out of the shower. Why would Vanya even think of leaving this heavenly bliss?

As the meager rays of early morning sun slant into the room, I go limp, ignoring the nagging commands of my “uncle”. I am too tired to withstand another tortuous day of pulling rickshaws. Dragging me across the dusty floor, my “uncle” admonishes me, “AYA! WHY ARE YOU SO WORTHLESS NOW?!” He sighs loudly.

I spend a day lugging people around the city. As grime accumulates in my toenails, despair builds up in my mind

Returning home, I slump down onto the pile of rags where I sleep, trying to imagine the comforts of my old feather-bed. I gingerly poke my bare feet—oozing with grime-filled pus. Flinching as my raw hands contact the rags, I close my weary eyes. For once I wish I was back in my old world of comfort, however boring.

There's nothing to do here, in this huge compound apart from read, eat, and take lessons. I have already failed my classes, and I can't even explore the house! At least my old life was eventful—I had to run rickshaws, and do chores. The ZuJie – the once admired, colorful building — is now mundane and dull. “Come Vanya, it's time for the trip to NanKing!” “Mother” tries to sound excited, but I can see through the show now, just as I can see that the ZuJie isn't as it seems. I want to go back to the ghetto, my home.

I trudge into our car, putting my suitcase in the trunk. My “parents” get in as well, and our Ford speeds on. I stare out the window glumly.

Abruptly, our car screeches to a halt and the driver swears angrily. We have collided with a rickshaw. The rickshaw driver is about my age, perhaps even younger. A childish voice rings out, “Watch it!” I smile, then freeze—I remember that voice. I burst out of my seat wildly, and stare at the boy clutching the broken rickshaw.

He stares back.

“Stanislas?”

“Vanya?”

On the crowded railway platform of Shanghai, China, two twins stand hand in hand, gazing into the hazy distance. It is dawn, and they had been roused by their foster parents.

The incoming train grinds to a stop, jolting the twins back to reality. Reality, the fateful, fascinating, fickle world around them. They are jostled into the train's open door as the morning wind howls around them. The rhythmic bumping of the train rocks them to sleep, and they awake to a speaker blaring over the din: “This is the Vladivostok Station. All passengers headed for Vladivostok please get off.”

They disembark, looking furtively for a familiar brick house—their true home.

They walk on, lost, but not alone.

The Fall of Small Swords

Dulwich College Shanghai, Cheng, Jerry – 12

1855 September 26 6:00am Yu Garden, Shanghai

Liu Lichuan stared at the sunrise in the east. He could already see the large dust cloud created by the gathering army. He had always feared this day would come. He set down the notebook that he just finished writing on.

A man entered the room and reported that recon had spotted a force of about 8,000 soldiers assembled inside the French concession and that there was no news from the sailors. "Oh well," Liu muttered. Nothing that he wasn't expecting. He told the man to muster the forces and took out his opium pipe. The familiar calm swept over him.

He was proud of the Small Swords that he created. He created a country within Shanghai where there were no taxes, so the people were not robbed of their money. The city looked so much happier now. He created currency and trade. Given enough time, his little bubble might have grown into something bigger with the rest of the Taiping Tianguo rebellion.

He put his opium pipe in his coat and walked into one of the yards at Yu Garden. An old servant in his red uniform saluted at him. "Hong, you should go somewhere else. The imperial forces are coming," Liu said. He went to the stables where a stable boy was caring for his horse. "You too lad, go somewhere else and hide. The army is coming."

Liu steered his horse into the courtyard. It was a beautiful place with a small pond with lotus inside. On the side there were carefully pruned flowers. It was a place where he would come to relax and smoke some opium. He realized how much he would miss the place. He observed the panic. Everyone in Yu Garden seemed to be rushing as far as possible. He didn't blame them. If they were caught by the imperial forces near Yu Garden and identified, they would be punished.

He left the Garden to join the small group that had been gathered. There were about 1,000, at most. All of them had faces grim with determination. He took out his revolver and that was the signal. They started marching towards their 'barricade' which was near the border between Chinese Shanghai and the French concession.

They stood in their positions, behind the makeshift 'barricade.' The gates had been forced open, but there was no movement or sound. "Maybe they've given up!" said the man next to him. Then a single crack and the man next to him fell to the ground, blood coming out of his neck.

The first group to enter were from the Qing imperial army. Those enemies were quickly killed with a rain of fire. But after them came group after group of French, British, and American soldiers. Each time the enemies would push to close. Because of this, he and his men would have to fall back and make a new 'barricade.' Each time he would lose some of his men.

On the fifth push, Liu and his men finally had a bit of success. But the ground was already littered with bodies: some with the blue uniform of the enemy, but most wearing the red uniform of his men. Together with the blood of the fallen, almost everything was red. The last few attempts to push back the enemy had made them fall back to Yu Garden. However when the fifth push came, a few shots from the Small Swords snipers and a volley from the Second and Third Squadron killed most of enemies in the push. Then his men jumped over the 'barricade' and with a bit of hand to hand combat broke the enemy formation. The enemies retreated.

The sun was already casting long shadows. Liu knew that if the fight carried on into the night, they could escape under the cover of darkness. Now he needed to stall the enemy as much as possible. Many men had already thrown away their rifles as they had no more ammunition. They would probably all be killed the next time the enemies attacked.

"What do you say Yang?" Liu asked one of his soldiers, "Should we stop fighting?"

"Well, we do have a few more shots left," replied Yang hopefully.

"But we probably won't survive another push."

"The snipers still have a lo..."

The final push came. All the men fought bravely with their pistols and even Liu had to use his revolver. But eventually they were captured.

1855 September 26 6:00pm The French Concession, Shanghai

Gong stared west at Shanghai. "I, Gong Mujiu, the great Circuit Intendant of Shanghai forced out of his own home! What a disgrace!" Luckily he was going to get his revenge today! The French, British, and Americans finally agreed to help him take back Shanghai. Bill, a commander from the French concession handed him a telescope.

"Watch from afar," he said. Gong peered into the telescope. He could see some of the rebels from Small Swords peeking over the top of a loose barricade made out of random household items such as tables and beds. He also spotted some gun barrels sticking out of the windows in the buildings surrounding the street. Then his blood boiled as he stared at Liu. Next to him, a man was saying something. Gong tried to read his lips to learn what he was saying, but the man fell to the ground dead, before he could figure it out.

Gong cheerfully watched as the Small Swords rebels were forced to retreat a bit every single time they were attacked. Soon they would be cornered and Liu would be captured. Then the good part...

He was pulled out of his daydream when the French commander told him that they had captured all survivors and identified the bodies.

He walked to the prisoners inspecting each one to see if Liu was there. But Liu wasn't among them and was not among the dead either.

"Where is Liu?" he asked, barely able to suppress his anger.

"We are still searching for him," replied the French commander.

2017 May 12 3:00pm Yu Garden, Shanghai

Bob Chen was one of the builders at Yu Garden repairing the damage from the flood. They spent the entire morning pumping out the water still inside Yu Garden. Miraculously most of Yu Garden was not damaged severely. Bob was double checking the east area for damage.

He passed a courtyard filled with flowers, which were probably once beautiful but had been killed by the flood. He stepped into a house next to the courtyard. There were rumors among the builders that this was where the legendary rebel Liu Lichuan had once lived during his takeover. He noticed a hole in the floor which was probably caused by the flood, but upon closer examination, it looked like it was man-made. Bob realized that this was probably a secret compartment with a trapdoor that was destroyed during the flood.

Inside the secret compartment there was a book. Sadly, most of the pages were damaged, so that it was impossible to read them. However some writing on the last page was legible but only in broken bits. "*The defeat of Small Swords seems imminent... I am proud of... I will be going back home where they will never find me. There I will restart Small Swords... Small Swords will live forever...*" Underneath the sentence there were two characters which read "*Liu Lichuan.*"

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Dulwich College Shanghai, Sun, Jiawei – 13

A man rowed an old creaky wooden boat in the rain. Curtains formed around him. Rain drops fell from above, landing onto his black overgrown hair. The hair created waves rolling down the back of his neck, covering it in a bush of black. Drops of water slowly rolled down his head, making their way through his unshaved beard, squeezing through the openings in the strands of hair. The boat groaned from being tossed around like a toy by the waves. The waves did not show any signs of giving up but nor did the rain. The old man, was no exception either. Gripping both oars as if they were sacred monuments, he rowed the boat like there was no tomorrow.

After a few hours of this tedious battle between sea and man, the rain and waves finally cleared up, admitting their defeat. A few rays of sunlight were able to make it past the dense layer of cloud, illuminating the surrounding area. Slowing, a jungle appeared in the horizon. The jungle rose up into the sky so high that it towered over the man even at such distances. A sprawling jungle of shattered glass and rusted steel sat at the horizon, all the buildings in the jungle were impressively tall but there were three that rose up into the air, like pillars that held up the sky. The Shanghai Tower, The Shanghai World Financial Center and The Jin Mao Tower. As the man carried on rowing the boat, he got closer and closer to the complex of buildings. Most of the buildings at the edges of the forest were already submerged in water, slowly being washed away. As the man entered the center of the forest, the density of the buildings increased and maneuvering his boat became harder. The clouds had cleared away already and the sun began beating down on the man. A howling gust of wind blew through the abandoned city. Steel beams were mainly all that was left of some buildings. The sun scorched the man, leaving his shirt completely wet with sweat. The man carried on rowing with all his effort until he had reached the Shanghai tower. Surrounded by dilapidated buildings, the old man stood up in the boat and surveyed his surroundings. The reflective glass panes in the Shanghai tower displayed a desolate scenery, but when the old man looked into it, he saw something different. 30 years has passed since Shanghai's golden age. When Shanghai was at its peak. Shanghai in 2016. The old Shanghai.

The road was bustling with activity this morning. Everybody seemed to have something to do, somewhere to go. The sun rose high up into the sky as if it too, was on a mission. There was no refuge from this frenzy. The restaurant in the peace hotel by the river was definitely no exception. It was filled with foreigners and Chinese from end to end, all of them was just relaxing on a clear Saturday afternoon, watching boats roll up and down the river and admiring the three towers which makes up stunning view of the Shanghai skyline.

Jack Wong rushed down the street, bumping and squeezing past people as he ran as fast as he could towards the Restaurant. The cars on the road next to him were on a stand still, jammed together like a child's toys. The drivers all sat impatiently inside the cars, all with a face full of frustration. Jack looked down at the watch on his wrist. It was a simple watch that he had bought in the fake market. The time was 8:20. His eyes bulged as he looked at the time displayed on his watch. It has happened again. Somehow he is always late for work. Jack rubbed his eyes and looked down at the watch again, praying that he was hallucinating. Picking up the pace, he breaks into a sprint down the sidewalk, dodging people and flying past them. The restaurant was less than a kilometer away when Jack turned the corner and made it onto the Bund. Sprinting as fast as he can, he sped by many buildings, The Asia Building, The Shanghai Club, The Union Building and many more. Finally reaching the Peace hotel, Jack ran into an elevator and into his restaurant where he found, much to his demise, his boss waiting there for him. Hanging his head down in shame, he followed his boss into his boss's office.

His boss was furious at him, shouting at the top of his lungs. After an hour of endless shoutings and apologies, Jack Wong was finally able to leave the office and keep the job. Jack spend the rest of his day cleaning up the restaurant and preparing it for dinner meals. Being late has happened so often that he could not remember when was the last time he was actually on time. Jack had many good experiences at the peace restaurant, serving as a waiter.

The old man carried on rowing his boat, past the concrete jungle. He rowed over where the river used to be and into the bund. All of the buildings along the bund had been underwater for a long time. Seaweed grew up the sides of marble pillars, cracks and holes caused by the pressure of the water appeared in every single one of the buildings. He rowed over to the peace hotel and thought back to all of the good experiences he had there.

Jack Wong had worked in the restaurant at the Peace Hotel for almost his whole life until the building was submerged. Every day he worked there, it was a completely different. He used to admire boats wading their way through the water currents up and down the river when he was waiting on tables. Each day, a large number of people would come into the restaurant and just look at their phones the whole time, unaware of the piece of history they are sitting in. People who took photos of food before they ate them. People who complained about the food that people in twenty years time will kill for.

The old man stood up in his wooden boat and looked around him. The Old Shanghai came to life. Cars driving up and down the bund. Sidewalks bustling with people. Boats driving up and down the river. The three towers spiraling up into the sky. The glimmering lights of the night. Buildings buzzing with activity.

The Old Shanghai.

Shanghai Summer 1921

Fanling Rhenish Church Secondary School, Sung, King Ho John – 14

As the orphans grew through the summer of 1921, studying, practicing, and living with Master Zhou, running through the streets and mapping out their hideaways, they decided it would be a good idea to establish three safehouses in each of the French Concession, the Chinese City, and the International Settlement. A safehouse would simply be a stairwell or a false floor where they hid a cache of weapons. These could be used in case someone tried to kidnap Peace again.

And with each passing day into the late summer, Peace grew ever more beautiful, more alluring, while her prostitute mother fell deeper into debt. Master Zhou— who adored the three children— warned Peace, Sanmao and Ah Yi never to wander down certain streets, especially near the Bund, and showed the children how to position themselves in a diamond shape for protection when passing through busy markets. He also made them promise never to leave the International Settlement (but they did, with frequency). Master Zhou could see that the children were over-confident in their kung fu skills and fledgling black magic abilities.

Once per week, the children would skip along rooftops in the French Concession to pay a visit to Peace's mother for tea. This was very provocative, if not outright dangerous. Although her mother was always relieved to see Peace so happy and healthy with her 'brothers' (as Peace called the two boys), she would repeatedly beg Peace never to visit the brothel and always stay on guard: 'Here. Rub this coal on your cheeks, and hold your head down...walk slowly...' her mother would coo as if she were instructing the latest style in makeup.

Before the current uprising, Peace's mother had always intended to send Peace away to live in the countryside near Ningbo, but with increasing lawlessness throughout the countryside, she gave up any plan of allowing Peace to leave the city. Warlords and armed gangs roamed on the outside, while refugees, beggars, and ordinary families begged to be allowed to enter the city. Yet, Shanghai itself was in a state of unrest and far from being 'safe'....

The kidnapping finally took place on September 2nd, 1921. It was an ordinary day for the three children. The weather was clear, and Peace had let her guard down. She and Sanmao were at the corner buying steamed buns. Walking back to the gated yard of the Home for Poor Children, it seemed as though Peace was hopping when she tripped on an invisible wire. Instantaneously, a man turned from his place against a brick wall, produced a burlap sack, and bungled Peace into a waiting car. Sanmao witnessed the abduction from his vantage point and took note of the car's number plate.

Peace was now in the hands of the legendary Madam Wong, who greeted the car at the gates of her mansion. Madam Wong had heard of Peace's beauty: 'Welcome to my home. Don't be depressed, Little One, we will bring you everything you need. Let's get started with a proper breakfast and then we'll talk business.'

Madam Wong was charming (and she spoke the most beautiful Shanghaiese), but Peace was already planning her escape. Her knowledge of the city was so thorough that with just one glance out of the window, Peace knew exactly where she was within the International Settlement, and she even knew where the nearest safehouse happened to be: incredibly, it was in a garden shed behind the club next door. Peace tried not to stare in the direction of the cache as an exquisite congee was brought to the table.

‘Thank you, Madam. I’m hungry.’

Madam Wong wore heavy makeup to cover the scar on the right side of her face. She had big, beautiful eyes, a big nose, and a crooked mouth. When Peace smiled, Madam Wong’s crooked mouth would break into a crooked smile, and display a set of false teeth.

At that moment, two tall strangers burst into the room. They did not bother to introduce themselves: ‘All we want is silver. You can start by asking your mother for 600 taels,’

Peace saw a look of annoyance cross Madam Wong’s face. ‘Not now, boys. Can’t you see that two ladies are sharing breakfast?’

Peace smiled thankfully and tried to prolong the meal. She calmly spooned the congee without actually eating. She was sure that Sanmao and Ah Yin would arrive at any moment, and took a quick glance out of the front windows. The fine lead panes had been left open to catch the late summer breeze (Madam Wong and her foolish gang didn’t seem to be taking this kidnapping very seriously).

‘Perhaps Little Peace will become my adopted daughter for while; we have prepared the most beautiful rooms for her visit.’

Peace nodded slowly and forced a tight smile. Naturally, Peace would never consider leaving Master Zhou’s studio. She would never leave her brothers and her teacher, not even if she were given the opportunity to move into a luxurious mansion.

Suddenly and as expected, Peace heard a pebble bounce off the windowpane. She caught a glimpse of Ah Yin’s hair. He was already up on the roof.

‘Excuse me, Madam, do you mind if I wash my hands?’

Peace rose from her chair and took 3 steps back. Just then, the boys burst into the room through the window. They were brandishing two swords and a changion. SanMao threw the changion to Peace, which she caught it deftly with one hand.

‘Are you ready!?’ cried Ah Yin.

‘Yes, here we go!’ shouted Sanmao.

The boys backed the two strange men out of the room with smooth sword work, then locked them in the stairwell. One of the men bolted out the front door of the mansion to get more men and weapons. In the meantime, Madam Wong was still sitting at the breakfast table, sipping her congee and Peace was standing at the back wall, changjon at the ready.

Ah Yin was annoyed: ‘This was obviously your plan to kidnap Peace. You never think about the safety of others. Give us one reason now why we shouldn’t kill you.’

‘Children, children. I am like a mother to Peace, I want to take good care of her...and we never asked for any money. This is all a big misunderstanding,’ replied Madam Wong.

Peace was touched by Madam Wong’s words, but couldn’t erase the memory of two large men demanding 600 taels, just seven minutes ago. And these men were surely coming back.

‘Madam Wong, now I think it’s time for *you* to call *your* mother. We want 200 taels – now – or we will chop off your fingers. Listen to us. There is no one in this house to help you.’ stated Peace, who used her training to force a determined look, even though she secretly wanted to run.

Madam Wong started to look upset, but she didn’t seem at all regretful. She started to weep false tears and said that she only wanted companionship, not silver. The boys were surprised for a moment, but Sanmao made the demand once again: ‘You are a con woman, famous all over town for terrifying good people. The time for tears has passed. Get 200 taels from the safe. This is officially a **RAID**. Do it **NOW!**’

Madam Wong walked slowly to a jade carving in the corner of the room, opened a door in its base, and took out a leather purse. She turned to face the trio that had thwarted her plan: ‘Children, don’t become thieves. Please don’t be like me. Just leave now and walk away from this life, become honest citizens.’ Madam Wong said, clasping the red leather purse with her long, painted nails.

‘Don’t listen to her. She’s stalling. Grab it!’ shouted Sanmao, taking the bag.

The children debated whether or not to harm Madam Wong and finally decided that they would simply break her jade bangle. They agreed to do this instead of harming her body.

Madam Wong was made to hold her hand out flat on the table while Ah Yin smashed the flat of his blade onto the crystal green–white jade. It cracked and split into two. When the jade broke, Madam Wong turned ash grey and crumpled into a pile of tears. The children then rushed through the back window and ran down the alley at speed.

When they reached Master Zhou's studio, they finally dared to peek inside the red purse. It contained 80 gold taels! Truly a fortune. In handing it over, Madam Wong must have been convinced that she would get it back.

The following day, the children were training with Master Zhou when the news came out that Madam Wong had passed away. Peace felt an instant wave of shame and regret, and told the boys that breaking her jade wasn't necessary.

Ah Yin simply stared at the ceiling and then asked Peace if she'd like to get kidnapped again. After all, with Madam Wong gone, Shanghai would be a safer place.

Later that afternoon, Peace's mother sent a message to Master Zhou's studio: she was been released from all debt upon Madam Wong's passing, as it had been Madam Wong who had credited the brothel.

And so, soon after the summer of 1921, Peace's mother was able to open a small business in Master Zhou's building, mainly serving noodles and steamed bread. There would be no more need for Peace to walk to the corner in the early morning hours. Eventually, Peace's mother gave out so much free, delicious steamed bread to the orphans from The Home For Poor Children that the steamed bread stand on the corner had to pick up and move to a different part of the city.

The summer of 1921 was not the first, nor was it the last time that Peace got kidnapped in Shanghai. However, it was the most memorable kidnapping and formed one of the most treasured memories of her youth.

Twelve O'Clock

The Poor Love of a Poor previous Generation Guy

Harrow Beijing, Guo, Bill – 13

Many stories end with the end of life, but more stories are just beginning, I hope we can cherish the immediate people.

Well, the story begins. . . Story around five young people, my grandfather, grandmother, pro-foreign, grandfather, grandmother.

My grandmother and pro-grandfather, a child in the big city is the young lady, grandmother engaged in trade, grandfather home restaurants, you do not know the 90's when I saw my grandmother when the photo is how young shock, curls, sunglasses, Cheongsam, but also Diao with a cigarette. . . The grandfather, grandmother, grandfather, but it is the big cities around the neighbouring towns of small families. With the Japanese aggression, the five young people linked together, grandmother and pro-foreign public because the war had nothing, and they came to the big city to make a living grandfather, grandmother, grandfather met, grandmother and grandmother became Jinlan sisters.

Grandmother and affectionate public love, and tall and handsome pro-grandfather is attracted to the petite white and white (of course, my grandmother is first-class beauty, much more than the grandmother look good.).). Grandma is a very lively and very bold and assertive woman, that love fell in love, of course, also broke up breaking up, and good or no ambiguity. After a lapse of a few decades, my grandmother told me that the reason why I broke up with my grandfather, because he felt unreliable (the fact that she is right). So, my grandmother to switch to my honest grandfather's embrace, and that for my pro-grandfather is a huge blow. Grandpa told me that when the pro-grandfather met in the restaurant, intends to make things clear, and my grandfather almost kissed grandfather and fight. . . Later pro-foreign public or accept the reality, but the spirit of slump. At this time, my grandmother took her Jinlan good sisters, my grandmother, introduced to my pro-grandfather. Grandmother beautiful, stylish, gentle, because they are in the fall, so I have a common language and pro-foreign began a love. With grandparents married, in the second year, pro-grandparents also married.

Grandparents year after birth gave birth to a son, is my father. Not on the grandmother is pregnant, just pregnant pro-grandfather went to Shanghai to make a living, when the grandmother's prediction also in my grandmother pregnant, my pro-foreign entrusted his brother in the country and my grandmother divorced, The child at the age of 18 he should take away. Do not know how his brother's message, anyway, came to my grandmother's ear is the divorce, the children do not. In this case, in that era, grandmother lonely gave birth to a daughter, is my mother. Do not say that era, even now, a single mother is flies is more difficult, especially my grandmother, a squeamish what people do not do is how to spend that time.

At this time, I like my grandmother for a long time, introverted silence of the grandfather debut, and duty-bound to take care of my grandmother and my mother's responsibility, and my grandmother in my mother less than 1 year old married, married Regeneration of a female 2 children, my aunt is a 2 uncle. At that time they ushered in the famous Cultural Revolution, and then tight and severe era, my grandfather work diligently, pulling the big four children. And my mother, that was called the illegitimate daughter of the child, there is Qi the illegitimate daughter of that age, thin, capable, look good, melancholy. But the grandfather to my mother well, in the call to the countryside when the countryside, arranged for my aunt to go, in order to lead to aunt had a mild kidney disease. In this regard, my mother has been grateful to his grandfather, even if the pants to wear grandfather army trousers to go to school, was shouting illegitimate daughter, the trousers of the trousers big pockets stuffed mud. . . Mother did not tell my grandfather.

Calm day so passed, grandparents gave birth to four sons and a daughter, and my grandparents have two women and two sons. Grandmother with my grandmother said, and other eldest son (my dad) Zhang Da marry my mother, we know the root know, grandmother agreed. Grandmother in this life I was deeply hurt deep-related, so that her children's spouse has a great election preferences: must be poor, honest. This led to the marriage of two daughters are not because of love and began to grandmother is disgusted with my mother's first love, a wealthy family of Shanghai boys, insisted my mother married my dad, of course, my mother is very obedient, or later How

could I, ha. Even if my aunt is also, grandmother insisted that she marry medical students from Guangxi, on the grounds that the family is poor enough, honest people. How to say, although the grandmother's daughters are not starting marriage in love, but the daughters of the marriage did not repeat the grandmother was abandoned fate.

Originally, the passage of time so far away, but my mother was 40 years old, the neighbour hood notice to have a tracing from Australia. Yes, my parents outside the public for 40 years, separated by a Pacific, came to her daughter. At that time I was a teenager, pro-grandfather met with my mother, do not need to test DNA, that look is a mild printed. Pro-public told my mother his 40 years of experience, almost can be written as a book. Pro-foreign public in Hong Kong had a marriage, is a Japanese woman, and later divorced, there is a non-biological son, the boy let his second wife back to Japan. There is an affair, the woman gave birth to a pair of twin daughters, but the other side re-vote her husband's arms, went to the United States together, the woman's husband is a force in Hong Kong people, told me in this life are not to find his wife and daughter, But also to leave Hong Kong, or kill him. Affected by the affair of the pro-grandfather so fled to Australia, in Australia and a divorced Chinese women married, the woman with two daughters. In Australia, my smart grandfather to make money, lived a luxury car to live in the villa life, but also to do back to the previous generation of the line, open restaurants. Pro-grandfather to find my mother was very happy to see me even more happy, a steady flow of money to China to improve our lives at the time. 70-year-old day, the pro-grandfather over the ocean to my phone, said the old money to send us tigress unhappy, so he decided to divorce, give the woman raised two daughters, he felt enough. I was surprised, but the pro-grandfather still in the 71-year-old from his life in the third marriage.

Pro-foreign and my mother's recognition, has been no one dare tell my grandmother, even if the pro-grandfather back to the country, to see the grandfather and grandmother did not see 40 years, did not dare to see my grandmother. But no one said, does not mean that grandmother did not know, but grandmother has not asked. Until the recognition of the tenth year after the grandmother myocardial infarction failed to do a bypass, in 2002, twenty-nine years passed away. Dying, grandmother finally called my mother in the past, with the following dialogue, grandmother: he met you? My mother: seen. Grandmother: Did he know you were his own daughter? My mother: I know. Then my grandmother died. My mother said, in fact, pro-grandfather has been in her heart, she has been afraid to ask, has been not dare to mention, has been afraid to say, has not dared to see until dying, before asking out without pro Two Problems in the Name of Grandfather. Mother called the pro-grandfather, told his grandmother died, my mother said my grandfather has been on the phone has been no echo, and finally said: Hui Yi, put the phone hung, Hui Yi is my grandmother's name. 2 years later, the pro-grandfather died in Australia, seriously ill before the pro-foreign public board a long newspaper, looking for Japanese sons and American daughters, but until the death of them did not appear. As a result, my grandfather in bed and lawyers changed the will, all the real estate and parking spaces in cash, all left to my mother. . . Grandfather said that all the children he has tried to raise, whether biological or non-biological, except my mother, he is not a father to do a day's responsibility, can only be as compensation to my mother. In September 2010 the pro-grandfather died in Australia, before the death of no children around.

And it all happens in Shanghai.....

The New Tales of Shanghai

Harrow Beijing, Liu, Rita – 14

After the war the smoke of gunpowder split everywhere, The stench of the dead body are all over the trenches. I lie underneath the trenches repeating the same reaction over and over again ,lie down, rollover and hide under the crater

I muffled hear "the Japanese come again ready to fight "when I take my gun out just ready to hunted my 11th stick Japanese worm however the big stupid sticky worm thrown a grenade at me right on my face After the exploding the angel from above drag me.

"Is just a nightmare, don't worry honey you will be fine, I promise you will be ok, me and your dad decided you are going to a Hong Kong university and be a normal person ! "I'm tom, a boy who survive in the great war. That's how lucky I 'm. Now I 'm going to talk about what happened during that period, Right now 1877/01/01 I'm setting in the jail and writing this note, after an hour I'll say goodbye to the world.

夜上海，夜上海“every single night when I was bored I will open my window and looking at the night club that beside my house listen to the music and enjoy the ‘tintang” bus go cross the street, wait till the next day to come faster, however after the annoying winter passed everything completely changed, my life, my family and my schoolmate.

The Japanese soldiers are bossy, tyrant and scary. When I went to school they take away the teachers, when I back home they always potshotting, I can't even fall in sleep.

After a mouth later my mom and I decide to study in Hong Kong, the environment was much more calmer than shanghai. The first year of university was fantastic my crush always seat beside me, talk to me and no guns, no bloody bossy killer who always take the teachers away. That's when I realized life wasn't that hard. In the second year of college I bravely tell my crush and be together with her. She's name is Chengcheng ,who always wear a white cheongsam and a pair of glasses. Everyday we walk around the campus eat sandwiches on the grass talk about life and dreams. She teach me mathematics I help her with English language. Sometimes Chengcheng is my personal cheerleader when I playing basketball. Sometimes I watch Chengheng dance on the stage with white dress like in the wedding. We promise to accompany each other for the entire life, She will be my beautiful wife and I will be she's handsome husband.

“you should go back and look what happen.” Until the worst sentence coming out my life wasn't that perfect any more.

I accompany chengcheng back to shanghai to join the funeral.....never back to Hong kong again and not even finish the last year of college. When we back to shanghai everything changed, like a person who get lost in a rain forest and howling, swallow it pride bagging the monsters to her go ?and live in the rain forest forever ?In this world there's always a bigger rule over top of every single law that is the strongest live because they deserved the others have no right to say anything about it. From that thought I decide to use anything that I can do to help my country.

A thousand of people walk across the street yes, you are right I 'm one of the elite in the line, and leading the student to resist the president and' the Japanese . remember the night I seat at the window and looking and listening to the background sound track. That pulls me and give me determinations to fight for my country my home town shanghai!

3 years later,

After the war the smoke of gunpowder split everywhere, The stench of the dead body are all over the trenches. I lie underneath the trenches repeating the same reaction over and over again ,lie down, rollover and hide under the crater. The stench of dead body let me wake from the night mares again but this time, is for real. i put my guns ready and the running position ready, the trumpet start the sound I said to myself after the trumpet sound over run as fast as I can kill all the Japanese ! but the thing start to go the opposite way of how I think, my legs star shaking and my body is under my control. the captain point at using his gun and I finally scared by the war by the Japanese. I'm a deserter, a loser.

夜上海，夜上海 the back track still in my head over and over again, maybe that's my destining like what others been say on my dad 's funeral. I think this is the end of my story is time for me to die for my behavior and my own choice.

夜上海，夜上海.....

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Harrow Beijing, Park, David – 13

There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.

—Thornton Wilder—

This story begins when it was 1842 June 16th when “The Battle of WooSung” begins. This battle is when British people come and invade China, Shanghai and this is when I first saw her. She came to Shang Hai to cure wounded people in the army. She was the most beautiful person that I’ve ever seen. I have tried many times to see her. When I saw her for the second time was in August. I saw her sitting by the ocean. There were many guardians protecting her so, I failed to see her properly again. Few days later, my mum died. Actually, she was killed by the army of British. Then, I thought ‘If I could go to the past, I would tell my mum not to go out that day. If I could... If I could...’ I always think to myself to make a time-machine and save many people’s life. It was the only thing I could do... or... It was made for me to do.

The third time I saw her, It was midnight in the top of the ship. She was so beautiful. At that time, I didn’t have any friends to talk to or stay with. So I had to live a lonely life alone... Next day, It was the fourth time I’d ever seen her. She was looking at me. It felt like eating a cotton candy. Her eyes were very soft and the sunshine was really bright and I don’t know how but we were able to stay together because the house of British army had blown up for no reason. The next day, I was able to stay with her and I made a poem when I think of her.

“Physics in Love”

Mass is not proportional to volume

A girl as small as a violet

A girl who move like a flower petal

is pulling me towards her with more force than her mass

Just then, I am like Newton’s apple

I rolled towards her without stopping until I fell on her

With a thump, with a thump thump

My heart

Keeps bouncing between the sky and the ground

It was my first love.

(Kim InYook, 1963)

As the poem says, I realized it was my first love. Every night, I was full of anxiety that she loves me or not. However, that didn't go that long as I thought.

One day, I heard a voice in my dream... It sounded quite a bit like me. The man said "Don't go out..." and disappeared. So I just decided not to go out because, even though it wasn't real, it was too scared to see him again. Nothing happened, completely nothing... then I thought to myself. If I could tell to do or not to do something to myself in the younger days, I would say to young me to say to my mother not to go out and die... That's the only way I can save her. 1 month later, I was able to see the beautiful doctor. All the armies were gone but she decided to be left behind. No one knows the reason. I was on the way to the work and I saw her next to the sea. There was no one looking at her or me. I was really happy that she had recognized me. I heard a voice someone whispering next to me... there was no one but I heard some one whispering to me "Save her"... "Save her"... I didn't know what I should do. So I just ignored it and just went to work. On the night I've read a sad news which says a girl has died in the sea. Unluckily, the girl was the girl who I've seen before. Everyone felt sorry for the girl.

Love is like a war :
Easy to begin Hard to end!
—ancient Proverbs—

Then I remembered that someone said "Save her"... "Save her" and I also remembered that the voice was similar with the old man who was the man I saw in my dream.

20 years later, I was still in Shang Hai working and working. I'm now 29 years old now. Past 20 years were boring because It had same daily life everyday. Eat—work—eat—work—eat—work—sleep—wake up. However, today was different. I saw someone who I met before. It was the girl I met before in the war. I thought that she was dead but, what she was saying to me was different. She told me that I've saved her life. However, I couldn't remember anything. I was so curious about it and I started studying in the age of 29. It was quite hard but, I never gave up. When I was 60 years old, the mysteries made when I was young were actually solved. I've made a time—machine at the age of 60. It worked successfully. Therefore, I started solving all the mysteries I have. Firstly, I went to the time when my mum died. I found myself sleeping on the bed. So, I told to myself to say not to go out to my mum. Suddenly, unknown memory with my mum was in my head. It was a new experience I've ever experienced. Then it came to my memory, my mother had lived 40 years longer and I remembered she died 11 years ago. Then, I forgot how my mum died for the first time.

Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no lose of enthusiasm

—Winston Churchill—

I went to my working place when I was 15 with my time—machine and I helped myself doing a great job. I remembered when I was really confused with myself when the girl thanked me for saving her, I have no memory about the scene that I saving the girl. I used my time machine to go when I saw her next to the ocean. And I have witnessed a shocking thing. We was just getting ready to jump to the ocean. So I stopped her from going in the ocean. By doing this, I felt ashamed because I didn't save her when I was 9 years old even though I heard a voice to save her.

I was thinking to my self, 'I heard a voice from older me when I was younger. So a older me might be calling me for help.' After saving her, she went somewhere I don't know. So I decided to wait until I see her.

Nothing is as far away

As one minute ago

—Jim Bishop—

I'm now 80 years old... but my time machine is broken.. So I can't go anywhere... let's end my life.. I have nothing to achieve and I have no one to live for..

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

—Kahlil Gibran—

So this was my story was my life...

—David Park—

Story of Old Shanghai

Harrow Beijing, Xie, Jane – 14

In a mansion in the western outskirts of Shanghai, a woman was sitting very quietly in the hall of a very fashionable sofa, waiting for her husband. There is a company called Dong Yue, and there is a boss called Dan.

This woman, he just came near his wife called Rebecca, his father is a company boss, but because the company is nearly closed, will face the crisis of the collapse, can only let her daughter become a scapegoat. Danny would sit in the hall waiting for her husband to come back. Keeping her time waiting for him. What will she spend doing this month? Her heart began to get pain. In the empty hall, the light is dizzy. She is a lady, although is not as beautiful as she's other two sisters, but she is also really beautiful, but her husband did not even look at her so that the only thing she can do is to like with it. Outside the wind is big and loud, falling from time to time in the yard of the tree. The clock hit eleven, her heart began to pump, she knew he was coming back, and this morning he called a maid, said he would like to get some clothes at night at 11, let her help to prepare. The maid is called Nina. Nina was been bought at the age of ten, to help and take care of the lady in the house. The telephone bell sound like a baby was crying from the entire mansion. Rebecca doesn't know when Dan will come back tonight; she did not answer the phone.

The maid is calling Rebecca; don't know what happened but the master what to see you. By looking at the situation is a really big accident; it is something related to he's husband. Rebecca was happy because that she can see her husband. Many people was outside but her husband was not there only her husband's father Lorene, Lorene is not really healthy so always come back to home to have a rest. One of the many people come forward and say you are Dan's wife right? Don't you know your husband was died, At Monday night? Danny comes back home and she went out in a hurry. In the past she would not go out, but today is happens a really big problem, who will pay attention on her?

Half years later, she has become a very famous actress, then she come back to the house that she usually live in at tell other people what have she experience. She is begun to be more popular than before, and now she can go in or out the house freely. She still misses her husband even though her husband died but she will remember him forever.

Tales of Old Shanghai

Harrow Beijing, Zhao, James – 13

Old Shanghai, was a prosperous city. Everyone who pass this city would be surprised of economics, tasty snack, nice dress and so on. It was the most prosperous time, and it influent the world. If you go to Shanghai now, you usually can see something similar with old Shanghai. The building, food, cloth. These can be representative of the old Shanghai. There are so many foreign people in Shanghai, accept me...

I

My name is Charley, from England. Our family are very rich. We trust to put the money in Shanghai because most of the west of the concession are in Shanghai, and they implement the law of concession. It's the special legal status, so we can trust them. This is why I come to Shanghai again, for the business trade. I spend five weeks or so to get to Shanghai. It's a pretty long trip, and sometimes I feel so boring without chat with anybody. When I arrive, I see my uncle—Ben, he is over there. He is a very important person to me. When I just 4 years old, there were nobody has time to take care to me because they were so busy, except him. He taught to me how to write, how to read, how to play. He influences me a lot, even more than my father. He moves to Shanghai to live a few years ago.

Ben: 'Hey, Charley, how are you?'

Me: 'Fine, but a little bit tired, you know...is because of the steamer.'

Ben: 'Yeah, I know. Long time not see.'

Me: 'Yeah...so long.'

Then we go to his house. On the way home, I see something so interesting, or it could be something different with my country. There are many shops besides the road. When we get home, I see there is a stranger.

Ben: 'Oh, this is Marden, my attendant.'

He looks very... it's hard to explain how he is look like, but not as a good guy. But I don't worry about that at all. The next day, Uncle Ben takes me to a small shop with lots of cream.

'Bai que ling?' What is that?

'I just understand when I ask uncle Ben: it's a very very old shop with long history. All of females in Shanghai use the cream in this shop. Because Uncle Ben worked here for a half-year before, so he knows this. He knows that my mother would like it very much. So I buy some for her for the gift after two month. In the afternoon, we go to somewhere else. When the moon rises, we leave. It's so busy today, but so happy too. I just we are going to back to Uncle's house, but we aren't.' Nong...Tang'What is this.

Ben:'It is the famous type of Local-style dwelling houses, it has a long history.'

Me:'So are we going to live here tonight?'

Ben:'Yeah, I 'm going to let you know what the feeling of the local people live in

Local-style dwelling houses.'

Me:'Alright.'

II

This is a very impotent day. I'm going to have a business trade. Although my father trust them, but these aren't my money, so I feel nervous.

When I open my eyes, sunlights send into it. I go downstairs, but there are nobody there, in the living room. Then I turn my head to the direction to the window, they are waiting for me outside. I look at my watch , is 10:30 now. It's too late.

We go to the concession in a hurry. But I didn't see Marden this morning. When I in England with my father, he heard there are some place near the wharf , if we can buy this place, it would be a perfect opportunity to earn money. So I come to Shanghai. Also another reason is it's Shanghai here, it's a very prosperous city, with large crowds. We don't need to worry about the problem of people. When we arrive, we see a man.

Uncle Ben:'Hey, man'

Man:'Hey, Ben. What are you doing here?'

'We are going to trade with somebody here. Oh, forget to tell you, This is Charley, My nephew.'He point at me,'can you help us to find that man, or woman?'

'Sure.'

He take us to the house, When we enter the house, I'm very surprised. The man is...Marden!! But then, I'm going to discuss with him. The course is pretty smoothly, so we don't spend a very long time in discussing, then I write down my name on the contraction, then we back to home. I'm so relaxed, because I finish a big thing(for me it is a big thing).

Nowadays, Although Old Shanghai was gone, but the new Shanghai still is a prosperous city, it is the economic centre of China. It still have something similar with Old Shanghai!

The Sound in the Morgue

Harrow Beijing, Zhu, King – 14

In a small town there is a man, he gets up very early every day and goes to bed very late. On his way home, there is a small wood, which he has to cross every day. He bought an old car last year from a stranger, only because of the cheap offer. He spent only a month salary to get that looking-well car. Everything is fine with it except the braking system.

In the small town, there are not many people. The poor life over there has driven some of the locals out to the bigger cities to seek their dreaming fortune. The rest of the residents almost know each other, although they don't talk too much, they know everyone very well. So the news of Mr. Blake buying a car flew into everyone's ears including Christopher, the dustman of the town.

One early morning, when Blake drove his car to work, he noticed Christopher was cleaning the old and nearly rotten benches beside the pavement at which some elders often sit. As Blake was eager to show off, which he was dreaming to do, he deliberately slowed down, pulled down the window, and shouted to Christopher,

"Hey, Christ, still dusting?"

"Yep, man" with an slighting scorn on his face, Christopher nodded his head to Blake.

"What about a ride? Freezing cold out there." Said Blake.

"No, no, thank you, old pal, I have to work" refused Christopher.

"Okay, see you around " Blake pushed the pedal hard to make his car with a noisy start-off. He determined to mock at Christopher this way. Unfortunately, the poor brake system made the car nearly slipped into the gutter.

Christopher laughed out madly "Go to the Hell, stupid Blake."

That day, Blake worked very hard, he carried several corpses into the stove of crematory. He worked for 5 years on this job, according to his words, he had to take care of the dead. But the truth is nobody likes this scary job.

After he tidied everything around, it was quite late in the evening. He took his key out, dragged a pair of exhausted legs, he started his car. He really needed a sound sleep.

Approaching the wood, he instinctively slowed down. He noticed there was a shadow in front, he blew the horn, but the shadow was still there. He pushed hard on the braking pedal. Nothing happened. The car still rushed forward. And then, a miserable scream arose. A man, yes, a man was knocked off with the great force. The proud, or had been proud of car, finally stopped.

Blake opened the door, stormed to the man. "Oh, Lord, no, Christopher" but the man lying there without any reaction, only the sorrowful moaning echoed in the wood. "Come on, Christopher, are you okay?" Blake held Christopher's face which was covered with blood coming out from Christopher's mouth and eyes. There was still no response from Christopher.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" Blake murmured once and once again as he knelt down beside the badly injured man.

"I can't let people know I had killed Christopher, I will go to prison, I will lose everything, I will lose my job. Oh, I can take Christopher to my workplace, yes, I have to take him there."

He pulled Christopher with a hard force into his car.

He had to find a place to hide Christopher's body. He opened the door of the morgue. It was so quiet that he could hear his breath. He found a box which had contained an old lady died of cancer that afternoon. Now he had to open that box again, this was one process he was extremely reluctant to do in his job which meant the body in the box would be burned sooner or later.

Now Christopher was in the box, still with weak breath. Blake tremblingly close the box, he dare not look at Christopher's face. Suddenly a very weak voice from Christopher came out "Save me."

Blake was extremely frightened by this voice. He sat on the floor for the sudden fright. He cried "No, Christopher, please, I can't. Please forgive me. I can't lose my everything." He heavily shut the box.

He curled up in the corner of the morgue. One hour, two hours---

"Save me" a voice suddenly woke him up from the sleep. Blake looked around, he was still in the morgue. No one came into the room while he fell into sleep. He slowly approached the box which Christopher was in. Not a little bit of sound was in there. Then he shut off the door of the morgue and went home with a bike.

In the morning of the town, people found the street was very dirty. The early bird, Christopher, didn't show up. People began to look for him. But anywhere they searched, without a little sign of where Christopher should be. Everyone in the town didn't know where Christopher was except Blake, who pretended to look for Christopher with the company of another dweller in the town.

Blake went to work, to the room he was charge of, strictly he was the only man that in charge. He nervously opened the door, staring at the box which Christopher should be. Christopher was still there. The bloody and stiff face showed no sign of life. Blake was sure Christopher had been dead. He wanted to burn Christopher's body without people around would notice. But it was daytime, he had to quit the idea. He made a decision to burn Christopher at night.

When the final stream of sun disappeared, the street lights came on, Blake stood up from his oily armchair. He stepped forward to the box. "Save me", a voice in the corner of the morgue suddenly arose. He shouted out "Who's there?" he slowly moved to the corner, there was nothing, even a hair didn't show up there.

He looked around the morgue. Nothing was in the room except himself standing in the center and a dead body in the box. "Please, Christopher, please forgive me" he prayed and closed his eyes. "Save me" the voice arose once again in the room. Blake was really scared this time. He sat on the floor, closing his eyes, yelled to the box where Christopher had been. "I'm sorry, man, I'm sorry, please forgive me."

He tried to call drag the box open, but it didn't work. He pushed back very hard. The box opened, he found Christopher was Nolan right there. He could not believe it. He shut it down with a hard force, yes, definitely hard. He was afraid to hear that sound again. Shutting off the door, he started the car, and the drove home.

Getting near the wood, he was he quite frightened, he prayed everything could be fine. ButI suddenly the car stopped by itself or something else. "Save me" a sound echoed around. He rushed out of his car. In the empty wood, only his shadow in the light of the car.

He kept running forward. He was wanted to get home and hide in his room. ButI the sound"Save me" was anywhere he went. He ran and ran, attempting to escape the bothering of the sound.

The next morning, people who determined to look for Christopher, found Blake dead beside his car. A bloody and stiff face accompanied by a pair of astounding eyes.

The Murderer

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chao, Catherine – 12

I stopped in a corner, and was just in time to see someone running and disappearing along the road. I wanted to follow him, but something stopped me in my tracks. A rush of fear washed through me. I stood there, frozen. I could feel the sweat trickling down my cheek. My arms are shaking, my legs are trembling. Someone was lying there in the cold hard ground of spring. I was hoping he would move or at least twitch, but he stayed still, very still. I don't know what to do. His clothes were soaked red, and beside him was a knife, dripping with blood. I fell to my knees.

Is he dead?

I covered my eyes, unable to believe. It's the first time this had ever happened to me, the first time I ever saw a murderer, who ran away. I took a deep breath, and tried to stand up, despite my trembling knees, but I tripped, slipped, and touched the knife, right at the tip of it. Before I could react to what has happened, everything went black. I could feel myself falling into a deep black hole, down and down, as I did, there was a voice echoing inside me, "You are the murderer....." I was in total confusion and anxiety, until I heard an enormous crash.

I don't know what happened. I can't see. Can't hear. Can't think. The mysterious voice in my head gradually faded away. I couldn't understand what it meant. How can I be the murderer? For a second I thought I might be dead, but my heart keeps pounding rapidly, nonstop, so strong that I can feel it pumping in my body, as if I am getting hit in the chest every two seconds. I stretched out my arms and legs to see if there's anything around me, but before I could, my hands crashed straight into a hard wall. Filled with pain, I screamed, but before I could react to what just happened, I was disrupted by a sudden light. As my eyes gradually adjusted to the light, I was able to squinch, and realised in front of me was a very old house with cracks in every corner of the wall. That is when someone threw a bag of rice in my face. I have never seen anyone so disrespectful in my life. I wanted to stand up and tell her off, but either I was too shy or too mad, I opened my mouth, but nothing came out, so I just glared at her, and stomped away.

That was strange. I remember I was next to a person on the floor, how did I end up here? I decided to go home and just forget about everything, but something stopped me in my tracks. My mouth is wide open, my eyes are as big as saucers. I looked around. There were roads in the middle, and beside it were weird looking houses, which looked like they had been bombed or destroyed. On the right was a big wide ocean with tiny boats passing through, and a fascinating bridge in the middle of the deep blue sea. This is not where I lived. My house isn't even near any oceans or lakes. In fact, this place looked so similar to Shanghai..... At that exact moment, astonishingly, a group of soldiers walked passed, marching, and speaking chinese! The truth is in front of me.

I am in the history of Shanghai.

I don't know what to do. My head is all blank. Girls were wearing clothes with old fashioned flowers, and men had fans that they hold onto. In this weather, with the sun beating down with no mercy, I got to cool down somehow. I found a fan on the floor and immediately waved the fan as fast as possible, enjoying every moment of the slight wind blowing towards me, but the eye of calmness didn't last long. I was soon disturbed by a deathly silent. So quiet. Too quiet. I can sense something was wrong, then I realised everyone was staring at me, whispering and murmuring.

"She has no manners."

"I wonder what her parents taught her."

"Is she even ashamed of herself?"

I stood there, taking in their comments one by one as my mind raced. I looked around. There was a crowd surrounding me, with people glaring, who looked like they were about to punch me in the face any minute now. I put down the fan, just to be safe. One, two, three. I ran as fast as I can, I could hear people shouting and screaming at me as I pushed through the crowd. I hid in a corner. Without any warning, tears burst out of my eyes. I don't care about anything anymore, all I want to do is go home. My heart is filled with pain and sorrow. I thought of mother, waiting for me, worrying about me and trying to find out where I went. I thought of father, coming back from work, bringing a whole bunch candies for me, but then realising I was nowhere to be found. The more I thought, the more tears rushed out of my eyes, each one rolling down my cheek, and dropping onto the floor with a quiet splash.

Has it been one hour? Two? Three? I sat there alone, my eyes are so dry and aches with pain. I know I can't stay like this forever, so I decided to just go on with life. It's not the end of the world. I let the last tear roll down my cheek, and then summoned up all the energy to stand up. I can do it. I know, I will get over it somehow.

Night fell, and I decided to take a walk and get some fresh air, while calming myself down. I thought I could just forget about everything that had happened and have a normal life here, like everyone else. However, it's not as easy as I thought.

It's been 10 days of pain that I managed, and I finally settled down. I found a job in a factory which provides lunch for me. I met this really nice man, and he let me sleep in his house for a few days, until I earned enough money to rent a house myself. The sun has gone down, and the sky was soon dark. I decided to take a break, so I went out to get some fresh air in the night sky. I looked up. The moon was hanging up in the dark, giving a tint of light to the world below, giving a tint of hope to me. I walked down the empty street. It was so quiet you can hear a pin drop. I took a deep breath and let everything go, but the eye of peace didn't last long. At the corner of the street, I see a familiar looking man standing in darkness. I went over to check who he was, and that is when I realised that he was the person lying on the floor last time, killed by a murderer. That is when the dagger appeared in the palms of my hand, the dagger which brought me here. It didn't take me long to figure out what is happening. That man brought me here. I have to kill that man with the dagger, to go back. A rush of terror washed through me. I panicked. I want to go home more than anything, but how can I kill this innocent man?

"Hello!" That man said, smiling respectfully. I just stared at him in horror. His smile immediately vanished. "You look so pale, is something worrying you?" I don't know what to say, don't know what to think. Tears came bursting out of my eyes. "Sorry!" I screamed. I closed my eyes shut, I couldn't control myself, the thought of home just swung my arms up and pushed it right to that man in front of me.

There was a deathly silence. I opened my eyes to find that I was back to where I belong, but the moment of relief didn't last long. The person lying on the floor didn't move, nor twitch. He just lied there, as still as can be, while I watched the blood gradually soaking through his shirt. That is when I heard footsteps running towards my way. I could see a shadow getting closer and closer, and found that the child looked surprisingly similar to me. I ran away in fear along the road, and as I did, my mind raced. That child, the one finding out what had happened, was just like me before. The person I saw last time, who was running away, is what I'm doing now. The exact same scene appeared in front of my eyes. That is when I finally understood the voice I heard.

I was the murderer.

The Pickpockets

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Fox, Molly – 13

27/12/2013

Her body lay there, cold in the morning sunlight, the light breeze brushing her hair into patterns on the floor. Her hands frosted in a light layer of ice, beautiful and still. A cry disturbs the morning silence: high and piercing, as the earliest risers of the city see the body lying there. A small crowd gather, huddled together, staring at the silent cold body. The sound of pounding footsteps echoes down the small alley and the crowd parts as a woman sinks to her knees, her face buried in her hands. Her cry a whisper, but audible to everyone gathered around.

26/12/2013

Luciana looks round the corner, there's the normal crowd of people shopping, people taking pictures, people talking. Enough people for her to go unnoticed, for her to get what she needs. She turns around to face the others and whistle three times, the signal that they are clear to go. Adelia sprints off to the left, Lucca to the right, Mariella and her brother Simon run ahead to the northern edge of the crowd, and she walks into the middle of the swarming crowd. She looks at the second-hand watch on her wrist; it's time. She walks casually behind a middle-aged man in a long brown coat, she can see his wallet sticking out of his coat pocket, bulging with newly printed money, and as he stops to talk to what must be a friend, she takes her chance. She swiftly pinches the wallet out of his pocket, she feels bad, but she knows that she must do it; it's the only way that she can survive, that they can survive. She pushes the wallet into her own shabby jacket and carries on walking. The next victim is a tall blond woman in high heels and a fur coat. She looks rich. She delves into the woman's handbag whilst she is waiting in the coffee shop for her drink, but her hand gets caught on something. She tries to pull her hand out as carefully as she can, but she's not careful enough, the woman looks around and sees her with her hand in her bag. "What do you think you're doing?" She says, her voice is high, almost squeaky, but snappy and sharp. She steps back as much as she can without pulling the bag off the woman's shoulder, "Sorry," Luciana stammers. "I thought that I dropped my phone in your bag and I was trying to look for it without disturbing you." It's a lame excuse, it even sounds stupid to her, but the woman seems to fall for it. And as she starts taking things out of her bag and putting them on a table, looking for her phone, Luciana notices her wallet on the table, she snatches it and runs. The woman looks up and sees her wallet gone; her pink crocodile skin wallet gone, and the brown tail of Luciana's coat disappearing into the distance.

She knows it's me; I know I've been caught. Thoughts whirl around Luciana's head and she sinks to the ground as a fresh wave of guilt floods into her. I'll have to warn the others, we'll have to find a different part of the city, a new place to stay, a new place to survive. And it's all my fault. Footsteps echo down the winding alleyway behind the houses, and the shadow of someone running closer. Luciana steps back into the shadows, hoping she won't be seen. "Luciana!" the shouts are getting closer, she braces herself. "There you are! What are you doing hiding in a back alley? I've been looking for you everywhere!" says Mariella, her voice muffled as she throws her arms around Luciana's neck. "I can't breathe," stammers Luciana. "It's a long story anyway, we need to be quick, find the others. Oh – where's Simon?" She asks realising that for once Mariella's twin brother – Simon – wasn't by her side. "Oh he ran off, doesn't matter! But word is going around that some woman had nearly a million dollars stolen from her. You'll never guess who it was! It was ... oh ..." Mariella breaks off as she sees Luciana's expression. "Oh, it wasn't you was it? Please say it wasn't you." Mariella's short dark hair hangs down in front of her face as she looks at her feet, fiddling with her hair-tie, praying for someone to help her. Minutes pass in awkward silence, finally, Mariella sighs

“Come on then, we must tell the others and find a new place to stay. They’ll be onto us, the whole city looking for you.”

27/12/2016

‘Who is it?’ ‘Who did it?’ questions circle around the ever-growing crowd. She stamps her foot, getting more and more agitated at the questions, and anxious for her brother to find her. Where is he? When I need him most, he disappears. Angry thoughts fill her head. It was her fault; she should have looked after her more; checked the shadows for people. It was her job, and she’d failed. She’d known that people were after her; she’d just not thought that they would kill her. It was her fault. Silent tears ran down her cheeks, and her short black hair hung limp and greasy. And finally the shout of her name.

26/12/2013

They ran through the tightly packed crowd. Weaving in and out of people, trying to find the others, the blaring lights and excited rapid chatting distracting them. Soon they were sitting in an old cafe on the side of the street, completely disorientated and lost. Mariella pulls a phone out of her pocket, it’s shiny and new, and definitely not hers. ‘Where did you get that from?’ asks Luciana. Mariella shrugs, and replies ‘Places.’ They sit in silence, as Mariella tries phoning the one phone that all five of them own. Her eyes flick up to meet Luciana’s, ‘They’re not answering.’ Luciana’s eyes fill with panic, it was her mess, and now the others were potentially in danger. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll find them and warn them,’ but Mariella’s soothing voice did nothing to calm the panicked thoughts racing through Luciana’s head.

They were sitting on the porch of a derelict building in the back streets of the old city, Luciana’s fingers were tracing the patterns imprinted into the concrete, and suddenly she lifts her head and looks straight at Mariella. ‘You mentioned the ... the woman’s name earlier on – who is she?’ Mariella’s eyes flitted down to her hands, ‘Er ... she was just someone I used to know.’ She said hoping that it was enough for Luciana, but knowing that it wasn’t; Luciana always pressed for more information. Luciana rolls her eyes, ‘Her name. Please Mariella, it’s not much. You owe it to me.’ Mariella’s laughs fill the air, cold and sarcastic, ‘I don’t owe anything to you. You’re the one who’s got us in this trouble. I couldn’t care less if you were found dead in the morning, because you were the one who messed with her, and you’re the one who should have to pay for it.’ Luciana’s eyes fill with tears, ‘Well, maybe if you’d told me that she was here then I wouldn’t have stolen her wallet. You’re the one who knows her, how was I to know that she would ... would, I don’t know maybe try to kill me.’ Luciana’s words cut Mariella like a knife, ‘I’m sorry I was just over exaggerating; of course she won’t try to kill you. You just ... don’t want to be caught. Anyway if you really want to know her name, it’s Cecilia Yeung.’

Luciana sat on the edge of the pavement, alone; Mariella had gone off to find her brother, and the others were nowhere to be seen. The sound of footsteps patters down the empty street. She looks around, seeing a shadow move into the darkness surrounding her, the now silent street making her feel uncomfortable. She curls her feet up, folding her knees into her body, looking at the moon, a precious pearl in the vast ocean of darkness. The footsteps start again, making her jump, as she stands to her feet. A woman approaches her, her hair swinging in a neat ponytail, her high-heels clicking. The moonlight illuminates her face, and as Luciana’s eyes rise to meet hers, the bang of a bullet echoes down the street. Her body lies there, glassy-eyed and mouth wide open in a scream for help.

The sun rises and the early-wakers of the city are up and wandering the streets of the old city. Among that crowd is Mariella, having found her brother and the others last night, she now looks for Luciana, her best friend. She spots a small crowd gathering at the opening of one of the back streets, and follows the gathering of people. As she pushes her way to the front of the crowd she hears whispers. Whispers about a body; whispers about a young woman. Her stomach flips as she reaches the front, a cry escapes her lips, and her knees buckle. A single word escapes her mouth, "Luciana!"

The Dance of the Young Lion

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lam, Adrian – 12

Much was at stake for Ming. As Ming regained his balance, he blinked away his tears. Ming glimpsed at the dagger, hidden away from view in his opponent's shoes. But he could not avoid it and now the pain in his leg was very apparent. Still, he could not afford to lose. He recalled why he wanted his revenge so much...

A decade ago, the dark old Shanghai streets were as silent as they were dangerous. That evening, Jack, Ming's father, was making his way home swiftly. The moonlight barely glimmered in the apparent darkness. To an outsider, old Shanghai in the 1930's was a mystical place. It was full of stories with violent fights, yet it was a place with extravagant celebrations. But Jack knew better. He clasped his jacket tightly around his neck and moved quickly through the unlit streets. He shook his head, his apparent pensive faded away, as memoirs of his past days with lion dances and secret societies crept out of his thoughts. The eerie silence contrasted with the rhythmic pounding of his own heartbeat.

A loud crash broke the silence and startled Jack. Jack stopped dead in his tracks. He knew he was discovered. "It has been a long time," the shadows called out. Jack didn't need to see the face of the voice. He knew it belonged to a crony of Jingwu association. "It's time to return to us," the darkness asserted.

Jack straightened and looked to the darkness. His sharp eyes unwavering. "No," he simply said. "Very well." The nameless crony leaped from a nearby villa and caught Jack off-guard. Despite being well-trained, Jack was no match for the underhandedness of the Jingwu clan. In the distance, young Ming watched in horror as his father fell on his knees, kneeling limply. He choked back sobs and held his hands tightly over his mouth, afraid to make a noise. The darkness had taken his father.

Another sharp pang struck Ming, but this time, the pain came from recalling the events leading to his father's death. This reminder was enough to make Ming more determined to win. Inside his red lion costume, Ming found the courage he needed to endure the pain. He stood up strongly, resisting the urge to give up, and he lunged back.

While Ming had been filled with determination, he wasn't focused. His rival was patient. Time and again, his opponent waited for the perfect opportunity. His fiery eyes declaring his wrath for Ming. He swung his arms back, loading it with all his effort. In an instant, he avoided Ming's advance, dashed towards him and released his punch. BOOM, a loud sound rang through the battlefield. The cheering crowd was suddenly silent.

The audience around the battlefield held their breaths in anticipation. They waited for the engulfing dust to lift from both lion dancers. In the midst of the battlefield, a golden lion stood tall and looked down triumphantly at the slain red lion.

As Ming's eyes slowly lifted, the sun shining through the room made Ming wince. He painfully awakened and remembered that he had been in a coma for over two whole months! Knowing he wasted so much of his time, he

sat up filled with anger and anguish. The determination that used to be within him was gone just like Jack... Those shadows of darkness have returned. Yet again, those shadows of darkness took something valuable and dear to Ming.

On the surface, it appeared to Ming that he had lost everything. But one thing that could not be taken from him was his thirst for learning and his drive for perfection. Ming was willing to sacrifice anything – material things, valuable things – in return for knowledge.

After he had recovered, he looked everywhere, even to the boundaries of the Earth, to find Jack's old master. Purposeful and dedicated, Ming trained from dusk till dawn until he dripped blood, sweat and tears. Two years in training, Master Sifu has taught all he knew to Ming. Master Sifu knew Ming was ready.

Ming returned to the battlefield for a rematch with his old nemesis, a disciple of Jingwu. Ready and less reckless this time, Ming stepped forward. Spreading his legs and bending his knees, Ming's intricate footwork exuded strength and stability. His enemy struck. Ming evaded effortlessly. His challenger lifted up his leg, branched out his arms and moved his arms in a clockwise motion. Mimicry of eagle claw. The disciple swooped and Ming saw through the simple trick. As Ming knocked over the opposer's advance, a silvery object glistened in the sunlight. A knife!

Ming feigned left, then right, like a dancing red lion. The slash could not reach him this time. Sleeping-lion Ming was too tough, and try as his rival may, no punch could be landed on Ming.

Ming continued to provoke and mock the Jingwu disciple.

It was apparent who won this time around, as the powerful red lion danced circles around the struggling golden one. "Why don't you kill me?" the disciple pleaded. But Ming ignored him because in every way, Ming was more superior. No longer driven by rage and thoughts of revenge, Ming understood why his lion suit was red in colour. It symbolized a courage to stand up to your inner demons and to your bullies. Jack wouldn't have wanted Ming to be blindsided by vengeance. Jack would've been proud of Ming today, the strong and brave Ming, worthy of holding his red lion head high...

The Mystery of Mysteries

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Mesquita De Melo, Matilde – 13

The creak of a floorboard woke me up at the crack of dawn. Light from the dusty table lamp next to me seeped into my vision. I slowly fluttered awake and shifted up into a seated position with my back against the delicately engraved wardrobe behind me. My head throbbed from last night, I pulled out my hair tie from in between the strands of my hair and snapped it onto my wrist, only to then slip on my worn out trainers and sling on my battered backpack. Aching, I staggered up, my back straining from last night's exertions.

I hobbled uneasily over to the open doorway and was immediately introduced to the Shanghai morning rays of sunlight. A yawn escaped me as I noticed the meticulous pattern of skyscrapers. Like a beautifully, well thought out piece of art, a wave of metal cascading down only to swoop back up leading into the great Shanghai tower. I knew I was only here for one reason but how wonderful it would be to take in the views of Shanghai from six hundred meters up in the sky. One could only dream.

I slowly limped over to cross the street, drawing no attention to myself when I spotted an agile blur. A movement so quick that only one with the eyes of a screech owl could identify. This fleeting mystery dashed into an alley, a dark nauseating road of obscurity.

Now me, being an inquisitive human being, pursued this mysterious figure and found myself coming face to face with my mystery.

A girl.

No, not just any normal girl, a scrawny little creature. And even though this little girl looked frail and drained, her eyes had a spark, a spark of which bustled with eagerness and fascination.

Fascinating *fear*.

"Are you lost?" I inquired.

She shook her head.

"Not lost— but scared" she stuttered. A flow of questions ebbed into my mind.

"What are you scared of?" I sputtered.

"Time— no— there *is* no time." She hissed under her breath. Then she did something unexpected. She whizzed past me, and gently laid her small hand on the great Shanghai tower, then *disappeared*.

Nothing but the great structure of steel and metal was left standing. No little six-year-old girl standing next to it. Just a building in the middle of a bustling city. Then I remembered. My mission as to *why* I came here in the first place. A poem, a beautifully written piece of poetry that had a mystery to it. But then again why would that be

surprising? Mysteries. They were always my weakness, my forte and my passion. And this specific mysterious poem read:

One reason, one task

To unveil the one behind the mask.

Away you shall go, travelling over the sea,

To discover a world and unlock with a key.

Someone will find you, it's just destiny

But don't underestimate the power that she will free.

Find this person unlock this secret.

Don't leave the city before you have reached it.

What does that mean? I didn't know either but what if. What *if* this disappearing mystery, this little girl was *my* mystery? My *destiny*. I had to find out.

So I ran. No, I *sprinted* towards the Shanghai tower; I placed my hand against the metallic structure and nothing. No zapping feeling, no tingling sensation and most definitely no disappearing magic. Then I thought. Of *course* there wasn't an invisible six-year-old running around the city. It was just my imagination. My silly little mind playing games. So I left, I sulked. But why would that be surprising? I was disappointed, I had high expectations and as always I was disappointed and let down. Mysteries, it's what they did to you.

I left the city center, and walked back home with a drooped head. I entered my battered down residence and standing there waiting for me was a little six-year-old girl looking back at me with those eyes filled with fascination.

"Wha—what are you doing here?" I stuttered.

"I have a mission, I am here to meet someone and by your reaction to my disappearing. I am quite convinced it is you."

My jaw had dropped and my pupils enlarged. The girl said nothing, she just grabbed my wrist and dragged me out of the room. Much of the rest was a blur. But I do remember zapping across the city and being brought into some sort of factory. It was dark. A gloomy atmosphere filled the space.

Then there was a click and bright lights shone. There were people standing on every side of the room, staring at me.

"Welcome." They all said in unison.

"We are here to help you with your mystery. Solve it or fail it we are by your side, to win or lose with you we shall abide."

Then the light dimmed and they all started to shuffle. Not one whisper filled the air, after a while they were gone and I was once again left with the girl whom had brought me here.

“What is your name?” I asked, I felt I should know how to address this mysterious girl.

“Rayna.” She whispered. She was still quiet but much less fear lay in her eyes.

“We mustn’t waste any time, we must hurry to find the key to the mystery.” She hastily said this as she grabbed my wrist –once again– and fled through two battered down doors. Rayna then led me into a room and switched on the light. This room was completely empty except for a painting of a key. A *key*? No, it was too easy. This couldn’t be it. Don’t disappoint yourself again I told myself.

“So, what’s with the painting?” I asked inquisitively.

“Well it’s the map to the mystery.” Rayna answered with a sigh. She pulled a pocketknife out of her back pocket and plunged it into the middle of the painting. Without hesitation, she dragged her knife down with such a force and ripped the painting open only to reveal an obscure compartment behind. Nothing lay behind aside from a tightly strapped together bundle of papers. Rayna reached in and grabbed it. She ruptured the rubber band holding it together and handed me the pile.

“I am here to help you, not do it *for* you” I nodded my head as I observed the papers. They were all coated in dust, I swept it off and started reading through. The first twenty or so pages were irrelevant information, but, the more I got into the pile, the more interesting and useful the information was. One piece was particularly good.

Look high and low

Look side to side

For where the wind blows

Is where the mystery abides

No creature shall stop you

But the game of minds itself

So hurry up searching

For this mystery is precious, only one of itself.

This specific piece gave me motivation, reason, and definitely helped me with my search for after that I set off, I searched high and low through the city to find the answer. The *key*. Nothing was found for the next 2 days, but I didn’t give up, give in or give any sign of disappointment. I was going to find it, I *had* to. So I went in pursuit to find the key to my mystery and at last, I was rewarded for my patience. An old, abandoned building which you could barely breath in thanks to the enormous intakes of dust. This is it, I thought, I had been studying and working so hard for the past few days that this *had* to be right. Right? I carefully shuffled in. There was nothing in the room except for a long velvet drape that seemed to be covering up something important, something *mysterious*? And also there was a note plastered onto this piece of cloth. A message.

You have now arrived

For however long it may have took

Yes this is the mystery

That shall leave you shook

No this isn't the secret to world hunger or peace

This is just the truth that separates you and me

For this is the mystery you think is unsolvable

But really it isn't, its nothing but evolvable

So leave this city not sad or disappointed

But leave it knowing it was to just to help you be pinpointed.

I was so eager, so excited. I was anticipating this moment for so long. I carefully placed the note aside and slowly with care I peeled the velvet off the mysterious object. My jaw dropped open.

A mirror.

That was my mystery? My so long anticipated mystery?

Yes in fact it was because at the time I didn't know what it meant, but now, much later I have realized. I, I was the mystery. I thought I needed to follow everything around and needed answers to all my questions but all I needed was to be put in the right direction. Facing myself.

The Red Room

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ng, Giselle – 13

Across the paddy fields, over a stream, there was a forsaken and rusty Shikumen town house called the Red Room. The house always had one light on in the west bedroom. However, nobody had lived there for centuries. It was speculated that a dark spirit lurked within.

Amongst the villagers in a nearby village, Wei Hsu in particular, was curious about the Red Room. His curiosity became his fascination and as he grew from year to year, he vowed he would explore the Red Room for himself by his fifteenth birthday.

Fifteen years of curiosity went by. One windy night, trees swayed from side to side in the distance, Wei arrived at the foot of the dark doorstep of the Red Room, the air suddenly still, musty and stale. Petrified with chills down his spine, he stepped in, tiptoed as quietly as a mouse. It was pitch black; tension was all around him until a deep hollow voice cracked the silence. Then, a blinding light flashed across his face, three doors appeared, one red, one green one

black. The deep voice echoed: “Wei, come in. Aren’t you curious?” Slouched with fear, he stepped through the red door while keeping his head low; his bodily hair stood as if he was electrocuted. As he walked across the floorboards they started to collapse all around. He ran as fast as he could as if there was no tomorrow. Wei entered a labyrinth of eeriness and bewilderment. He circled every corner he could possibly find as if the world was spinning around his head.

Every few meters Wei ran, the voice echoed his curiosity and questioned his state of mind with riddles to solve. Feeling hopeless, he wondered what his fate would have brought him to if he had chosen the green door instead. Just then, he fell through a crack in the floor; green doors swirled all around him, like a whirlwind. It was as if the spirit of the Red Room whispered his thoughts.

Shadows repeatedly whispered: “One step closer...one step closer...” Figures barely touching the floor shoved him through one of the swirling green doors. Wei shut his eyes tightly in fear of not knowing what awaited him beyond. Abruptly, darkness surrounded him, slowly climbing up his body creeping into his very soul. His sensations diminished, memory faded, then in a ‘Poof’, he disappeared into thin air. Suddenly, Wei regained consciousness as he landed on the roof of the Shikumen townhouse. Liquid ash dripped down his face, he started to chant an ancient incantation unleashing shadows into the sky, which made the streets rampage into chaos. Within moments, darkness loomed as the shadows conquered the surrounding villages of the Red Room.

The panic stricken villages were out of control, fear and chaos were everywhere and nobody understood what had happened. With Wei missing, his family wondered if it was his doing because they knew about his peculiar fascination with the dark spirits of the Red Room. When they entered his room to search for clues, under his bed, they found a case full of notes, pictures and research; one wall was covered with unusual symbols that were beyond what they comprehended, it was almost as if Wei had practiced dark magic. It quickly became clear to them what he was trying to achieve. With torches in hand, Wei’s family and all adults in his village fearlessly fought their way through the shadows towards the Red Room. It was too late. Grief stricken, they knew the only way to stop this disaster was to destroy Wei. They searched for every sharp object they could find to stab him but failed over and over again, while others decided to set the house on fire.

Weakened by the attacks and as fire tore through the house, darkness slowly began to lift. Wei’s family and the villagers knew the fateful consequences as legend had it that if the Shikumen townhouse was destroyed, the unleashed shadows would kill the possessed soul along with it. As the house crumbled to dust, the shadows started to scream in torture, poured themselves out of Wei’s body before vanishing into thin air, as did Wei’s body. Wei was gone forever. The sinister pain pierced through witnessing soul like a knife stabbed through their hearts, a feeling they would never forget.

The Year of the Snake

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Sharma, Callum – 12

To my lovely Grandson Yao Jin,

I miss you very much and I have been thinking of you a lot lately. I see photos of you which bring a smile to my face and I hope that you are 很好. You have grown into a handsome young man and I'm pleased to hear about your accomplishments. I am writing to you now as I feel death is watching me and I may not see you again. When you were younger I was afraid of telling you my adventures, but now my time is nearly over and I must tell you a secret....

It started a long time ago in the year of 1932 in Old Shanghai when it was known as “the Paris of the East and the New York of the West.” It was a time of new theater, popular music, glamour and pretty girls wearing beautiful bright orange and scarlet qipaos. The night sky was filled with bright lights and fireworks; there were the sounds of singing and shouting from the Europeans and the smell of money.

I, however, was living in a tiny modest apartment with my dearest mother, father and sister who you unfortunately never met. I was working in a clothes factory for years that paid quite well as the young and rich loved new fashion. Despite the glamour, it was quite an ordinary life for us and I would often secretly watch the glamorous people with their elaborate and colourful clothes hoping one day that I could be like them.

The day it happened was a busy day at work in the clothes factory; people working and not stopping until they have finished with sweat rolling down their faces. We got out quite late because Chinese New Year was coming closer so we have to make double amount of clothes for the locals and foreigners. Everybody had expensive new clothes for Chinese New Year!

I was walking my usual route home along The Bund but it seemed quieter than usual. I remember wondering if perhaps this was the calm before the storm of Chinese New Year. As I walked along the quieter part of the Bund, it felt eerie with strange menacing shadows looking at me. Suddenly, I heard noises. Whispering, hissing and strange noises. I scanned around, trying to look at where the noise was coming from but I couldn't see anything. I quickened my step but then heard the hissing started again like it was following me and then I saw it. Two huge gleaming blood red eyes staring right at me. I froze like a statue. I could feel a chill running down my spine and I was paralyzed to the spot. Then I ran. I ran as fast as I could all the way to my little wooden house in Chang Nin. I tried to convince myself it was a dream and that I was imagining things, as I was tired. But all night I could just think of nothing but those humongous gleaming red eyes.

I woke the next day with a start! Did that really happen last night? Surely not, I must have been imagining things and perhaps the red lights were the lights of a ship, I'd seen them so many times. I put it out of my mind and continued to work and walked home as usual along The Bund. I was slightly apprehensive but I saw nothing and laughed to my crazy imagination and myself. Then, I heard it. HISSSSSSS, the same noise again. Then, I saw those same gleaming blood red eyes and I knew it was not my imagination. The same feeling came over me, the feeling of a chill slowly running down my back. Then the creature moved. The blood red eyes were followed by emerald green scaly skin curling as slithering towards me. I froze like a statue. I couldn't move. I should of run. But I couldn't.

The serpent rose above me, engulfing me with its mightiness. It spoke in a hissing noise “Don’t come back here tomorrow” The serpent hissed again and then was gone. I stood still and then frantically looked around the dead dark harbor but could see nothing. I ran as fast as I could all the way home.

The next day at work I was working harder than I have ever done before to take my mind off the events from the night before but I could not stop thinking about it. I was in a daze all day but luckily got let out early and used another route to my house away from The Bund. It was the afternoon and I ignored the beautiful sunset filled with pale pinks, oranges and amazing reds. I returned to an empty house and fell asleep from the exhaustion of the last two days.

A few hours later my parents came in screaming and asking if I was okay. I was very confused. They told me that there were several murders on the street of the Bund where I usually walk home. I was in shock! Had the serpent protected me? Why? Why me? I had so many questions: how did the serpent know, how did I speak to the serpent and why would the serpent protect me?

I walked home the next, this time purposely the same route on the bund. I wanted to see the serpent. I felt less scared, more curious. I saw the same gleaming red eyes and emerald scales rise up and although I was still shaking, I wanted to stay and ask questions. I looked him right in the eyes with false bravery. Before I could muster up the courage to speak, the serpent looked right at me and hissed “ You were born in the year of the snake and I am here to protect you and give you longevity and great fortune”Then it disappeared again as quickly as before.

My dear grandson, I imagine that you are reading this and not believing a word of it and I would not blame you. You may also be wondering why I am telling you this story. Well, my dear, I am now 99 years of age and as you know I have had great health and fortune in my life. I know my dear grandson that you were also born in the Year of the Snake in 2001. Perhaps one day when you visit Shanghai you will be curious enough to take walk along the Bund at night and you too will see the Red Eyed Serpent. Or perhaps not and then you will never know...

With all my love

YeYe

Courtesan

Heep Yunn School, Chong, Kylie – 14

I'm not just in it for the money.

It's the heady, intoxicating rush of power, the knowledge that I hold someone's heart in the palm of my hands, bending men to my will with a pout and flutter of the eyelash.

The money's certainly a factor, though. People pay you surprisingly well for breaking their heart.

Making people fall in love with you is addictive. It's almost like a game— the initial eye contact from across the room, the coy smile and feigned blush, the courtship, the clink of copper, the broken heart. I make it a point to ruin all other girls for my clients, and besotted earnestness is proof that I've done my job. Some of them even become outright delusional, convinced I'm in love with them and expecting me to spend time with them for free.

I flash an insincere smile at the man opposite me as he wrings his hands, clearly holding back tears.

“Sorry, love, but I don't do freebies.”

It's not my fault he went bankrupt and can't afford me anymore. Without a backward glance, I walk into the foyer and swing the front door open.

Being desired really is flattering, but I'm a courtesan, for goodness' sake. Loving and leaving is quite literally my job. Why would I tie myself to one man? I only made that mistake once, and look where that got me.

Life here passes in a swirl of glitter and dances, and the courtesan house exists in another world, providing men with a break from reality. I'd been hearing about the war for a while, but as long as there were men to bewitch and money to earn, I couldn't have cared less about who controlled the city.

The Japanese occupation meant an influx of foreign clients, but Japanese officers were prone to violent outbursts and got away with almost any crime, especially committed against a courtesan. Still, I wasn't worried— I could look after myself.

One night, I was lounging against the bar, checking out prospective clients, when a commotion broke out. Violet, another courtesan, wrenched herself from the embrace of a Japanese officer and spat at his feet before stalking away. We courtesans had always been given to dramatic gestures, and I shook my head in wry amusement—Violet probably wasn't even angry.

As muffled giggles broke out, the shock on the officer's face gave way to humiliation, then uncontrolled rage at Violet's public rejection. Abruptly, he took a handgun out from his waistcoat and, before anyone could do more than cry out in surprise, shot her in the back.

The gunshot reverberated in the silence as we all processed what just happened, and then the room lapsed into mayhem, we courtesans sprinting upstairs to hide in our rooms.

That night, I remembered the men I'd rejected, all those lovers I'd spurned after they went broke trying to keep me by their side. I imagined them breaking down the door, revenge alight in their eyes, and my skin crawled. I had to get out of there, had to protect myself using the only way I knew how.

That was how I ended up the wife of Huang Yuelin, the highest-ranking police inspector in Shanghai. This was purely a business relationship— I accepted his protection as payment for my services, and marriage was the easiest way to deter would-be assailants from extracting retribution.

I was spending more time with Yuelin than I'd ever spent with any client, but during our conversations I remained alert, never forgetting that I was on the job. That was how I lured people in— I became whoever clients wanted me to be, a manifestation of men's fantasies. Knowing what made a person tick was a point of pride.

I could usually deduce what kind of woman my clients wanted, but Yuelin proved an enigma. As I studied him, reading by the fireplace, he glanced up and smiled at me.

There was nothing for it. I asked him straight out.

"Are you satisfied with my services?"

He barked out a surprised laugh at my bluntness, then sobered.

“I’m very satisfied, but— I don’t know. Something about this feels off...”

I was instantly on edge at the insinuation of my performance being less than perfect— no man had ever been able to resist my charms.

“I’m sorry. I’ll try to be whoever you want me to be in the future.”

He sighed. “Shaohei, that’s the problem. I want you, not some projection of whoever you think I want you to be. I’d like it if you tried to— be yourself.”

I turned away from him to hide my expression, thoughts whirling. There was a reason I never showed my true self to clients. My confidence came from the knowledge that clients were attracted to the personas I put on, the woman of their dreams. They courted me because they wanted the glamorous, unattainable girl, not boring old Shaohei, and that lent me a certain degree of emotional detachment. I was careful to be professional, to keep my emotions out of working relationships.

I’d always just been an actress playing different roles, and I was terrified that if I let my mental barriers down, I’d found myself falling for Yuelin. Still, he gazed at me with such earnest hope, and something made me close my eyes and take the plunge.

“Okay.”

Yuelin’s job as top detective put him on the hit list of many in the Shanghai underworld, but I’d never thought about what that meant for me. I was well-known as the wife of Huang Yuelin, and, oblivious to the true nature of our relationship, a gang tried to coerce Yuelin by holding me hostage. They sent ransom demands, but to the gang’s bewilderment, no response came. I wasn’t surprised by Yuelin’s silence. After all, I was nothing but his courtesan.

I was replaceable.

Resigning myself to languishing in this damp, dark room, I closed my eyes out of exhaustion and despair.

When I woke up, I was lying in my bed, Yuelin leaning anxiously over me. His face split into a grin of relief as soon as he saw my eyelids flutter open, dashing outside to summon help.

As Yuelin fussed over me, I noticed shadows under his eyes and realised that he'd lost sleep looking for me. He'd been worried about me. Yuelin cared for me, in a way that nobody had cared before. He saw past the makeup-caked facade I wore day in and day out, and loved who I was inside.

As the days wore on, I found myself enjoying Yuelin's company, laughing freely in his presence and sharing errant thoughts that crossed my mind. My heart swelled whenever I saw him smile, and I was the happiest I had ever been.

One day, I realised that I hadn't collected payment from Yuelin in months.

I'd committed the cardinal sin of a courtesan. I'd fallen in love with a client, but I couldn't even bring myself to care. I understood then the power of infatuation, the giddy high that came from loving and being loved. I'd never thought that I deserved to be someone who experienced the beauty of falling in love, much less have someone love me back.

I should have remembered that what goes around, comes around.

It was all over the newspapers: Top police officer caught in a sordid affair with actress Lu Lan-Chun. Maybe age was catching up with me, the papers speculated with savage glee, or maybe Yuelin had just gotten tired of marriage. I sat in my bedroom, staring blankly at the headlines, all suggesting that I had driven Yuelin to seek comfort outside marriage through my own shortcomings. An indescribable sensation welled up within me, and I cocked my head, trying to identify the unfamiliar feeling.

Of course. How ironic.

The courtesan was heartbroken.

Whoever said 'tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' obviously never experienced what I was going through. I felt like I was being ripped apart from the inside out, my heart shrivelling but beating harder than ever, a cruel reminder that I would have to live on without his love. My lungs constricted, and a raw cry ripped itself from my throat. I understood now why people died from a broken heart, knew all too painfully the agony and despair of my spurned clients.

I had to leave Yuelin. Stalking down the stairs in an attempt at quiet dignity, I cut off his explanations.

“You owe me the payment for the last three months of my time, I’ll send you the invoice. Thank you for your business. Never contact me again.”

“Shaohei—”

I didn’t look at Yuelin as I walked to the door, because I knew that the sight of his face— earnest, open, pleading— would break me. The front door swung shut behind me with a soft ‘snick’, signifying the end of another client.

Just another client.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Freedom

Heep Yunn School, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris – 12

1921

Fanchone grew up in the largest city in France – Paris. Like all Parisians, Fanchone had always been extremely conscious of freedom.

He was an only child. His father was away from Paris and only came home during Christmas. All these years, alone with only his irritable aunt for company.

Fanchone's life changed in 1928. It was the last Christmas and the last time Fanchone ever saw his father. His father never came back; his death message came instead, delivered by a Chinese man. Orphaned at age seven.

His mother had died when he was born, so his father was all he had in the world. And now the only one in the world he could rely on was gone, and though he tried to get his father to talk to him, the dead, as always, refused to speak.

The Chinese man told Fanchone that his father's business partner in China would take him in and he had to go to Shanghai. Fanchone knew nothing about Shanghai except what his father had told him. Shanghai. A cosmopolitan city, known as a paradise for adventures and Paris in the East.

Fanchone left on the day after. When the cruise approached Shanghai, Fanchone stared at the faraway port. He saw people fighting, yelling prices, bargaining... and along the coastline, coolies and barrels of opium.

The Chinese man led Fanchone to a rickshaw. The rickshaw hurtled towards Nanjing Road. In seconds, they arrived at the International Settlement – a place run by the Municipal Council, a powerful assembly of “taipans” and “nabobs”, who set up their own police force and defense corps, and ruled all of Shanghai.

Hurrying on for another mile or two, they arrived at a huge villa in the French Bund. The villa stood imposingly amongst its neighbours and embodied an elegant mix of European and traditional Chinese designs. Fanchone stepped into the villa and saw a Chinese man in a long robe talking to another man heatedly. Fanchone stood imprisoned in the hallway, listening wearily to the man's criticisms about the disastrous opium business the man had been running.

“So he’s the fearsome Du Yuesheng that my father has been working with?” Fanchone questioned himself.

Du saw Fanchone and moved forward. Fanchone trembled. Du patted his head, “Come, child, this is your home from now on.”

★ ★ ★

For some reason, Du loved Fanchone and treated him better than his own blood. Although Fanchone loved Du as a father, he detested Du’s ways in running the opium trade, courtesan houses and racketeering businesses in Shanghai.

At eighteen, Fanchone was good-looking for his age. He had inherited the best of his dead parents’ features – his mother’s light brown hair and leaflike ears, his father’s rounded chin and hazel eyes. He came with Du to Du’s favorite courtesan house every day.

~

Fanchone sat at the table, watching the beauties file in. Each one reflected gracefulness, charm and beauty. Fanchone noticed that the colors of their *qipaos* complimented the Mei Langfan teahouse. Thick carpets, colorful tapestries, fainting couches, flower stands with peonies as big as babies’ heads. The food on the table looked Western but tasted Chinese.

Sipping wine, Fanchone watched a song girl take to the stage. Another courtesan seated herself before the zither. As she swept her hand across the silken strings, the room fell silent.

Softly at first, the first cabaret let a few notes flow from her throat. Slowly, her voice rose, then fell again, like the waves of the ocean. Every person sat mesmerized, struck dumb by the magic in her voice.

The girl came to the climax of the song. The waves roared, reaching its peak. On the wings of music, she seemed to fly through the starry night sky, her eyes seemed faraway and distant, her face shone with jubilation. As she ended, the girl’s last lines sent a shiver down Fanchone’s spine.

For so long we have met under the bamboo tree,

And in spirit you will always be free.

You are free

The moment you wish to be.

The audience took a moment before they gathered themselves enough to applaud. The girl simply walked away and began to help serve. Fanchone watched her quietly. As she placed a cup of tea in front of him, Fanchone saw her sneak a glimpse at him. He learned that her name was Muoli, and in turn he gave her his name.

Closely, Muoli did seem like the most beautiful of beauties. Her hair had a tinge of red, streaked with dark brown, and cascaded down her back. Her *qipao*, a beautiful soft, sky blue complimented her pale skin. Her eyes were dark brown and in them Fanchone saw sincerity, but also the starvation for what so many song girls lacked – freedom.

~

The courtesan and the gangster began a relationship. Their love was companionship, happiness, and discovery of freedom in their hearts.

Du noticed changes in Fanchone and guessed he had a girlfriend, but he would never have guessed it was a courtesan he had fallen in love with.

~

Years passed, and one night, Mouli performed in Mei Lanfong and Fanchone watched her. When the song ended, Muoli turned away to help serve.

Muoli placed a bowl of rice in front of a well-dressed gentleman. He thanked her and began to speak to another man in rapid English. Obviously, they thought Muoli would not understand. But Muoli did, thanks to the Fanchone, who had been teaching her English.

“Is it all ready?” whispered the first gentleman. Muoli’s ears perked up. She shouldn’t be eavesdropping, but the man’s whisper made her feel uneasy.

“It is. We’re patrolling Du Yuesheng’s house. Anyone who appears nearby will be shot on sight.”

“Good. Then by tomorrow we will be ready to capture Du Yuesheng and hand him over to the Communists so we can peacefully retreat to Taiwan.”

Though Muoli disliked Du as he had been forbidding them together, she respected Du as a revolutionist, unlike the other racketeers. She knew, if Du died, thousands of revolutionaries would be in danger. She smiled at them innocently and hurried off to find Fanchone. In a whisper, she told him what she had heard.

“We must go, then,” whispered Fanchone. “But remember, he might not believe you.”

Muoli nodded and they waited for the party to end. Then they followed the agent to Du’s house.

Sweat was breaking out across Muoli’s palms. She tried to slow her hammering heart. Taking a deep breath, she and Fanchone stepped out from behind a corner.

Bang.

Muoli first heard it, then instinctively flung herself over Fanchone's body to protect him. She felt the searing pain in her stomach.

"Muoli!"

She shook her head. "Du."

To her relief, Fanchone seemed to know the situation was dire. He heaved her to her feet and pulled her to the front door. The Communists guarding the house saw Fanchone and merely nodded in acknowledgement.

Together, they stumbled into the villa and burst into Du's bedroom.

Du jolted awake. "What happened to you?"

"You're in danger," answered Muoli, her breathing ragged. She told Du of the conversation.

Du's brow furrowed. "Why are you doing this?" he asked Muoli.

"I know you don't like me staying with Fanchone. But we truly love each other. And I know he loves you too." Muoli gasped. "So you must take Fanchone and leave Shanghai tonight. I once was like you. I believed only in money and power. But I had never had happiness because I never had freedom. Listen to your heart. Don't you feel tired surrounded by bodyguards every day?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Fanchone saw in astonishment a tear glistening in the corner of Du's eye. "Muoli is right," Du told Fanchone. "I thought I had everything in Shanghai, but to keep everyone safe..." he angrily wiped away a tear. "I've been enmeshing racketeers and revolutionaries all these years. We must leave now," he said, remembering the situation.

"There here will be no freedom under Communist ruling, no doubt. There is only one place where true freedom reigns – Hong Kong," Fanchone answered.

"Leave now. Please," said Muoli.

“No, Muoli,” Fanchone hissed angrily. “I’m not leaving without you!”

“You must.” Muoli’s breathing was raspy now. “Go to Hong Kong. Have a taste of freedom. Please, Fanchone. Promise me.”

“I promise.” Fanchone’s words were the last thing Fanchone ever heard. She closed her eyes, knowing that she would rest in peace under the starry skies.

Muoli’s chest stopped moving, and the waves of her voice died and never roared again. Fanchone threw himself over her body and wept.

Du and Fanchone packed nothing but bags of clothes and fled to Hong Kong with Du’s family, leaving all their properties, wealth and business behind.

As they stepped off the boat, Du thought he heard a woman’s voice, singing down from the heavens.

You are free

The moment you wish to be.

Owed Favours

HKUGA College, Tang, Yo – 14

"Kenta, I'm sorry to tell you this," Ming's face scrunched with unease, "I don't want to do this, but we have to, um, fire you. You know, because we are at war with your people." I nodded. It had been a hard year. My country invaded China a few months ago. As a Japanese working in *Shanghai Report*, I knew my risk as a foreign journalist. Ming was my mentor. He discovered my passion and talent and invited me to join his press. This time, it didn't seem like he had another choice.

As I stepped out of the door, a Japanese soldier put his hand in front of mine. In my mind, I felt safe having only been stopped by fellow countrymen. No harm would be done to me. "Just relax and let him do his work." I thought. Then, he pointed at my clothes. What? Excuse me? He was getting annoyed. I stared blankly at him. He wanted me to take off all my clothes for a "check". I pretended I didn't understand what he meant. With my facial features, I could easily blend in with the Chinese. Ignorance is bliss. Being picked out is my worse nightmare. Then, he called back up. They brutally tore off my clothes. I was naked, shivering in the cold, humiliated by people of my own country but too scared to confess that Chinese hid me in their homes. They spanked my butt cheeks, laughed when they saw my ribs sticking out and my stretch marks.

The gang proceeded to ask a Chinese boy to stand naked in front of them for a checkup. He refused, which was both idiotic and bold. The gang was not too happy. They aimed their guns at him. His face twitched with worry. He was speechless as the gang cornered him. My legs ran towards the boy. Before I knew what I was doing, I said, "TOMARI! STOP!". The gang's eyes were fixed on me.

One of them asked me in Japanese, "Why, brother! Care to join us?" "I don't understand what you're talking about!" I hid my fear and tried to play it cool. "Well, well, well, seems like our dear Japanese DID let go of his roots." one of them smirked.

The boy and I backed away. I squeezed the boy's hand. We exchanged a look before I shouted, "RUN!"

The soldiers were in shock. I grabbed the boy's hand and dashed across alleys. Time seemed to stop and everything seemed to flash by. Miraculously, we made a sharp turn around the queue of people lining up for third-class rice grains and the soldier lost track of us. The boy's face was as pale as a sheet, shivering and mumbling words of thanks which was barely audible. I bid him goodbye in my most non-Japanese accent and left.

Out of nowhere, a voice boomed, "Who are you? What did you do to my son?" I stammered, "I...I err, nothing..." He wouldn't believe me if I told him I saved him from Japanese pedophiles. The expression of distrust was fixed on his face. He clearly saw that I was a Japanese myself. The man clenched his fist, ready to punch me unconscious any moment. "No, dad! He saved me from those Japanese perverts! If he weren't there, they would have been harassing me right now!" The father's expression softened slightly. He turned to me, "I'm sorry, I was being too protective. It would be a pleasure if I could offer you help in return."

"I was wondering if you could possibly help me find a way back to Nagasaki, where I used to live," oh no! Why did I ask for such a huge favour?

He gave me a smirk, "You are in luck! I happen to know when and where the supplies ship departs. However, you must comprehend all the risks that you might face as a smuggler. Meet me here at 11 o'clock sharp tonight."

Little did I know what were the risks for the both of us.

All things went smoothly, I was about to sneak to the planned hiding spot in the storage room when...

BAAAM!!! A distant sound of a fired pistol." Quick, don't let loose! Don't let those filthy thieves and smugglers get on the ship!" said the commander, getting his troops to aim countless guns in all directions.

"My friend, I might as well stay here in this hiding spot and go with you!" the kind man said. "No, just go before it's too late! The armed men are still at a distance! Your son needs you!" I insisted. "I couldn't risk dying just because I tried to escape!" the man urged. "Go now! Before it's too late!" I frantically shouted, and gave him a big push.

That was one of the worse moves in my life. The one I would regret till the day I die.

"Look! I see a shadow!" one of the armed men exclaimed. And with that, a shot my saviour was down.

No, this could not be it.

"Tell Jin I love him... Take care of him for me, will you?" the man whispered, with a satisfied smile on his face.

A man whose name I didn't know died for me. The only way I could repay was to take care of his beloved son.

I'd never have the chance to go back.

But you have to take care of the boy.

You'll regret this.

Or will you?

I didn't hesitate this time. I jumped into the icy-cold sea. I was determined to go back to Shanghai. After all, I had yet one more thing on my bucket list.

New Tales of Old Shanghai

HKUGA College, Tse, Hiu Yan Jodie – 14

The earth was covered with a thick pile of snow. The horse trotted silently down the road.

Thud. Thud. Thud. I was counting the number of steps the horse walked when mum said, “Lucy, we’ve arrived.”

I poked my head out of the car. The city had decided to welcome me with a veil covering her, emitting a mysterious and elegant aura. From far away, children chased each other around; merchants boarded on and off ships; families waved goodbye to their children who set sail to far-away continents to study. The outlines of short buildings could be seen, with a warm glow radiating from inside. That was my first sight of Old Shanghai.

“Mum, are we living here?” I asked, a hint of enthusiasm in my tone.

“Yes, we are. You like it here?” Mum asked, smoothing my hair.

I smiled.

The car slowed down to a stop. I looked out. In front of me was a red brick house, decorated by two grey stone lions at the sides of the door. I got off the car and took my little backpack from the car. Mum pushed open the grey, heavy door as it answered us with a squeak. My eyes widened as I looked inside. The room was a football pitch, with the closet at the end of the room as the goal and the mattress at the centre of the room as the centre circle. The football was high up in the air, lighting up the pitch when mum flicked on the switch. At the right hand side was the referee table with four wooden chairs and a tiny stool besides them. I quickly sat on the stool.

Mum smiled as I ran around the room in circles, singing at the top of my lungs.

“Lucy, would you like to go outside and play for a while? I have to sort some things out,” Mum spoke softly.

I hesitated for a while, then wrapped both arms around mum’s leg, not letting go.

“Come on, go out and make some new friends. Don’t go too far though, and be careful,” Mum kissed my forehead.

I skipped out of the house, following the fragrance of freshly-cooked cakes coming out from the market. Steam formed inside the container in which the sponge cakes were held. The moist, white cakes were so appealing that I took one in my filthy little hands and had a bite.

“Hey young girl, you haven’t paid yet!” a voice screeched.

I looked up, puzzled.

“This costs two dollars, little girl,” the voice was alarmingly gentle.

The concept of money was never introduced into my young mind. I looked up at the lady. She had wrinkles on her forehead and two large pouches under her eyes. Tears were already starting to form in my eyes.

“I’m sorry. She’s my friend. Here it is,” said a girl beside me, handing a piece of crumpled paper to the old lady.

“Thank you,” I whispered, rubbing away my tears.

“It’s okay. What’s your name?” the girl asked.

"Lucy. How about you?" I questioned.

"Catherine. I'm four years old," the girl said.

"Me too!" I exclaimed.

That was my first encounter with Catherine.

The sky was still grey when I woke up the next morning. I got off my bed but immediately jumped back inside my blanket. My cheeks had turned bright red, and I couldn't feel my toes. I walked to the closet and snatched my sweater, covering it over my pajamas. I was still freezing, and with nothing left to put on, I took my blanket and wrapped it around me, then tiptoed towards the front door. I swung open the door, silently closing it.

"Hey Lucy!" a young girl spoke, responding to the click of the door.

It was five in the morning, and I was on the streets with Catherine. There was no better way than to start a day like this.

We walked down the streets. The houses surrounding us all looked the same, and I was curious as to how Catherine knew her way around the city. I followed closely behind her, scared that I would get lost in this maze. The city was strangely quiet, much to the contrary of what I saw the day before. Occasionally, we would see one or two people walk by, with heavy sacks on their backs, or with a bottle in their hands, staggering away. Besides the panting of the workers and the moaning of the alcoholics, there was silence.

We sat on the bridge, holding tightly in our hands, the sweet rice sponge cake from the market. It was really cold outside, but the cake warmed our body. I put my blanket aside. It danced with the breeze, swaying from one side to the other as if waltzing. White curls of smoke escaped from my mouth as I exhaled, blurring my sight. When the smoke faded away, I began to see the awoken city. The doors of the shops were half open, with dim light shining from inside. The curtains reflected dancing shadows from inside the house. The soft whispering of the city vibrated in my ears. It was the first time I got to truly appreciate the beauty and complexity of Old Shanghai, uniform but unique; crowded but spacious; diverse but united. The sweetness of the cake, the colours of the city, and the dancing blanket reflected my heart. The wind had stopped blowing; the stream beneath our feet became still. The mirror reflected Catherine and I. Our faces were shining under the bright sky, our smiles brighter than the sun. The cake had cooled down by then, but my heart was still warm.

Two years passed by. Every morning, Catherine and I would go to the market, then ending up on the bridge with a cake each in our hands. Then, we would play all the way till noon, where we had lunch in our houses, and spend the rest of our day together until it was time for dinner. We met so often as if our lives depended on each other. It never occurred to us that we would ever be separated.

I was awoken by a gentle rocking.

"Catherine, I'm coming. Wait for me," I muttered.

"It's me. It's time to wake up, Lucy. We have to catch the flight," Her voice was so tender, so soft, as if a slightly raised voice would crush me.

"Where are we going?" I cried as my mum dragged me out of the front door.

"We're going to Beijing. You're going to love it when you arrive," said Mum soothingly.

As we were boarding the car, I shook off mum's hand and mumbled, "I have to go find Catherine!"

"It's two in the morning, Lucy. Catherine's asleep." Mum said, trying to persuade me.

"No, she's awake. I know she will be awake for me," I shouted, and without thinking, I ran forward, ignoring mum, who was trying to follow me.

I arrived at her house. I looked around the house. She was nowhere to be seen.

"She's not awake," I thought, "I don't even have the chance to say goodbye to her."

Suddenly, there was a soft knock on the window. I looked up. Kneeling on her bed, waving hysterically to me was Catherine! I waved back. She put both hands on the window, and I placed my hands at the same spot. The two pairs of warm hands were only separated by a thin piece of glass, yet it separated the two of us forever. Suddenly, I turned away. I sprinted down the road. I never looked back. Warm streaks of tears were rolling down my bright red cheeks, and Catherine wasn't going to see this.

Thud. Thud. Thud. The horse trotted silently down the road. I looked out. There were hoof prints on the snow. I looked back. Mist lingered over the air, blurring the city. It was my last glimpse of Old Shanghai.

"Would Catherine see this?" I thought, "Would she follow the prints and look for me?"

"Mum," I asked, "Would the hoof prints stay there forever?"

"Of course not, honey," Mum replied, smoothing my hair, "The snow falling down from the sky will cover them."

I stayed silent.

"Are you excited to go to Beijing? You would go to school there and receive proper education," said Mum, breaking the silence, "I know you're sad to be separated with Catherine, but think of all the new friends you would meet in the new environment. I am sure you would find a new best friend there."

"No one can ever replace Catherine!" I thought.

I just smiled back.

As the hoof prints disappeared, so did my days with Catherine, buried deep underground by the distance that separated us, but our hearts still beat the same beat, and the memories spent together were buried deep in my heart, and so was it in hers.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Hong Kong Academy, Kng, Darrion – 13

Droplets of water litter the ground, footsteps echo as howls pierce the eerie silence, an englishman takes slow strides, trudging the ground with utmost silence, splashes of water resound through forsaken streets. Nervous eyes dart from to shop to shop, murmurs unheard for years, promptly start again, ghosts seem to be dancing.

Wisps of smoke puncture the cold thin air, wearing an overcoat, the man takes a cigar from his back pocket, he strikes a match swiftly without hesitation, lights a cigar, and takes a long drag. Tears of water drip off his hat, the glint of metal can be seen in the moonlight, *12:00 AM*, the man eyes a worn out bar with glimpses of light, his contact had arrived.

A pair of neon coloured eyes dart in the blood-curdling darkness, the lean furry creature shrieks as a looming shadow appears on the doorstep. “Cling, cling, cling.....”, an impeccably dressed figure appears, scurrying like a rat, he approaches a shadow. Inaudible words are exchanged, the air is full treachery and misgiving, drunken cheers are heard inside. Materializing from the darkness, our fine old fellow nods his thanks and shuffles into darkness, the figure gives a curt bow. With a glance inside, he runs onto the street.

Golden shards of light flew through the air, a well dressed Chinese man beckons the overcoat man forward. With a glass red wine in his hand, he dismisses the waitress. “Good morning William, you’re looking well dressed. . . ,” states the Chinese man with a slight tinge of Oxford in his accent.

“I have no time for jokes, Wang, what have you got for me?”, the man replies with a gruff voice. He takes a seat and takes his hat off. With rigged lines ran through his face, locked in a permanent frown, William gestures with his hand, and nods. Wang places a briefcase on the table, it clicks, two files are then produced, dust covered the files from head to toe, with a glance, William opens it.

A 50 miles away, a building appears in the never ending darkness, guards patrol the area as water spears strike the ground as a figure runs, water splashes on his face, swearing, he makes his way inside. A uniform armed guard stops the man and salutes, bowing, he explains the current situation in a foreign language, leading the man towards a telephone booth, the guard stops, gives a smart salute, and marches away. Glancing back, the suspicious character rams a variety of buttons, the telephone hums, then crackles.

“He’s here,” the man says.

“Commence Operation Cherry Blossom,” replies a muted voice.

50 miles back, a muted discussion is in progress as a shadow lurks through the darkness. Frowns have been developed as the conversation went forward, William asks Wang a question, Wang nods his head, a mixture of disbelief and shock develops on William’s face. He lunges and grasps Wang’s hand, taken aback, Wang recoils.

“Are you sure...”, William manages to gasp.

“Yes sir, he’s working for the Japanese,” Wang states.

“But...”, William trails off before noting the eerily silence that has fallen, the glint of metal catches his eye, he looks and notices a pearl black cylinder, a barrel of a gun.

Cherry red droplets leap like mackerel through the very air, red droplets litter the table. A body drops on to the floor, a bullet hole through his head. The corpse heads lurches sideways revealing the assailant, it was the waitress.

Gunshots ring through the bar as William swiftly fires his own firearm. Lead pumped from both directions, peppering walls, removing objects from our very existence. The chandelier above shatters, pottery and glass windows are removed with ease. Screams pierce the air, and one by one, people start filing out. “Thud,” a body hits the ground, blood gushing out of her pale mouth, she mutters a few inaudible words. Her once elegant figure is now destroyed by

the never-ending serenity of death. Even in death, she is a sight to behold, taking her name tag, William reads her name: Blossom.

A figure leisurely strolls out of the bar, fleeing like mice, one by one, witnesses start disappearing from the scene. “Blossom”, a name used to describe the never ending beauty of a new year, a new chapter in life. With that thought, an overcoat man walks out, where he once walked in.

Inside the every demise, is the rebirth of a new era, as the darkness lurks, the light shines, every loss, has a new gain, My name is William E. Fairbairn, and welcome to old Shanghai.

The Tale of Ting Xing

International College Hong Kong, Cheung, Charlotte – 11

I heard the sounds. The sounds of busy Shanghai. This is what I am used to, but something feels weird. No one is happy, everyone is angry and mad. I am Ting Xing, and this is my story...

I am a worker, for fishing boats. I thought my life only involved fishing and family, but this wasn't the case. One day, I went home from work, but this day seemed different. The skyscrapers, the Immigrants, they seemed, different. They were nicer, in a weird way. I was curious, so I went into a building, and it seemed prettier than it has ever been. I went into a bathroom, and this is where it all happened.

Inside there was a warrior, it told me everything. "This is the time machine, it only works on a full moon. You were chosen, to help investigate the future, and make our future a better place." After she spoke, she disappeared. I thought I was crazy, so I stepped out. But this was what was seen before my eyes.

It were people, but not the kind I have seen before I have stepped in the toilet. Their clothes were different, they had things I have never seen before, mobile phones. Then I realised, I have travelled to the future! I wasn't crazy, and I thought of what the warrior had said to me in the bathroom, "You are here to investigate the future." And I stepped outside...

The familiar Shanghai wasn't what I could see in front of me. There were no more fishing boats, instead, a polluted harbour. The fresh taste and smell of air was now a polluted air. There were more cars, not just ones that belonged to the rich, the skyscrapers were the only thing you could see, and this is where I would start my adventure.

I found money in my pocket, and an address, and I knew where to spend my night. I walked up to the place, and went to my room. I thought of this, "What do I need to investigate on before the next full moon?" I stared out of my window, and wondered. Then the newspaper came, and this was the headline: "DEAD BODIES OF 1947 FIRE FOUND!" What does this mean?

The next day, I woke up and didn't know where I was. Then I remembered, I was in 2016. I started investigating what happened. I went to the Old Shanghai Museum, and there was a replica of the fire. Streets and houses were burnt. I was astonished. "How could I stop this?" I thought. I then checked the date of when the fire happened. November 20th, 1947. I came from November 1st, 1947, so I still had time to stop it when I go back.

Then there was more news on a screen. I didn't know what it was, but I now know, it's a television. This was what I heard, "Ting Xing, a victim of the fire survived, and died in 1950. We still don't know what happened then, because 100 more people died then." Ting Xing, Me! I would survive the fire, but then die. Why would this happen?

I explored more deep into the museum. There was info of how the fire started. They weren't sure. "It was a fight between the British and the natives we believe. But we have a second answer, It might have been an accident." It was a fight between the natives and the British, so that's why the older residents have been angry the whole time.

I continued exploring deeper into the museum, i found out what materials started the fire. It were just sticks and a match. Who knew it would start such a big fire, and kill 1,000 people! I also found out who they believe started the fire. Hua Ming, the head of a terrorist group in China. Everyone knew her, and it was my job to stop her in 20 days. Which side was she helping? The British, or the natives. "The British!" I thought, because she had a english background."

I spent my next 28 days like this, visiting the museums a few more times and visiting the real site of the fire. I was ready to go back to my own time, and stop this disaster!

It was a full moon on November 28 2016, I was ready to travel back to my home. At 7:00pm, I stepped into the same building, the same toilet, and waited. The warrior was there again. "Thank you for completing your mission! I am really proud of you and your next mission is to go back to your own time and stop this disaster!" She disappeared, and I stepped outside. I was back in my own time, and it had only past 1 minute since I left. I was so relieved, now I was ready to stop this disaster!

I was ready to go find Hua Ming and stop this fire in 19 days. I started planning. People always say they find Hua Ming in Yan'an Road. That was only 5 minutes away from where I lived! I would go there and stop her right before the day of the fire. I would also first build a good relationship with her. I would say I was a businessman's assistant, and "the company" wanted to help her. Then I would arrange meetings with her on the 19th and 20th, and stop her right that second. I would start the mission next morning!

It was November 2nd, 1947, and I was ready to take on the mission! I walked up to Yan'an Road and was ready to face Hua Ming. I asked other people for the way. They knew the way, but they kept saying this. "You shouldn't go there, she is a really evil person! She could destroy you in a second!" But I was determined, so I carried on.

I was at the front door. I knocked on the door. No one answered. I knocked once more. Someone came to the door, and asked, "Excuse me young lady, how may I help you?" I said, "I am the assistant of the famous businessman, Ting Hua, and he would like to help Hua Ming in her business. May I come in?" He let me in, and lead the way to Ms. Hua Ming.

Hua Ming welcomed me, and said,

"We are very happy that someone is partnering with us! What projects would your boss like?"

"He doesn't really need any projects, he just wants me to help you!" I exclaimed.

"That's good. I would like you to help me in the NanXi Street project. Would you be happy to come to my office on the 19th and 20th?" She said. I agreed, and I ticked of step 1.

On the 19th, I met Hua Ming, she was really excited to see me. She explained more deeply into the NanXi street project. I felt like she was hiding something, a really important detail. Then she said, "I'm going to burn NanXi!"

“Why?” I asked. She said it was easier to burn all the houses of NanXi then asking the villagers for the houses back. I agreed, but I had a plan.

I crept into Hua Ming’s office the next morning. No one was there. So I did my job, to stop the fire. I threw everything that she could use to start the fire out. Matches, wood, paper, everything. Then I went back out, and waited for Hua Ming’s reaction.

“Where is all my tools?! It must have been that Ting Xing kid! I never should have trusted her! Now my plan was ruined!”

She wanted to find me, but it was too late. I already called the police earlier, and once she left the office, she got arrested.

“Damm it! I really should be more careful next time!”

I stopped this disaster. But how could I stop the next one, 1950?

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

International College Hong Kong, Gobbi, Giulia – 12

My name is Li Suan Bai. People make fun of me because of that humiliating name. Li is my surman, it means strong; Suan as in sour, another disgraceful name that was my mother's maiden name; My first name, as the pitiful British call it, is Bai, as in white. My mother said your name is part of you, I must learn to embrace it. Here in Shanghai that would be very hard as racism will not be compassed in the next recent years. My family has '三口人', three people in it, that would be me, my mum and my dad. I am thirteen but look ten because if you saw my babyface and scrawny body you would understand.

I live in a town on the East side of Shanghai, it is a very small one nevertheless a town with it's loud old ladies trying to sell goods and fruit, they are quite annoying; we also have a lot of men pulled carriages which is sort of strange since we have something called 'horses' to pull them but I'm guessing we're all penniless and in that case no one can't afford one. At this moment in time we also have a lot of banners and not to mention lanterns for the new Lunar year, everyone's favorite holiday. At the end of this town we have the creepiest temple there will ever be made with it's pitch black rooms and large doors with torn pieces of silk on them however in spite of this we still go there to pray in front of a large golden statue for good fortune in our life to come. But to me none of that matters anymore.

I was born the day the British settlers came to Shanghai, they live on our side of the city which causes violent fights and unbearable shrieking. I don't mind them and they are quite peculiar with their coats? Or was it doats? I don't remember, it was quite a contrast to compared to our ripped and disgusting 'clothes'. There was a boy which I found quite interesting. I learned his name was Christopher, I also learned after the man who apparently found a country called 美國, America.

One Sunday morning my family went to that ancient temple again. As we walked on the street we made clear of some very loud shouting and then a gunshot. Pail now we scurry off into the temple to give our blessings pretending like nothing had happened. As the silent praying begun I heard an unmistakable sneeze? It came from somewhere around in the temple yet my parents had not heard.

3 hours after our praying session I was still investigating for what had made that soft sound but I had nothing, nil and it was hopeless, not to mention that intimidating bamboo stick at home was to relentlessly smack against my palms, my forehead beading with sweat while those bone legs of mine are trembling that I can barely stand straight. That was the first time. Since then it has happened 8 more times and I do not wish for it to happen again and for that reasons I sprinted home. Yet it still troubled me till the next day.

After the agonizing 8 hours of the torture house I was so intrigued by that soft sound I had to go back and check the place again. I looked under, in and on top of every piece of furniture until the whole room was completely upside down and I was exhausted, completely exhausted that I gave up overall. On the way out though I got my shoulder hard on the door that I fell and coiled on the stony rough ground. All I could do was lay on the stone a feel pain like an animal start devouring the rest of my shoulder to my chest where my heart was beating furiously, both of anger and hopelessness. I lay there for what felt like an eternity until a cold hand started wrapping a wooly bandage around my shoulder murmuring things in a foreign language. English.

All I remember was a sting in my shoulder of a bottle with smelly liquid in it slowly sink into my shoulder and blackness swallowing me up, now I'm lying on a bed with a British man, his son and my mother, sobbing and sniffing softly. When she saw me awake she cried out of happiness.

“Oh how happy I am to see you” she cried “ don't you ever startle me like that again, in that temple you disabled your shoulder...”

She went on and on and on, I wasn't listening. The British boy Christopher was standing across from me, staring.

“...this young boy carried you all the way here then—”

“謝謝—thank you” I cut my mum off completely, then I took his big hand against my tiny one and slowly shook it may have been one handshake but it was so full of gratefulness and appreciative that it changed us all together.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

International College Hong Kong, Wan, Ciara – 11

I woke up with Master Li barked at me to get up. “Get up Alec! Get to work! You are late!” I got out of my warm bed and opened the wooden chest opposite my bed. Every worker had their own bed with a chest of their belongings opposite their bed. I looked to my right, I saw my best friend, Joziah getting out his rags and dressing into them. I began to do the same. I had a long day of work ahead of me. Today I had to wash the horses, feed the cows, pick the carrots, clean the pig pen and collect the chicken eggs in the morning. Then I got a 5 minute break. Then I had to get to work again until 10:00 at night.

All the workers started shuffling towards the exit of our mud hut. We were headed for the eating room. We had to line up for what seemed like hours, finally I got to the front of the line. The lady poured some green glop into my clay bowl. Today we had to eat congee mixed with fried caterpillars. I ate, looking at the people around me. What I saw astonished me for the first time since I came here. All these people got taken away from their parents, just like I did.

I remember, when I was around 3 years old, one day, early in the morning, two very buff men crashed open the door. My mother gave a squeal. “Why are you here?”

“We came for your son, he has been chosen by the King.” Gruffly said the first muscular man.

“Your son has been greatly honored.”

“When will he be back?” My Father asked.

“Soon, in around a couple of days.”

And that is how my own Mother and Father gave me away without knowing, because I never saw my dear Mother or Father ever again. And that's also how I ended up here, a slave, stuck, not being able to come out. I have been here for 7 years now.

A bell rang, waking me up from my daydream. Everyone around me instantly got up and went to their jobs. Luckily Joziah had the same job as me for his first job, so we were together. I had to wash a horse called Winter and Joziah had to wash a horse called Deccy. Winter was a white horse. She reminded me of when it snowed once and everyone was shivering, but the snow was so beautiful! Deccy was a mixture between orange and brown.

We scrubbed the horses, soaped them etc, until the horses were just a big soapy lump. Next I collected a bucket standing outside the horse pen, and went down to the pump. I had to make 7 journeys before Winter was properly clean. Next was the cows. I grabbed two bunches of hay and fed the cows. I could hear them grunting. I wondered what it felt like to be a cow. Would it be better than my life or worse than my life? I kept thinking of my question all throughout the day. If only I went to school, Then I could ask the teachers! Teachers know everything. 2 hours later I found myself in a very long line of people again, waiting to be served, this time the raw leftover guts of the pig they had slaughtered for the King's meal. That meal was good for a change!

Break time was over in a whoosh! We all filed out of the eating room and went back to work. By this time I was very sleepy. Even though it was only midday! I worked my head off until I had enough of this. I couldn't spend my life like this! A thought kept coming to my mind. What if I ran away? Could I run away? Where would I run to?

As I trailed off to bed, I still had that thought in my mind, Would I really dare to? When would I, if I did? I decided I would try tomorrow.

I woke up earlier than the others. I saw Joziah drooling on his bedsheet. I tiptoed out of the hut. No one was awake yet. I went back in the hut and packed my things in a spare rag. I crept out. I started creeping to the exit of the Castle. I was really doing it! Then I realized.

The gate was locked and I didn't have a key.

I looked all around me. I saw people sleeping everywhere. An Old woman. Some carpenters. A guard. Master Li... Wait! A guard! He must have the key!

I tiptoed quietly towards him. I saw the key dangling from his belt. I tried to pull it off.

It hit the floor with a clank. Just as I unlocked the gate, the guard that had the key woke up.

"AGH!" he screamed. He woke up all the other guards and they were getting onto their horses and chasing me. Quickly, I ran out. I have never been out of the gates before! This is how it felt like! I felt so free! I ran for my life, down to the village. Past the houses of loving people. What should I do? Where should I go? Maybe one of these people would take me in. I didn't recognize anyone. The guards were all around the village questioning people if they had seen me. If I got caught I was sure to get a beating. A really hard beating! A guard turned the corner on his horse, he saw me and started shouting to alert the other guards. I ran harder than I have ever ran in my life. As I ran past more houses, I saw people, holding little children, looking out of their windows, wondering what was going on out there. They looked scared. I ran past a couple, they looked miserable for some reason. When I ran past, they stopped and stared at me, like they recognised me! They were whispering to each other now. I looked behind me. The guards had lost me. When I turned back round, the couple were talking to me.

"Is it really you?"

"You look so like our Alec."

"But it's not possible! I thought the King killed him or something!" cried the woman.

"My name is Alec." I said to them.

"Is is really you?" They asked me.

"You are my parents?" I asked them.

"Yes, we are."

Then I rushed over to them and they gave me a hug. I never felt so loved before! My life before was probably worse than a cow, but the life ahead of me was a hundred times better than a cow.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

International College Hong Kong, Wong, Fedoria – 12

“Grandpa, Grandpa! Please tell me a story of the place where you lived when you were younger! I heard from mom that you lived in Shanghai... Wasn't it a very old city?”

“Ah yes, my dear. I remember all the little details of the bustling city and the sounds of the people busily traveling amongst the crowded streets.”

“Grandpa please tell me more about Shanghai!”

“Alright my dear. Oh boy how much has it changed since the 1930s... I remember the buildings that were close to the grounds, with the big and giant doors that made a sound that would scare the people nearby when you slammed them. The rings on the door that showed the fierce and vicious looks of the dragon head. Each building had a shop on the first floor with the house on the second. The advertising cloths hung low to the ground and occasionally, one would fall and kill a few. Mysterious alleys were all around the streets, where posters of missing women and kids were stuck. The alleys were the darkest place in the streets and people were often

killed there.”

“Did people just walk around the streets everyday without any transportation and beautiful Ferraris?” “Ah... no my dear grandson, they had loud trams that would make people walk to the sides of the wet and damp streets. The people also ride their rusty old bikes which make a terrible squeaking noise every time they put the brakes on. Ohh, there were also the people who carried people around in comfortable carts and traveled to a short distance.” Oh dear, it's almost your bedtime now. Now go to sleep and I'll tell you more about the amazing place that I used to live in. Goodnight my dear grandson.”

That night, Qiang drifted off deeper and deeper into his sleep and had a dream. He dreamed about the place where his grandfather grew up. Qiang saw the damp and muddy streets, the houses that were so close to the ground that you could almost climb up it and the big lit up billboards. Nightfall soon arrived. He wandered the streets that were quiet and mysterious with occasional cries of dogs and birds. That happened for a few hours after the nightfall, but after that, the streets became silent. Qiang found a small hotel to stay in for the night. The hotel had dim rooms and hard beds. It was not much luxury, but it would do for the night.

The next morning, he was woken by the voice of his grandfather. When he opened his eyes, in front of his eyes stood a teenager with a white tee-shirt and ragged shorts. It was his grandfather.

“Is your name Wei?” asked Qiang.

“Oh yes, my name is Wei and you don't look like you belong here.”

“Of course I don't, I belong to the modern world of 2016, where advanced technology is.” replied Qiang.

“ There is no time for stories right now. The Japanese army are dropping bombs down on Shanghai and we need to find a safe place!”

Qiang didn't have enough time to be confused, he heard the sounds of the bombs dropping on the nearby buildings. He quickly took few coins on the bedside table and ran for his life. He ran and ran until the bottom of his converse tore open and his whole body ached. He felt the heat of the exploding bombs behind him and heard the terrified screams of the young children. After what seemed like forever, they arrived at a well which looked like it has been left without use for centuries. Wei and Qiang jumped into the well and used the rope which looked like it could snap in half any moment to close the opening of the well. When they finally settled down in the well, Qiang could see about a dozen people in the well hiding from the Japanese troops.

They stayed in the well for a few hours, until the mayor blew a horn that resembled that it is safe to come out of the air raid shelters. The people in the well slowly climbed out and saw that there was nothing left in the small town that they lived in. The sky was grey and gloomy, the floors had holes in them and the remains of the buildings were covered in ashes and smoke. Beneath the remains of the buildings you could hear cries of

the people buried beneath the grounds. This continued for a few hours. After the nightfall, everything was silent. The streets were filled with death.

That very night, Qiang, Wei and many other people whose homes has been wrecked took refuge near a harbour that wasn't as wrecked as the other buildings. For a few minutes, he wondered why was he stuck in an era of time that belonged to his grandfather. Slowly, the lids of his eyes felt heavier and heavier.... and slowly

he drifted off to sleep. He was soon woken up by the snores of Wei, which was the younger version of his grandfather.

Even though his grandfather was snoring, Qiang could tell that he was having a terrifying nightmare. Wei had tiny little droplets of sweat trickling down his pale face and onto his shaking body. Qiang finally understood why his grandfather never helped him on his Sinyo War project in yr5. It was because he didn't want to revisit the pain he went through when he was just fifteen years old.

When everything was silent, he fell asleep and dreamed about the world having total peace; a place where humans didn't kill humans for worthless thoughts and jealousy. Where humans could treat each other like friends and everywhere looked like paradise.

He was woken up by a sandy and strong voiced which belonged to his grandfather. He was very confused. In front of his eyes stood a man with grey hair, faded freckles and veins that showed through his skin. “I hope you had a great journey through the ages to where I used to live when I was younger.” His grandfather delivered.

“Grandfather, how did you know that I went back in time and saw the younger version of you?” exclaimed

Qiang.

“Well..... there are somethings that are meant to be unknown in this big wide universe.”

No. 76 Jessfield Road

Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College, Abu Khaleel, Maryam Kamal Castro – 13

They dragged him through the street, his captors, under the protection of the silence and darkness of the street, most of the squabbling families in the stone houses already fast asleep.

As he blinked slowly, trying to cover his eyes with his hands from the bright light that suddenly appeared in his cell blinded him after so many days in the dark, an uproar of sound almost deafened him.

His feet were bloodied and bruised after being dragged for quite a while, for he had no energy to even try to walk after that excruciatingly painful beating they had given him. Given the fact that he had a fair idea of where he was being brought to, there was surely more to come.

If someone told me three years ago that I would one day be a prisoner of the Japanese puppet government, I would have laughed in their faces. He chuckled darkly, but was stopped as a surge of thick, hot blood came up his throat and filled his mouth, forcing him to spit the blood out of his mouth, staining his already soiled shirt even further.

Two figures rushed in, frantically looking around the cell while holding a lamp, the source of the blinding light, as they finally noticed him, a filthy figure hunched in the corner.

“Too bad we have to keep him alive, eh?” The more filthy-looking of the two who were dragging him snickered, as they roughly pulled him upright.

He gritted his teeth, trying not to scream out as they set him down on his feet, the torn skin of the soles of his feet screaming in pain.

They approached him slowly, both of them squinting and trying to identify him. Realization suddenly dawned on them.

“We just have to keep him alive until we *get there*, ain’t it?” As the two guffawed over that unfunny joke, he found himself wishing that they could have just killed him earlier when they found him.

“Dad, is that you?”

After only 3 days at #76, he was starting to feel as if he were near death already. He was going to give them nothing— he knew that, and they knew that as well.

Still— they were cruel, sadistic people, and torturing was what they excelled at and considered as one of their most enjoyable leisure activities. Day, after day, after day, of continuous torturing, each day with a new and even more painful method. He wondered if they would ever run out of creative torturing methods.

Mostly he just passed out before the pain became unbearable, thankfully.

During the 5th or the 6th day, not able to tell the time anymore after being in the dark for so long, he was roughly shaken awake by the guards outside his cell. When he couldn’t find the energy to rise, they poured a bucket of ice water on him. So, they couldn’t afford giving him water to drink regularly, but could waste a bucket of it just to wake him up?

He struggled to stand up, stars popping before his eyes as he swayed on his feet. The guards shackled him, and sighed when they saw that they had to help him walk.

“What’s... What’s this for?” he asked groggily.

“Boss wants to see you. Come on now. He doesn’t like having to *wait*.” One of the two replied, in a tone that suggested that the so-called boss had never had to wait for anything before, least of all prisoners, at least in #76.

They marched him up the rickety and rusty stairs, which made him feel like the stairs were going to collapse under him, and stopped in front of the only nice-looking door in the entire building, which obviously meant that the person of who it belonged to was very important to the place.

The guard that spoke earlier tentatively reached out and knocked on the door, his face showing that he’d rather have been anywhere else than knocking on the door at that moment.

The door slowly opened to reveal a man in his late thirties. He was sitting in front of a desk, which looked quite out of place in a torture building.

As soon as the prisoner recognized who the ‘boss’ of this torture house was, his eyes went wide with shock and he started to feel a bit faint.

He signaled for them to go into the room, and was all smiles as he said:

“Oh, look what we have here! Quite a nice catch, this person is, I admit. Now, let’s get down to business. My men tell me that you’ve been refusing to answer to their questions. Why is that? You know it will be easier if you just do.”

The prisoner said nothing, his face giving away nothing.

“Hm. So he still won’t talk. I suppose we should try plan B, then. Oh wait, this *is* plan B! Sorry, I meant plan C.” The boss was a peculiar person, not at all what the prisoner expected him to be, based on the rumors, and he was making jokes that were lost on all those who worked for him.

“So, we did some background checking on you, and found out that... You have two children, don’t you? Mei An and Mei Ling? I suppose we could just hunt them down and kill them if you don’t give us the information, but wouldn’t it just be easier to tell us *now*, so we don’t have to deal with the mess of killing two innocent, young children?”

Under all the blood and bruises, the prisoner’s face went white. He was certain that he had hidden his children away in a safe location months before they even caught up to him— but still, what the boss said worried him. But no—he swore to himself that he would not give in no matter what, and that these were just empty threats.

He just stared stoically back at the boss. The boss sighed.

“Well, this was pointless. Take him back to his cell, and don’t give him any water to drink or any food to eat for 3 days. Don’t send anyone to watch him either. Wonder if he’ll talk *then*.”

He passed out immediately after they shoved him into his cell.

“Dad? Is that you?” The shorter of the two, a girl, stepped towards him cautiously.

“Mei An? And Zhong Hua as well?” He struggled to stand up, and they rushed to hug him.

“How did you two find me? I thought I told you to stay with your aunt until this all ended and I could finally come back to you.”

*“Well... It’s a long story, and we’re sorry for not listening to you, but word had it on the streets that you had been taken to #76, and you **know** we couldn’t bear knowing and just leave you here! Especially at the mercy of **him**.” His son, Zhong Hua, the taller figure, shuddered.*

“Still, you shouldn’t have come! How did you even get in here and not get caught? They’ll kill you if you get caught! Wait.... How did you know who the boss was? I didn’t even know before coming here! What are you not telling me?” The prisoner said suspiciously, now even more confused.

“Err... We have to get you out of here now! They’ll be here in a second!” Zhong Hua said, visibly changing the subject and avoiding the question.

His two children each took one of his arms and carried him out, trying not to put pressure on his feet or scrape it against the floor, which had never healed from when he first came in to #76. For some unexplainable reason, he only felt a dull throb from his various injuries, like his physical body was far away from him.

“Hey! Stop right there or I’ll shoot!” A man holding a gun said. But he was faceless— the prisoner couldn’t tell the details of his face at all, no matter how hard he squinted.

“There’s no chance of that!” his son shouted back. They started to continue running, when the man fired the gun and shot the prisoner in the shoulder.

He screamed, because that was, well, your natural reaction to getting shot, but not because he could actually feel the pain. He wasn’t sure whether it was because of adrenaline, or because of the constant torture over the past week, or something else.

As his children looked at him in shock, he pushed them to keep running and they did. They ran until they finally reached the entrance, and finally exited the building and got far enough that they wouldn’t be found easily.

He couldn’t believe that it had only been about two weeks that he was in the building. He felt like it was forever. His children were rejoicing and hugging him, and yet he could feel them slipping away, and when he looked at them, he could actually see them fading away.

“A Hua! A Hua! What’s happening? What’s happening?” He tried to shout, but his tongue felt heavy in his mouth, and his eyes forcefully shut.

His dead body was found 3 days later, when the order was given to finally check on him. It turned out that the injuries he sustained from the constant torture finally took a toll on him— his body was already weak from injuries from before he arrived at #76. His children were safe and sound with their aunt in a safe house, and wouldn’t know that he died until 2 years later, which was the time he gave them for when he would return, and they finally looked for him then, when they could, after the liberation of Shanghai.

The Old Lady in old Shanghai

Island School, Dadlani, Diya – 12

She was a tough lady while hard to understand. All she did all day was argue. Either with her helpers, or her closest friends, not that they were close anymore. Her helpers couldn't leave, no matter how hard they tried. It was, and still could be, way to complicated....

But first, let me tell you a bit about her. When she was young, she was sent to an old village to live with her grandparents, her parents didn't want her. Her grandparents happily took her, wanting someone to take care of. Even though they were happy to have someone, they didn't like the decision that took place with their kids. The little girl was too young to understand what had happened, but as she grew older, things changed. Her grandparents started growing old and soon were sick. The grandparents raised her to be an amazing, kind, and a helpful girl, but everything changed when her grandparents fell sick. They knew they didn't have long, so they told her, told her everything. It was hard for her to take in, and would've been harder if her grandparents had told her in detail. This is what they said...

"It has been a long time, you are now 12. It will not be long till you go live your life on your own. We think that it's time you know the real truth. When you were younger, your parents left you here, to live with us. We haven't heard from them since they left you. I know it's hard, but that's the truth. On your 52nd birthday, I want you to open this letter. It tells you everything you need to know. But only on your 52nd birthday. It's too much for now." And they went...

She's was a good child, even though her grandparents were gone, she wouldn't disobey their rules.

As time went on she grew, older and older. Not necessarily in the right way. She started being rude, talking to people in the wrong manner. This was not something that should've happened, not at all. It all went wrong when she turned 15. She started thinking in different ways. Hating her parents for leaving her even more. Although she still missed her grandparents, she couldn't think right. Always thinking negatively, never positive. She has been like that since she was 15, now she is 51 and still can't forget her bad luck. She still treats others badly.

And now this is happening....

"Hey! You maid! Get in here right now or else..."

"Sorr-r-ry," the helper replied with a scared voice, "I-I w-w-as helping Minnie."

"Oh her, you mean Squeaky Mouse! What did she do now?!"

"She fell down the stairs and broke her arm, ma'am"

"Oh big whoop, that's not a big problem! I need you to get me an ice-tea! NOW!"

"Ok, I'll be b-b-back in a m-m-minute" And she ran off as fast as she could.

It's only a few months till her 52nd birthday, she is rude and disobedient, but still wouldn't forget what her grandparents had said years ago. Who knows what the next few months will be about.... Well, let's see.

"MAID,!!!" she screamed out loud. "WHERE ARE YOU?! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR 2 AND A HALF MINUTES!"

"I'm coming ma'am,!" the helper replied. "I'm just helping Minnie, I'll be there in a minute"

"I TOLD YOU THAT SQUEAKY MOUSE HAS NO PROBLEM! I'M GETTING DEHYDRATED! HURRY UP!"

"I—I'm c—coming!"

BOOOOOOOOOOOM.....

The aroma of ash floated in her nose. It was clear that no one had been there for a while. Spider webs, an old box, and a letter. That was all that was seen. It was clear, that it had never been opened since. What did it say? What was in it? How did it survive the explosion? Questions zoomed around in her mind. How did this happen? What happened? How? Everything and everyone were lost, in space, and thought...

She walked in the room and took the letter; it was full of dirt, but not destroyed. 2 weeks till her 52nd birthday. Nobody knows anything about her past, well, except me. I was and still am, a close friend. All the helpers crowded around her murmuring. Nobody knew anything about what happened, what was in the box, and what the letter said. Everything was just so complicated! Especially for her. She held the letter in her hand as tears dripped down from her eyes. She has never ever cried in front of anyone. It was a hard time. A day hadn't passed where she hadn't thought about her grandparents, now, looking down at the box and letter just made her feel even worse. She still wouldn't open the letter. 2 weeks she thought, just 2 weeks.

The next few days were calmer. Things went on more normally; well, as normal as they were with her. Nobody would dare to ask her anything. Even though they saw her soft side, she is still as scary as ever.

As time went on, she felt the need to open the letter. Just 3 days till her birthday, it was almost impossible to wait. The longer she waited the more tempting it became. All she thought about was the letter, every single minute of everyday, waiting for the right moment. No matter how hard she tried to forget, the thought just kept on coming back.

2 more days, by this time, she already opened the seal. It was just too tempting. Just a few more hours, she kept saying to herself. This is very confusing to the helpers since they have absolutely no idea what's happening. It's not just the letter she keeps thinking about; it's also the box. She doesn't know what's in it either. It was left when her grandparents died, along with the letter. She wouldn't open it because it could have a connection to the letter. You just never know. In a few hours, everything will be clear, just wait for a while longer. Everything will soon make sense.

Not to forget, she still lives in Old Shanghai, and there are traditions to follow. Chinese New Year is coming soon and everyone has to prepare. House decoration, long lost family invitations, jewelry, new clothing, and way more. The letter and box should be the last thing on her mind.

11:58pm, 2 minutes till her 52nd birthday. The letter was in her hand and the box beside her. 11:59, 12:00!! She tore the letter open and this is what it said:

Dear Annie, Our little girl. You are now 52. We are really sorry we couldn't stay long and take care of you for as long as you expected. We have put some of our most memorable memories in the box, as well as a few pictures of your true parents. We are really sorry we couldn't tell you much before but you were too young to understand. Now that you're 52, nearly as old as we are, (in our time) we think you have the right to know why your parents didn't want you anymore. They told us that they didn't think they could handle it, too much pressure for them. They just didn't think they would raise you right. They were afraid. So they left you with us, so you could be raised right, and you were, you are an amazing girl and everyone knows that. Even you. They said they would come and visit you every few years, but they never made it. Who knows if they're okay? As we said before, we left some pictures of them in the box. If they're still alive, (We hope they are) we say you go find them. When they left you, they said they were going to go to Hong Kong. So, if you are willing to find them, we suggest you start there. We're really sorry we couldn't stay longer. We Love You!

Loves,

Grandma and Grandpa

She lay there in bed reading the letter over and over. The words 'Hong Kong' in her mind. Her parents didn't really leave her and they might still be alive. Everything was so hard to take in. A few minutes later, she took the box and opened it. Inside were some of the best things that had ever happened between her and her grandparents. Buried at the bottom, were 3 pictures of a couple. They looked similar to Annie, but in many ways, very different.

The next morning she woke up and told her helpers to go and be free. No more working for her. She was going to look for her parents, who may or may not be alive. Her heart kept telling her that they were nearby. Somewhere. She has to look! When she finds them, I'll tell you. If she doesn't, then well, I think you'll figure it out. For now, all she has to do is celebrate CNY, her birthday, and then look...

Last days in Wujiang Lu

Island School, Jain, Ravi – 12

A stack of empty bags of flour lay on one side of our small stall, fluttering in the gentle breeze, secured in place by metal weights. A small plastic fan for cooling hot food, decorated with oil stains, lay on the collapsible table with cracked enamel coating. A red tarpaulin, once protecting food from the rays of sun, now waltzes with the warm summer wind, only a short string holding it from flying out into the clear skyline of Shanghai.

Living in *Wujiang Lu* hasn't been easy. Here in the inner belly of Old Shanghai, my father and I work day and night serving *xiao long bao*, barely squeezing out a living. Many of us dream of the glamorous life that lies across the *Huangpu* River along the *Waitan*, but I suppose I'm different. I like it here.

A wok lies abandoned in a corner along with porcelain plates with intricate patterns, now hardly visible after the wear and tear of everyday abuse. All of a sudden, my father's tired and husky voice calls for me from the back of the stall, where I find him sitting on a red plastic chair, fiddling with a broken bamboo basket.

"Son," my father says, coughing a little while adjusting his small, metal-rimmed glasses further up his nose. "Can you carry these metal pots outside?"

"Sure!" I eagerly reply, taking the large shining pots outside, leaving behind a tingling melody of metal bumping into tables and chairs, dampened by the pounding footsteps of pedestrians on a hurry. At one side of the stall sit two old men on red collapsible chairs, shouting and laughing with each other. They start a game of Chinese chess, using pieces that look as if they were carved from soap and a wrinkled piece of graph paper as a substitute for their long-lost board.

"Hey, I also heard there are some good public high schools nearby," father says from the back of the food stall. "You should study to get accepted."

"But father," I quickly reply, "I want to help you cook and maintain our stall."

"Don't worry about me, son. After you complete middle school, you need to study hard and get a good job, so you can lead a good life."

"But how about your stall?"

"Son, even though I love to cook, the stall's not getting enough business. This whole food street might not survive for much longer. Something with the World Expo, I hear ..."

"That can't be true! We've lived here for so many years; they can't just destroy *Wujiang Lu* like that!"

"I didn't say that! Even now, the future remains uncertain. Don't worry son. If you don't mind, I'm going for a quick walk in the park to clear my mind." Yet even as father said this, I felt he was not telling the whole truth and holding back the worst parts just for himself.

The next day, I woke up to the pungent odor of stinky tofu as the streets filled up with noisy tourists and workers. Suddenly, uncle *Li*'s penetrating voice pierced through the cacophony of the busy street. He wore simple clothes and a short white apron with the words "The Best *Chou Doufu* in Shanghai!" proudly emblazoned with rich Chinese characters. His wooden four-wheeled cart, creaked every few steps under the staggering weight of the stinky tofu, as he pushed his way through the molasses of people.

"Get your *chou doufu* here! Only five *yuan* for a plate!" he screamed passionately as he drove his cart through the cobblestone street. The food in the cart jumped up and down like children enjoying a trampoline. As predictably as the afternoon tides, huge flocks of people started to pile around uncle *Li*, asking for heaps of cheap stinky tofu.

Coughing a little, I see father stand up from the chair and itch his eyes, trying to rub away his sliver of envy for the successful neighbor. Adjusting his small metal glasses and regaining focus, I see father quickly take a kettle of water and a huge translucent pork skin blocks, his arms trembling under the weight.

"Father, I think you need some help!" I hastily cry out in alarm.

"Don't worry son," father replies "I've got this." And just like that, father started to cook.

Like the hands of a potter, father slowly churns the flour, dripping water in circles, and sprinkling small flakes of salt, the tasteful rain of the gourmet world. Nimble hands gently jab the dough, squeezing it and turning it like a typhoon. Father slowly spins the filling, a concoction of pork and vegetables, with long, thick chopsticks, worn away by continual use. With a small, ivory spoon, father slowly scoops the filling from its cozy bowl, and places it delicately on the outstretched dough. Like a lotus that closes its petals to the dark curtain of night, father gently seals the dough and creates a perfectly round *xiao long bao*. Yet, the delicate tranquility only lasts a moment, suddenly shattered by the high-pitched voice coming from the now empty stinky tofu cart.

"For the very last time, I don't want to help you! I just want to hang around with my friends!"

"*Wei Zhang*," sadly pleads uncle *Li*, "be a good son and please help me with our tofu business! I'm getting older, and I really need your help. I know that you want to hang out with friends, but I really..."

"Is this what you called me for? Do you really think I care about your useless food stall? Well I don't! Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to hang out my new friends, who know a thing or two about the good life. Unlike you, I want to live near the *Waitan*, not in this ugly street." As the people on the street curiously watched the drama, a sleek black car recklessly drives into the over-crowded street, knocking over the small table where the two old men played chess.

"Hey dude! Come on inside the car."

It has been a long time since I paid attention to what uncle *Li*'s son looked like. He appeared short and fat, with small, beady eyes that always squinted, as if unsatisfied with everything. The black shirt he wore was tightly stretched, barely able to cope with his great belly. As he clambered into the black car, the car honked loudly and raced out of the small street, leaving a small trail of rubber behind.

“What a roadhog!” father exclaimed, before disappearing into his small stall, glancing at uncle *Li* as he wept silently. As we retire into the comfort of the food stall, I noticed night had already enveloped the sky, with its twinkling blanket of stars competing for attention against the flashing neon signs.

The very next day, as I wake up, I see father handling a small bundle of cloth in his hands. As I walk outside, bathed by the warm morning light, father stands up, before he thrusts a clean white apron into my open arms. Surprised, I look up at him, as he slowly slides up his glasses and looks at the glistening skyscrapers near

the *Waitan*.

“I know I haven’t gotten much,” Father says with great difficulty “but I need your help, son. *Wujiang Lu* may be no more someday, but I’ll still have you, even if we have to move away again and again.”

“Don’t worry father. I’ll stay with you no matter what.” I say happily, my emotions overcoming me as I hug father gently while the rosy morning horizon spreads its color over the skyline of Shanghai, gently shining on *Wujiang Lu*, and the rest of Old Shanghai.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Leung, Danielle – 12

“So, how was your trip to Shanghai, Lucy?” I asked curiously, Lucy has just recently came back home from an extraordinary trip to Shanghai and I am eager to hear about it.

“Well... I have a lot to tell, so sit tight and listen closely!” she began...

During the first day of her trip, Lucy arrived at a hotel, which seemed rather old and... perhaps scary too. Be she was too tired to even judge the hotel’s looks, she quickly checked into a room and fell asleep. Not long later, she was woken by a sound of knocking at the door. Lucy wearily got up to check who was knocking at the door, “hello?” she called out, as she opened the door. No answer, “Hello?” she called out louder this time. But still no one answered *Must be some kids messing around...* she thought, and shrugged it off.

A few days into her trip, Lucy had overheard some people talking about the hotel being haunted, “I heard, that someone died here, and that person’s soul is trapped in this hotel!” *A trapped soul? I guess that explains all the paranormal activity that has been happening to me lately...* She thought, during the past few days, Lucy has seen some strange things happening, for example, saw the door slam shut by itself, taps turning on and off, chairs moving into different places while she wasn’t looking... *I better leave this place as soon as possible!* Lucy thought to herself.

After Lucy left the haunted hotel, she arrived at a better hotel and decided to stay there instead. She went to visit the Shanghai tower, which was one of Shanghai's most famous skyscrapers, it was 632 meters and 127 stories tall. Lucy loved the view from up there. After that, she went to the Shanghai Ocean Aquarium, where she saw many different, yet special sea creatures.

Next, she went to see all the great exhibits at the Shanghai museum, the museum had a large collection of over 120,000 pieces of rare cultural relics. Some exhibits have English descriptions, including Ancient Ceramics, bronzes and sculptures. Then she went to see the wonderful Yuyuan Garden, it was filled with decorated bridges, colorful pagodas and enclaves, separated by "dragon walls", and not to mention the magic Exquisite Jade Rock, it was said to have been one of Song Emperor Huizong's private collection!

After a long day of visiting different places and skyscrapers, Lucy decided to take a break and went to Shanghai's Circus World to enjoy its amazing performances. Many tourists go there just to see their great shows with animals, such as elephants, tigers, lions, horses... It was a good show overall!

"And that is pretty much what happened!" Lucy concluded. "Wow! That must've been a fun trip!" I exclaimed. Lucy nodded in agreement, "It sure was! Shanghai is a great place to travel to, maybe we could go together sometime!" she said.

The Turtle

Island School, Leung, Gus – 12

Maybe the sun had risen, but it was smothered by the towering skyline. Lao Wai always woke up early, because it was his tradition. But he could not fully see the sun. The sky had seemed so much bigger when he was younger, and now he felt he was always in the shadow of something. Even though he had problems in his knees, he still would go on walks in Old Shanghai. Old Shanghai is a place where time did not continue, new buildings were never constructed, old buildings never changed. There was a wall separating old Shanghai, and the modern Shanghai we all know now. Lao Wai often walked to the old City—God's temple, where he would watch the turtles swimming in the ponds and would light three sticks of incense in worship of the three gods that protect the city of Shanghai. He used to work as a security guard for this temple, and would see plenty of people coming and making their offerings to the gods. But now, it seemed as if his offerings were the only ones left in the temple.

Lao Wai's grandson George asked him to come over to his apartment to celebrate Chinese new year. Lao

Wai had thought that George had forgotten to invite him, but he called the day before.

'I sent you a text' George had said. 'I thought I taught you how to read them last time, didn't I?'

For Lao Wai, it was a long journey to George's apartment. He had to take the subway, which made him anxious. He counted his coins at the ticket office, and felt the pressure of the people queued up behind him wanting him to go faster. After he bought the ticket, he got on to the train. All of the seats were taken, and nobody would let him have one; even the teenagers looked down at their smart phones and pretended

he wasn't there. By the time Lao Wai got to George's apartment, his knees were aching. His family

laughed, saying that he had got lost and was late.

George was in one of his many suits, playing with his smart phone. He didn't even say *hello* until Lao Wai did. George was the editor of a magazine, and on the wall there was a picture of him above them words 'SELF-MADE MAN.'

Lao Wai asked George about his current girlfriend Sophia.

But George rolled his eyes and said 'Sophia wanted to get married and have kids, so Sophia is now Jessica'.

'I can't understand why you kids change names so easily.' Lao Wai said.

George did not prepare the dinner, his personal assistants did. There was steak, some vegetables, rice... It all looked and tasted very nice, but it seemed heartless, there was no love and effort put into those dishes.

After dinner, George gave Lao Wai a ride back home in his cramped Toyota. It was a very uncomfortable ride for Lao Wai, because George was driving very quickly and Lao Wai did not enjoy it. The stereo was playing some kind of rock music –it was very loud and that hurt Lao Wai’s ears. After arriving at Lao Wai’s home, George didn’t understand how his grandpa lived as he did; The place was dirty and had some kind of odor. It smelt like something was being burnt.

Lao Wai smiled and replied 'This place is where our family has always lived, and I will continue that.'

It wasn't long before George came back to old Shanghai, only this time without his suit and Toyota. He looked like a completely different man. He had eye-bags now, and didn't stand as straight as he had before.

'Dad said I should come, because I have these very serious headaches –He said you could help.'

Lao Wai took him inside and sat him down, and started to massage his neck.

But after a minute Lao Wai said 'There was nothing wrong with your neck –it must be stress.'

Lao Wai asked George about what was happening, George explained that his magazine company had went bankrupt because too many his employees had to quit. George fell from 15 million to 10 million.

Lao Wai didn’t understand the problem.

'The guy across the road has been selling bread for years. It's the best bread in China, but I doubt he's ever made even close to that. Come on –Let me show you!'

Lao Wai then dragged George outside to get him to try the bread, and George agreed that it was extremely tasty. George then started to talk to the baker about how he might be able to expand his business, but Lao Wai and the baker both laughed at him, because this was not the kind of life the baker would have wanted.

'It’s too much of a headache.’Said the baker.

George found that he was getting drowsy, so Lao Wai suggested they had a sit-down in the park. In the streets people had been playing old chinese instruments, make very weird noises, some high, some low pitched, but here it was quiet. George was impatient and frustrated because it was so quiet and slow, he was taking life very quickly, his pace of life was too fast. Never slowing down to realise the beauty in things.

Lao Wai taught George to play Chinese chess. At first, George was really confused by what Lao Wai was saying –How pieces had to move in specific ways, how some pieces out rank each other. George then found himself impatient as Lao Wai took some time to think of his next move, but in the end, his Grandfather always beat his grandson, even though he was becoming more and more tired.

Back home, Lao Wai had a nap on his sofa, and George wanted to take this opportunity to leave. He noticed that he had a another meeting in thirty minutes. He kept checking his Rolex for the time, not knowing when to leave for his meeting. He wandered around the tiny apartment, and noticed that Lao

Wai hadn’t cleaned up the dishes from lunch and dinner, for what seemed like three days. There was soup

left in the bowl and flies flying around the place.

George wanted to find someone to help Lao Wai to clean up his dishes, but then he thought –If he did it himself, quickly, he would still have enough time to get to his meeting. He took off his suit jacket, rolled up his sleeves and put a pair of yellow rubber gloves on.

As George was washing the dishes, a neighbour of Lao Wai's walked past the window and he noticed George.

'Who is this man?' He asked, pointing at George.

'I'm George.' Said George

'He's finally got a cleaner!' Said the neighbour 'Old penny-saving Lao Wai finally got himself a cleaner to help him do his dishes! You know, when his son was in school Lao Wai would cut his own hair –Still

does, after 20 years! He even took his wife's earrings and rings to a pawn shop to earn money! That fool never got it back.'

After that George was slightly late for his meeting, but now it didn't seem to matter anymore.

The next time George came to visit his grandfather, he stood up straight, and rarely looked at his phone. He had replaced with Rolex with a bracelet of wooden beads given to him by Lao Wai.

'I'm going back to the business, but this time I'm not going to rush everything, i'm going to take it slow.'

He told his grandfather.

They would slowly walk up the temple stairs together, George helping his grandfather with each step. The wind kept blowing out the incense sticks that George was trying to light in honour of the city gods. He

felt like breaking them in half and leaving, but he didn't. Lao Wai came to help George and cupped his

hands around the incense to keep the strong wind from blowing out the fire. They planted the incense in the shrine, and both bowed three times in honour of the three gods that protect the city of Shanghai.

As they walked down the steps George seemed calmer. More peaceful. Free from disturbance.

'How's Jessica?' Asked Lao Wai 'Actually... ' George answered, bashfully 'Jessica is now Sophia again.'

Lao Wai smiled in confusion and said 'I can't understand why you kids change names so easily.'

A loud alarm beeped from George's back pocket.

'Are you going back to work now?' Lao Wai asked.

'Yes I am.' replied George,

But he turned to add: 'At my own pace this time.'

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Soni, Sinayan – 12

Old Shanghai was under the depths of darkness. Insects and other tiny creatures were creeping in the moon's ray, hiding from a gargantuan, powerful beast. The beast had fangs as sharp as a knife, it had scales as plates of armour, savage sapphire eyes sat on its large and bony skull giving the beast a more intimidating look. The beast's claws were strong enough to slice any metal, its wings were as massive as a mammoth and its tail ended in a scythe-like blade. The beast was a Dragon.

The people of Old Shanghai feared the Dragon more than anything else; a wave of fear hits them and their blood turns to solid ice as their heart pounds like a drum when they hear or see the Dragon. Every Chinese New Year, the Dragon comes down from its home high up in the mountains above the clouds to feed on the innocent people of Old Shanghai. Every year the Old Shanghai people could not celebrate the New Year properly because of the malevolence of the hellacious Dragon because it consumes the guiltless people of Old Shanghai. Until one year, a young little boy who was 12 years old named Ping wanted to stand up to the Dragon. The previous year Ping had lost his father to the destructive Dragon, Ping's father had sacrificed his life to save his precious son Ping. Since then, Ping had vowed to slay the Dragon.

Ping's idea was to lure the Dragon, he asked all the people of his town to stand together close to each other in the town square as bait; therefore the dragon would come to the people to devour them. Ping would then courageously sneak behind the dragon and use his sword to slay the Monstrosity. However, when he told the people of Old Shanghai, they started to laugh at him saying, "You think a young boy can execute the Dragon when numerous people have failed!" Nevertheless, Ping never gave up he told himself that he could do it and that he would slay the Dragon.

Soon it was Chinese New Year and the people of Old Shanghai were as anxious like a prey going to be eaten by a predator, hoping that the Dragon would leave them and their family alone. On the other hand, Ping was as confident as Justice and he trained hard for when the Dragon came. Suddenly, the ground trembled as if it was an earthquake and there was a mighty roar from above that was louder than a lion's roar and the ferocious Dragon descended upon the fateful town in Old Shanghai. The Dragon was fuming like a hot rod of metal, a menacing aura was surrounding him. All the people of Old Shanghai had chills down their spine and they were hiding in their houses, trying not to make any sound. All the people of Old Shanghai were hiding in their houses except for Ping, who came face to face with the Dragon.

The Dragon did an ear-deafening roar as loud as thunder and charged at Ping, Ping was as helpless as a baby. The Dragon was tearing through the air at break-neck speed towards Ping. The Dragon pinned Ping on the ground and Ping was bruised badly. However, Ping looked up at the misty sky and saw his dead father waving at him gracefully saying, "You can do it son!" Ping did not give up. A storm of emotions was in Ping's mind. He was furious at the atrocious dragon, he was sad because of the death of his father and he was mustering up his confidence as he stumbled up to his two feet. The enraged Dragon then dashed again towards Ping. Ping luckily dodged and the Dragon ran into a mountain, that mountain rumbled then had an avalanche of boulders and the Dragon was buried under a pile of rocks and was dead.

People of Old Shanghai started to pour out of their houses to congratulate Ping's triumph over the Dragon. They apologised, Ping forgave them and they had a big feast in Ping's honour. Ping looked up towards the sky and saw his dad in Heaven smiling and waving at Ping and Ping said, "Thank You."

To this day, there is a statue of Ping with his father in 'Yu Garden' for his bravery. The moral of the story is that anyone can do anything, they just have to believe in themselves.

“Halt,” the deep voice reached my ears.

I stopped, almost tumbling over. Footsteps padded closer and closer.

“Turn,” the deep voice boomed at me.

I turned, there was a British soldier staring at me, cold and hard. “Whose side are you on? Britain or China? Make up your mind girl, what’s your choice?”

I stare at the ground, I feel a pain on my shoulder. The soldier just slapped me, “Answer me, girl.”

I was about to answer when I heard a voice say to the soldier, “Hey, don’t be so harsh on the girl.”

The soldier that slapped me answered him, with the same deep voice, “She looks British, but she’s wearing traditional Chinese clothing. She looks just like a thief too, you can’t trust anyone these days.” And he gave me another slap with his rough hands.

“Don’t bully her, she might be someone who can’t speak,” the other voice said, as I continued to stare at the ground.

“True, but if you’re a thief. I’ll find you. Find some pen and paper if you can’t speak. You look so young and vulnerable, so I’ll let you off, but first...” I felt more slaps coming down onto me, pain washing down on me. It was just too hard to bare, so I fell to my knees, transparent tears fell from my eyes.

The soldier actually laughed, his laugh was bitter and cold, just like his stare. Slowly, his footsteps faded away.

“Hey, look up.” The other voice said.

I looked up, just a little bit. The person held out his hand, and I recognised it immediately. I looked up into his face. It was him. He was the boy I saw yesterday, watching me as I went to get my family our monthly food, which wasn't very much at all. He seems to watch me a lot, and I seem to watch him a lot as well. If I see him on the street, I give him a small smile. I know you're not supposed to do that. Being friendly towards the enemy, but I just can't help it. He is still wearing his grey and green uniform, with brown boots. It doesn't seem to be very comfortable to be in this uniform all the time. He also wears a green cap, this cap is made for soldiers to wear when on duty around the villages. Unlike the ones, they wear when going to battle. The green cap has multiple holes in it, and black thread stitched all over it. Unlike the generals, who have shiny clean caps. On the street, he always comes for my aid. He could have let the soldier slap me, but he didn't. He could have let the soldier who was threatening to take me away a few days ago, but he didn't. I felt like I was starting to like him and I thought he had the same feeling, but I was wrong. Yesterday, when I was out I saw him speak to my twin, Xin Xin. I heard parts of it, as I approached them.

"I really like you.... I know... But I'll find a way..." When I approached them, he looked really confused. I remember him saying, "You guys are twins?"

After that, I practically dragged Xin Xin away from him. I remember Xin Xin asking me, "Are you jealous? Are you jealous that he picked me over you, well, you should be because I am a lot better than you." We are sisters, but we act like we are enemies, in our own little war. Life isn't great for me, until I met him. And now he's gone too, and this is the first time I've seen him since.

Painfully, I pulled myself up unwillingly with the help of his rough hand, "Thanks," I say to him politely as I pull myself up to face him. My English is quite reasonable, as one side of my grandparents are fully British and I've learnt it since a young age.

"What for?" he asked,

"Just for coming to my rescue again, thank you," I dipped my head at him, in respect. Then, I turned around and started to walk home. While I was walking home, I stopped in front of an old lady, who was begging on the streets. She seemed to be British, but I gave her a coin, which was part of my own pocket money.

Oh well, there goes my pocket money, I thought. At least, it's going somewhere good and it will help others too. Although we are poor and at war. My brother works in another country will send us some extra money, half of it will usually go towards the army. Because the army seems to check everything belonging to us. Every single package, every letter. If they think it's harmful, they'll burn it. Along with all the other things they're going to burn. As I passed her, I heard her calling out to me,

"Dear child, come here. There is something very important I need to tell you,"

I paused, not knowing what to decide, but I retraced my steps and turned to face her, expecting this to be a trick and I would see a gun pointed at my chest, but her face was innocent, low spirited and heartbroken, like a young child I see on the streets with their crying family, when their other family members are dragged away. Her bare hands are smooth, but they are covered in scars and bruises, where she was slashed by a whip. She started to speak in a fast and hushed voice,

"Whatever you do, do not trust the young man who helped you today."

“Why?”

“I do not know child, but I have heard the British soldiers are planning to do something horrible to young girls.”

“He’s not like that, anyway, I have nothing to do with him.”

“Good. Do not tell anyone I told you this, please, I beg of you. Now go young child.” Then she continued begging, looking towards the dusty ground, when she lifted her head up again it was like she was looking through me.

Her words replayed in my head over and over again. It just didn’t make sense, the boy, he’s such an innocent young man. He can’t be that bad, but then mother always tells me not judge someone by his looks.

It’s not like I’m getting close to him or anything? Right? I thought.

I continue my journey home, I lean on the wall to tighten my red shoes. I notice a piece of white paper sticking out of them, then I realized I’m making dinner tonight. I quicken my pace, still walking, because I can’t run in traditional Chinese clothing. Grandma spent ages making this dress for me, it’s still my favourite one although there are holes here and there. I turn the corner and head towards the noisy market. Taking a deep breath, the sweet apple scent reaches my nose. As I smile in delight, I unfold the shopping list and off I go.

It’s been two months since I talked to the young soldier who helped me multiple times before. I didn’t get the chance, because I’ve been dogging all the other soldiers, who have hit and slapped me. So far so good. While he’s on duty, wearing his green uniform, if he passes me, he gives me one of his amazing small smiles. I try not to smile back, but it’s just so sweet. Just like the candy we used to share. Xin Xin and I, but that was long before we became enemies. It was a terrible mistake I made once, when we went on holiday. I tried everything to make it up to her, but she just wouldn’t forgive me. And that’s how it’s been ever since. The old lady’s words play over and over in my head, she said, “Whatever you do, do not trust the young man who helped you today.”

I was walking home from school after a long and tiring day, during the last lesson we were learning how to sow, it still didn’t work for me. The girl on the right of me, finished piece after piece, sowing and stitching. Her needle work was amazing, the product she produced was absolutely breathtaking. The girl on my left, she was even worse than I was. She kept pricking her finger with the sharpened, silvery and solid needle while putting her thread through the hole of the needle. I walked past a dark alley when a pair of pale hands shot out and grabbed me. The muffled voice said only one word, “Sorry,” Then, the person pressed a handkerchief to my mouth to stop me screaming. Some else came behind me and tied me up, the ropes rubbed into my wrists, then before I could even try to fight back, they threw me into a bag.

I was kidnapped.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Kellett Senior School, Ferguson, Freya – 13

The dirt and cobble streets ran endlessly, constantly crammed with men, women, babies and children. Noise of laughter and shouting filled the streets. Children weave amongst the busy men. Women call out to customers. Babies wail to their mothers. Down a little alleyway there is a row of houses. It is much like the rest, but there is one house that holds a little girl and her mother. This is the story of how their lives changed forever.

The girl's name is Eleanor Ying and the mother's name is Maya Ying. Right now Eleanor is in school. Sitting at her desk staring into space. She is imagining herself in a park. There are swings and seesaws, also rocking horses and a yellow plastic slide. The sun is out and shining, filling everything with warmth and happiness. She slides down the slide and onto the ground.

"Eleanor! This is the fifth time I have had to tell you to concentrate! This is unacceptable. You are staying after school today!" Miss Wang raved

"Sorry miss." Eleanor grumbled. The rest of the day passed by sluggishly. The bell rang for the end of school. Everyone was getting up when four soldiers burst into the school, guns at the ready and pointing right at the students. Everyone froze. The leading soldier stepped forward. He was tall with short grey hair. He had the same green uniform as the others but he also had coloured ribbons fastened onto his shirt placing him above the rest of the men. He had a strong powerful commanding voice that made you want shrink into a corner and never come out.

"Listen up everyone you do what we say and no one gets hurt. You are our prisoners. You shall do what we say exactly when we say it. You shall not speak unless spoken to and you will not converse with others around you. Understand!?" Everyone was looking around very confused. The school did not teach English so they had no idea what the soldiers were saying. Everyone except Eleanor. Eleanor was taught English from a young age by her mother. She had no idea why her mother taught her English apart from that she said it was very important to understand. Why it was important, she had no idea. She knew that none of her classmates understood, so she put her hand up very slowly. The soldiers saw this and pointed their guns at her. She froze.

"S-sorry Sir I-I don't think th-they understand you." the petrified Eleanor stammered.

"And why would that be?" Barked the General his gruff voice rumbled like a volcano.

"They don't understand English sir." Eleanor whispered as she disappeared further and further under her desk. She was trembling now.

"How come you understand then?"

"My Mother taught me."

"Who is your Mother?"

"Um..." Eleanor didn't know why but she had a feeling that it wasn't right to tell them her name. Luckily just then another officer came in.

"I want all these children outside in a line now general."

"Yes sir." The General said saluting. "I'll deal with you later." He growled looking at Eleanor sinking his piercing eyes into her flesh.

A little further away was another set of soldiers being led by another General. "I want you to go round to each of the houses and take anyone from inside the houses. And bring them here."

"Yes sir!" The soldier said in unison marching off.

"What's the matter with you Henry?" Said Jimmy giving him a friendly punch in the arm. Jimmy and Henry have been friends since they were born and they joined the army together as well. They had no secrets between each other

"You promise not to tell sergeant or the General right."

"Of course not mate."

"Thanks it's just that, this all seems so wrong and mean. We're meant to be protecting our people. Not just attacking other countries for the sake of getting slaves!"

"I know what you mean, I feel the same way. But what can we do. After all we're only Privates." Jimmy sighed as they trudged along the dirt paths.

"This is stupid but..." Henry dropped his voice to a whisper. "I want to see if I can find her. I know she's out there somewhere I can feel it."

Jimmy sighed "Not this again!"

"Yes this again she said she came from Shanghai so if she is anywhere she bound to be here." Henry said exasperated.

"Whatever." Jimmy said as they came up to the first house. "Let's just get this over with." The two of them barged in with their guns at the ready.

"Come out with your hands up." Henry ordered in Chinese. A woman came out. Henry looked at the woman and dropped his gun. The woman heard this and looked up.

They both stopped "Maya?" Henry asked in happy disbelief.

"Henry?" The woman was standing there flabbergasted.

"Is that really you?" Henry asked still not quite believing.

"Oh my gosh!" They ran to each other and just stood there hugging.

"Where have you been? I've missed you so much!"

"Hey, hate to be a bum but the Sergeant said..." Jimmy stammered looking at Maya.

"What! I'm not taking my wife prisoner!" Henry said shocked.

"Then how do you propose we keep her a secret to the General, without any of us getting into seriously deep trouble? Because I don't know about you but I would prefer to not be shot for treason!"

"Hold on, hold on. What's going on?" Maya asked deeply confused.

Henry took a deep breath hanging his head "The army is capturing all the citizens of Shanghai for slaves." He explained.

"That's horrible!" Maya exclaimed shocked and horrified. "Have they got to the children yet?" Maya asked suddenly in a panic.

"Unfortunately yes the children are all lined up waiting for the adults." Maya's face turned to what was a mixture of horrified and panicked.

"Oh no oh no oh no!" She started saying to herself.

"What's the matter?" Henry asked now panicked himself.

"I'm so sorry I didn't tell you earlier." Maya said ashamed "You're a father, of the most beautiful girl in the world."

"What! Really!" A huge smile spread across his face.

"Her name is Eleanor."

"That's amazing! What a beautiful name." Henry said bursting with pride and happiness. Then his face fell. "If my daughter is out there I have to save her and the rest of the children."

"Very heroic but, how are you supposed to do that?" Jimmy asked. Henry thought.

"I think I may have an idea." He said smiling

"Well!" Maya prompted.

"Maya you are my prisoner do what I say and this will work. Look scared and struggle a bit." Henry ordered

"Ok..."

"Jimmy you obviously have been helping me. You take this arm and I'll take the other." They led Maya out together and met with the other Soldiers.

They followed the General to a large space of open land where there was already lines of children chained together. Tears streaming down their petrified faces. Their breaths were quick and sharp. Henry and Jimmy chained Maya to the woman behind her. He gave her a reassuring look trying to calm her. The other mothers were looking rapidly around for their beloved children making sure they were ok. At the front of the terrified crowd was another man he was powerful and strong everyone seemed to cower away from him. He was obviously high ranking and people respected him. He didn't need words to order his men. All he did was start walking and automatically the rest followed. They were led onto a huge boat with massive sails and equipment. The prisoners were led down into the cockpit of the boat. There were rows and rows of cellars. They were inhumanly dirty but still the prisoners were crammed in by the hundreds. There was barely enough room to breathe. Children and adults were separated to different ends of the cockpit. The trip was long and hard. Many people weren't used to the rocking of the boat and new diseases spread quickly, soon the cellars were filled with the stench of sick and cadavers. But finally the gruelling trip was over and everyone was chained together again and led off the boat.

The Sergeant went to the front of the crowd and with his booming voice ordered the Generals to let the families reunite once more. The soldiers were posted so that it was impossible for anyone to escape, the chains were then unlocked and the mothers ran to scoop up there shivering frightened children. Maya and Eleanor ran to each other like their lives depended on it and they hugged. They hugged each other so hard they could barely breath. Eleanor buried her face into her mother's shoulder and cried. The two stood there in silence while tears of quiet relief ran down their faces. In each other's arms, they were finally safe, for now.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Kellett Senior School, Singh, Gayatri – 12

I looked with wonder around at the spice market. Vibrant colours and smells seemed to come from every stall. I gazed at the pork crackling on one stall, with its delicious smell. My mouth watered as we walked around the stalls, delicious smells wafting out. Ma stopped at one with a bright red sign and gold calligraphy.

“Two of your Qīngwā tuǐ,” she said, pulling coins from her special cotton wallet Nainai had made her. Frog legs! Ma used to buy them for me before Ba died, when we had money to spend. I stared up happily at Ma, but she remained expressionless. She handed me the frog legs in a plastic bag and carried on walking, occasionally stopping to talk to one of her friends. I eyed the frog legs. Both of the legs looked tender and juicy on the inside, but crispy on the outside, just the way I liked them. My stomach rumbled. I hadn’t had any food since breakfast. Taking a quick glance at Ma, I sneaked one of the legs into the palm of my hand. I took a quick bite out of one of the legs, then another. Delicious! I was about to take a third bite when a loud, piercing scream filled my ears.

“Eeeeeewwww!”

Staring at the crowd, I quickly clapped my hands over my mouth. I was mortified. Hundreds of pairs of brown eyes stared at me, this stranger with carrot-red hair and blue eyes who had screamed. But I couldn’t help it. That girl over there was eating frog legs! The poor thing. She obviously had thought it was chicken. Thank goodness I was to warn her. Acting quickly, I ran and yanked the leg out from her mouth. The texture was slippery and squishy, and I winced as it passed from my hand onto the floor. I slowly stood up, and looked expectantly at the girl. I expected her to look relieved, even grateful, but she looked anything but that. Her face was squished up, like she was about to cry.

“Oh, no, don’t cry,” I whispered, alarmed.

“Excuse me,” she said, in accented English “but who you think you are?”

Shocked, I tried to explain.

“Your daughter was eating frog legs,” I said shakily “not chicken.”

Suddenly, I could tell by the woman's expression that this was not news to her at all. I froze, realising what she meant. And slowly, she said the words that I had been dreading, the words that would make me look like a villain, not a hero. Slowly and deliberately, the woman spat,

“I know.”

You’re probably wondering why I was crying so loudly. It’s no big deal, you’re probably saying. But it is. This girl, who I have never even met before, not only ruined my dinner, the only time I’ve had frog legs since Ba died, but she humiliated both me and my culture. This foreigner, this person who had left her country to come to mine, had described our food as ‘Eeww’. That’s the problem with them foreigners. Just because they left their culture and country behind doesn’t mean they can look down at ours. I’ve never been as angry before. I hate her with her ignorant views and loud proclamations on what was delicious and what’s not.

Ma and I walked home in total silence. The silence was deafening, and every time I opened my mouth nothing came out. We walked across the uneven cobbles and stopped outside an old, rickety concrete building. Our home. We walked up the narrow stairs in the same way as walking home—in complete silence.

We stopped at our door and Ma slowly unveiled our rusty door key. The door swung open, showcasing the lack of decoration and dusty grey floor. As I knelt down to pick up a piece of stray lint from the floor, I felt a hand give me a stinging slap across my face. Ma was glaring at me with such anger I wished the floor would swallow me whole. My hand instinctively reached up to my cheek, tender and pink from the ferocity of the slap. “You idiot!” She screams, her body shaking with anger. I stare at her, confused. What I had done to warrant such anger? I know I had done nothing wrong. Ma seemed to sense my confusion and continued. “You have just made a fool of yourself in front of those people. They have always hated us before and they’ll hate us even more now that you’ve humiliated them.”

I blink, and take in the words I had just heard. Why did Ma care if they hated us or not? And why did she lay the blame on me? It was no great secret that there had been a rift between us and the foreigners even before I was born, which was only twelve years before. Ever since we lost the Opium war we were

made to feel the lesser race in our own country.

Ma continued; “Here, we must be careful not to do anything that might make them hate us more.”

I stared at her in shock. “Why do you care so much?” I asked, a little irritated. Ma stared at me, nostrils flared. “Those people were my new employers.”

Mother and I sat in total silence as we boarded our rickshaw. Au Sung, our rickshaw-carrier knew it was better than to speak while he ran. He stopped outside a large villa with a beautiful wooden gate. Our home. Jung Ming, Mother’s maid quickly ran to greet us and collected our coats and disappeared, probably to do a final dust before Father came home so the house would look perfect. After Jung Min had scurried off and Au Sung had left to smoke a cigarette outside, Mother turned around to face me with cold eyes. I immediately felt a cold sense of dread, like someone had dropped an ice-cold bucket of water on my head.

“Alice. You shall wait until Father comes home than you should come down to face the consequences of your actions.” Even though her face was calm, Mother’s voice betrayed her thoughts. Even though she believed I had made a mistake and Father should know of it, she did not want to make Father upset, especially when he came home with a cheerful exterior but bitter feelings inside. Mother and I were two different people, mother and daughter, a person who made a mistake and a person who didn’t, yet we still feared Father’s words created when he came home reeking of liquor, words that could make the strongest person in the world feel like nothing, and a tongue sharp enough to cut away a strong mask and reveal a scarred face. I loved Father, but I hated the drink that turned him into this cold, poisonous monster. A few minutes later, the doorbell rang, and I saw Mother freeze up, her beautiful face expressionless but eyes filled with terror. Jung Ming quickly appeared at the door and opened it, then hastened away, mumbling something about bathing Eve. Father was standing outside the doorway, but he was not alone. A large bottle of whiskey was by his side, it’s normally golden colour black in the darkness.

“How are my two favourite girls?” He asked, voice slurred alarmingly. He clumsily stretched his arms out for a hug, but tripped and smashed the bottle of whisky on our silk carpet. I held my breath. If any other of us had done it we would have dire consequences, but Father simply laughed it off. He gave both of us a swift kiss on the cheek and headed upstairs. Mother and I exchanged looks. “Maybe it is best if we tell him tomorrow,” she says softly, and I couldn’t have agreed more as I trudged off to bed.

Today is Ba’s second death anniversary. Enough said. I woke up to the smell of incense candles. Ma was lighting them, her hand trembling as she held a box of matches. Quietly, she placed the candles in front of Ba’s portrait. She whispered something softly, and turned around, eyes red.

Even though I love Ma, I never will love her as much as I did to Ba. One of my fondest memory's is when I was six and sitting on Ba's lap. He was telling me the story of Hua Mulan, the famous Chinese warrior who, against all odds fought in battles despite being a woman. I loved that story, and insisted he told it again and again. However, as I got older, I began to read on my own and Ba's stories became a distant memory. I lost interest in reading and listening to old Chinese tales and wanted to read the English storybooks that my classmate's read. I was fascinated with their culture. Their clothes, their food—their everything. But I'd never met one of them before. I felt a little embarrassed, ogling at her as if she were in a zoo.

By—Gone Shanghai

Marymount Secondary School, Tam, Wei Zhuang Samantha – 13

“Take a seat on the wooden chair, and I will brew you a steaming hot cup of Jasmine Tea. And whilst we enjoy the tea, let me tell you a story from Old Shanghai.”

1919, French Concession, The Bund

“Get out, woman,” an Indian security guard sneered at a woman, who was with a three-year-old, “You are not allowed here.”

The woman quickly spurted out a string of apologies, dragging her son away hurriedly from the Public Garden.

“Where are we going Mama?” the three-year-old tiny tot raised his head up to look at his mother, toddling besides the woman in her forties. They were both in rags, their face painted with ashes.

The woman looked at the boy with much love, sighing, “We are going there, Fai.”

“What do you mean by there?” Fai asked, clutching the woman’s hand.

“Right there,” the woman pointed towards the area, where the well-off foreigners lived.

“It seems like a beautiful place,” the boy said dreamily.

The woman chuckled. “It sure is, sonny.”

The pair walked silently then. The woman knew exactly what they were going to do – to beg for money, or for food. They had not eaten properly for a week, only having small bites of a stale bun bought a week ago. The woman knew this wasn’t going to last long enough. She didn’t want her beloved son to starve.

“Come on sonny,” she said after finding a spot they could stay. “Let’s sit down here.”

Obediently, Fai sat next to his mother, snuggling close to her. They sat in silence, the boy unaware of the situation while the mother was desperately waiting for someone to drop by a penny or two.

Having been a scorching day, Droplets of sweat dropped off Fai’s tiny face. “It’s so hot, Mama,” he nudged his mother.

The woman quickly shushed her son, pulling a worn-out rag to wipe his face. Many suited foreigners walked by, throwing glances at the beggars along the road. Their glances were spiteful and arrogant and no one stopped to give them anything.

Finally, after what seemed to be hours of waiting, a blond man walked by, dropping a penny in front of the two. “Thank you so much,” the woman said, nudging her already dozing off son, “say thank you to the nice man, son.”

Fai looked up, mumbling a sleepy thank you. The man gave them a slight nod and left. “I am hungry and tired, Mama,” he told his mother softly.

The woman chuckled, placing the penny in a safe place, and picked her son up, walking towards their home.

There was a rickshaw passing by whilst they were walking home. “Is that Uncle Guang?” Fai asked excitedly, recognizing the puller who was his favorite uncle.

“Yes, that’s your uncle Guang,” the mother said, “But do not disturb your uncle. He is working.”

A well-off Japanese was propped on the car, looking like he was being given a massage, while the rickshaw puller had to drag the cart along with the overweight man. Every now and then the passenger would give a mighty kick in Guang’s back, harshly urging him to go faster. Guang looked like he was in pain but did not dare to complain.

And all of that, was carved onto Fai’s heart, and was never forgotten.

1932, Chinese Zone, The Bund

“Come and join us!” a student approached Fai, who was six feet tall and more muscular than the people than his age.

Fai was a student who loathed the Japanese and joined his friends to protest against them. The Japanese Navy then attacked Shanghai to crush them. Him being his hot-blooded self, decided to join the army. Of course, it was risky – but he knew saving the country was more important than his own life. He knew it would worry his mother and make her live in angst until he came back, but he had decided. He was going to fight for his country.

Walking side by side in silence, they savored every moment before they arrived at the train station. The faded navy blue canvas bag, swung over Fai’s left shoulder, bounced up and down, making a soft noise every time it hit his shoulder.

Fai was worried. Worried about his aging mother, what if she was killed during the war? What if he died? Who would take care of his mother? He was her only family. A thought bubbled up, urging him to just give up joining the army. He immediately shook away the thought. It was tempting, but wouldn’t it be selfish of him to give up saving the country in order to save himself and his mother? The scene from years ago, where the Japanese treated his late uncle Guang, who recently died in the Japanese attack, like he was worthless, replayed in his mind. He clenched his fists. He was going to join the army.

His mother was petrified. If he died, there’s no point of her living. She wanted to convince him to stay, so she wouldn’t be living in angst every day. But wouldn’t it be selfish? He was a strong boy, she knew for sure, and he would come back, safe and sound, she tried to persuade herself, yet the thought of Fai dying was taunting her and making her heart thump faster. She quickly pushed away the thought, repeating to herself, Fai was strong and he would come back safely... And saving the country was an honorable act, and what a brave man does. She couldn’t help but feel the slightest bit of pride of her son, now she could boast to her friends, “My son is an army boy. He is out there, saving the country.”

Finally, they arrived at South Railway Station. “Take care, son, and write me letters,” the mother looked at her son.,

“Will do, mother,” Fai curled his lips up into a smile, and bid her farewell.

“Wait!” His mother called, and handed him a worn-out rag. “Here’s the handkerchief you’ve been using since you were born. Bring this along with you, and it will be like me staying with you.”

Fai silently took it and stuffed it into his pocket. “Goodbye, mother.”

Then he spun around and got on the train.

The mother watched her son walking away, the train getting farther and farther away from her, and the tears she had been holding streamed down her face. She sobbed profusely, and she crumbled, completely.

1945, The Bund

It had been thirteen years since Fai left for war. He lost a leg and barely survived. He was able to come back home. He was coming home! After thirteen years! He was ecstatic, he was so thrilled to see his mother. For the first six years, they kept contact through letters, however, one day, he stopped receiving letters from his mother.

However, when he stepped foot in Shanghai, he didn't recognize it. Everywhere seemed different. The bund looked darker than he remembered, and the sky was greyer than ever.

After a few minutes of staggering, he arrived at the village where he used to live, but he didn't see his home anywhere – the hut made of metal, patches and rust sprawled everywhere.

"Where is it?" he murmured, while the fallen leaves on the floor made a rustling noise.

"Have you seen my mother?" he approached a woman in her sixties.

"Are you Fai?" the woman peered at him, her eyes pitiful.

"Yes?" Fai said hesitantly, not sure where this conversation was going.

"Your mother is in heaven, poor you. She died during the Japanese attack in the South Station in August seven years ago, the woman stated, patting his shoulder sympathetically, "She often went there to see if you were back ever since you went to war." And she walked away.

Fai collapsed, falling on his knee, tears running down his face. He took out the handkerchief his mother gave him before he left, and buried his face into it. It had been so long since he cried, he hadn't cry when his fellow soldiers died, he hadn't cry when he lost his leg, but here he was, on his knee, tearing up like an infant. He saved his country but not his home.

He stumbled across the village, still sobbing and sniffing. People passing by sent him pitiful glances, seeing a full-grown man breaking down.

"Mama," he whispered into the thin air, "Come back."

A few decades later, in front of the Central Plaza in Xintiandi, a newly opened landmark of Shanghai, an aged man who only had one leg sat on a wooden stool. In his hands was a worn-out rag, and he was mumbling his story to the thin air.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chan, Stephanie – 12

Throughout Shanghai, all the myths of The Old City of Shanghai have been remembered, but one was forgotten. *The Ghosts of the School*. Whoever was killed in this school and the spirits of those who died would only appear to those with powers and wait for them to tell the world and the spirit itself who the killer was. Few remember this myth: it's said that whoever was killed in The School of Performing Arts, their spirits will haunt the corridors until the killer was revealed.

It was Shane's first day at the new school, and he was late to class. It was role call and he crept into the class through the back door and quickly sat down at the remaining seat exactly when the teacher called out for his name. With a relaxed heart, Shane sunk down into his chair. The teacher announced that they would need to partner up for a class activity. Shane tensed up as he was the only one who hadn't found a partner, with him being the new kid he didn't have any friends to partner with. But luckily, a tall and handsome boy came up to him and said "Want to be partners? I see you're the new kid and struggling to find a partner." Shane gladly accepted his request and asked for his name and he answered with "My full name is Tyler Jones Smith but my friends call me so TJ, so call me TJ." And after a day of boredom, the school day was over. But to Shane's surprise, as he was walking to the school, He saw it was surrounded by the local guards, a guard went up to him and said "The School is closed as a dead body was found in the principal's office. We are closing the school temporarily for investigation." Shane was incredibly curious, he had a strong urge to sneak inside and investigate the site himself. He turned around to leave and saw TJ standing behind him. "Hey TJ! You want to go and investigate the dead body?" As soon as TJ heard that he quickly responded with "*No! Don't go investigate, it will only bring trouble to the both of us.*"

Shane couldn't keep his curiosity to himself, so he waited for TJ to leave and hid behind a bush to get a sight of the school. From what he observed, every corner was being watched in the security room. He waited for the guards to give a blind eye to sneak inside the building. With a pounding heart, he tiptoed through the entrance and walked through the hallway leisurely, but was startled when he heard guards walking to him. He immediately hid behind a pillar behind him. It took a while for the all the guards to walk away but eventually he was able to creep into the school. He then proceeded to walk towards the principal office, he passed by another few guards but managed to not get caught. He settled into the principal's office and found the room the body was found in, which was in a secret room behind the principal's desk. But to Shane's surprise, there was nothing, he left the secret room in utter disappointment. In shock, Shane found a newspaper clipping in the doorway of the room and what was printed on it shocked him even more. "*Tyler Jones-Smith was found dead in a secret room located inside the principal's office. It is confirmed that the boy was killed 10 years old.*" "You found out my secret... I told you not to come, I told you not to investigate. Now you know." TJ said in a low and quiet voice, who appeared in the doorway with an expressionless face. Shane widened his eyes in disbelief. "Well... to explain whoever was killed in this school and the spirits of those who died will only appear

to those with powers and wait for them to tell the world and the spirit itself who the killer is. And yes, you will need to find and reveal the person who killed me to the entire world until I can be free.”

A few days later...

Shane couldn't go back to school after what had happened. He had to spend a few days to himself, he had also made a new friend named Tom. They became good friends immediately AND Tom also went to his school so they planned to hang out.

The next day...

It was Shane's first day after what happened and he was feeling nervous about coming back to school. He was walking up the stairs of the school and saw Tom. But something was off, Tom was hiding behind the car of their teacher and was mumbling to himself, he had morning bed hair and he had black circles under his eyes. Shane thought he was having a bad day, but to Shane's surprise, Tom was the same the next day. And the next day and the rest of the week.

It was a normal day at school until an announcement came, all students were required to go to the assembly hall. "They never use the assembly hall for announcements..." mumbled Shane. " *We will have to unfortunately, close the school down for personal reasons.*" said the local guards. Everyone was curious why the school closed down and the corridors were hustling and bustling with the eager students to leave school. Everyone was excited for the day off, and to the student's excitement, the school contacted the students that the school would be closed down for the week. Shane was starting to become suspicious of what was happening in the school. But soon later, bad news came in. According to the newspaper, there had been a murder at the school and the victim was the principal.

The school was open again, Shane was curious, again. So he gathered up the courage and stayed at the school until all the teachers left. He thought that he could find clues to find out who is the murderer and also at the same time investigate TJ's killer too. "Since TJ's body was found in the principal's office AND the principal was recently found dead in that same office. I should go there first to investigate". thought Shane. He checked the hallways to see if anyone was around. The hallway was empty, so he strolled through the hallways and headed to the principal's office. What he saw shocked him. It was the principal. He wasn't dead, He was standing next to his desk. On the phone, talking with someone. He was talking really fast as if he was really nervous about something. Shane tried to listen in to the conversation, but the only thing he could manage to hear was. " *No! They can't know.....what I have done..... arrest me*" said the principal in a rushed tone. Shane couldn't handle his breathing and was gasping loudly. "Who was that? Is someone in my room?... wait I'm going to go check it out." Said the principal, putting down his phone and walking to where Shane was. Shane's heart was beating so loud it was like he could hear drums through his ears and could sense the principal's footsteps coming closer and closer. And the moment finally came and the principal saw Shane. The principal grabbed the collar of Shane's shirt and quietly said "Why are you here? Might as well tell you as you're going to die tonight anyway." Shane murmured " I thought you were dead." The principal said "Yes, everyone thought I was dead but something you don't know is that your friend Tom is the one who has been helping me faking my death and we plan to kill anyone with the powers to see spirits. We don't want anyone to know that we were the

ones who killed TJ. So if we stop anyone from exposing what we did. TJ's spirit will remain in this school forever and we won't get jailed." "Well, you explained yourself very clearly Mr. Smiths, TJ's father."

Shane and the principal turned around to find Tom at the doorway. A tall and muscular local guard was also standing next to Tom and was holding a recording device and every word the principal said was recorded. "When.....did...you come... here" stuttered the Principal. "We were here the whole time, Mr. Smith," said the local guard. "HOW COULD YOU!" yelled The principal. Tom looked away and didn't respond.

TJ appeared in front of the school after Shane had revealed the principal. "Thank You, thank you for freeing me from this school after all these years. I can never repay you back for this."

Next Day in the newspaper...

"There has been an arrest at The School of Performing Arts, the principal who was assumed as to be dead last week but apparently was found alive yesterday according to witness Shane Wilson. He said that the principal had threatened to kill me but Tom who was one of the killers and is also being jailed for 2 months but the principal will be jailed for 3 years for faking death and death threat."

And this was the myth of The Ghosts of the School, the legend is as old as history itself, one that many people of Shanghai have forgotten about.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chu, Isaac – 12

“Ready the dynamite!” The shouts of construction workers erupted in the air. General Chen stared down from his pavilion. In just a few minutes, the once great New Northern Gate would be reduced to nothing but rubble.

Only a year ago had his forces occupied Shanghai. Only a month ago had the great dismantlement project begin. Only now did he begin to regret his decision.

“General, they have come again.” Chen sighed. The protests had not stopped since his order to take down the old city walls had been given. News of the dismantlement spread like a fire. Soon, everyone knew of the plan. Everyone opposed him.

“Should we drive them away?”

“Do take care of them. They’ve been a nuisance to me since forever!”

As soon as that came out, he heard a “Boom!”, and the ground started shaking. “What’s happening?” he yelled, but his voice was drowned out by the loud noises of rocks tumbling over each other.

All of a sudden, something sharp and white came streaking across the dust cloud that was forming outside, sailing across the pavilion from the balcony. General Chen had a split second to react before he fell. Down, down, down, into the darkness...

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1554, Shanghai

“Pirates sightings reported in the south. Due to arrive in about three months’ time. Amoy has been taken over. We are defenseless.” The Emperor was having a hard time.

He had left the safety of Beijing to check on the important town of Shanghai. He quickly regretted his rash decision.

Soon after he had taken risen to the throne, China had suffered a great deal from the Wokou, ruthless Japanese pirates who looted the coastal areas of his empire.

An entire portion of China’s south had been taken over. He could not afford to lose Shanghai. Especially not to the Japanese.

If there could only be a way to delay and hold back those pirates...to make Shanghai impenetrable... Any way... To hold back against those pirates...

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1673, Shanghai

The moon hung high up in the night sky. The sky was pitch black, without a sliver of starlight except for the moon. Yet, the town of Shanghai was illuminated by the bright fires that burned at each corner.

Shanghai had never been so alive since the Song Dynasty. Not selling, were the traders, but rather carving and shaping stone at their stores. Not resting, were the soldiers, but rather training in their barracks. Not on the lookout, were the guards, but rather evaluating the progresses of different parts of the wall.

Not cradling their children, were the women, but rather making cement at their homes. Not gambling at midnight, were the men, but rather pulling stone through the streets. Not hiding from their mothers, were the youth, but rather delivering resources to the workers.

It seemed as if everyone had a part to play, something to do. As General Libu surveyed the surrounding area, he thought he saw the Emperor smile and nod in approval. The Great Southern Gate of the Leaping Dragon would be completed in time.

Shanghai would be safe from the Wokou.

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1780, Shanghai

The sound of galloping could be heard in the quiet night. As the group of horses neared the house, Lishen gasped at the sight of the royal emblem of the Empire of the Great Ming on their broad flags.

“Is this Lishen? Of the Virtuous Phoenix?” The riders climbed down from their horses. Lishen bravely steps forward. “Yes”

“Your time has come.” As he spoke, the messenger revealed an elaborate scroll from his cloak, encased in fine jade, and handed it to Lishen.

As Lishen unraveled the scroll calmly, the messengers paced uneasily, reassuring their horses. The moon dimmed, the stars stopped tingling, and the air became chillier than usual.

Lishen had known this day would come ever since he was a child. He had longed to serve his proud nation, to continue his ancestors’ legacy. Yet, he could not stop his fingers from shaking as they lingered over the crisp parchment.

His family stood beside him – a young, attractive woman, weeping softly under a handkerchief, and an even younger boy, looking at his father with tear-filled eyes.

As he read, Lishen’s once expressionless face shriveled like a prune. Tears began streaming from the young boy’s face. “Why,” he mumbled, “Why does daddy need to leave?”

Sighing deeply, Lishen knew he hadn't a choice. The Emperor had specifically asked for him to go alone. He walked over to his son and knelt down.

"Soon, my brave one. It will be your turn."

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1827, Shanghai

"Heave—ho! Move it! The gate's almost finished! There'll be food for all of us!" Lishen wiped the sweat off his brow using a fat finger. Shanghai's Eastern Water Gate would be complete in time for Winter.

The famine had hit Shanghai unexpectedly. None of the local crops could grow, and with the growing pressure of the power Li Zicheng's rebellion, foreign imports were cut off, and the number of mouths to feed increased drastically.

The Emperor had organized an emergency squad for the building of the Eastern Water Gate, to allow ships to directly enter the town.

Licheng looked across the horizon — the sun had just risen. The emergency squad had worked all night, and Licheng was exhausted.

A black speck appeared on the sun. Licheng tried to ignore it, but he kept turning around to inspect the dot. And every time he turned, it got larger.

The ground started shaking. A little at first, but slowly getting more vigorous. Finally, it got unignorable.

"Who's there?" Licheng roared. He was tired by the endless night of work. His eyes were bloodshot, his patience seeping away by every passing moment.

As a response, a volley of arrows flew in from the sky. They rained down on the half-complete gate. The surrounding area exploded in chaos. People were scrambling to get to safety, some ducking under the pavilion, others sounding the horn to let people know that they were under attack.

An arrow was headed straight for Licheng. He sidestepped it, and his foot teetered over the edge of the platform. He struggled to keep his balance, but another arrow forced him to make a spin around the platform.

He slipped.

He fell.

"General! General!", he heard.

Flags of a dragon being raised over the walls of Shanghai, that he had helped to build.

Everything went black.

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“General Chen! General Chen!”

Dots swam before his eyes. A twig. He swatted at it. No, a hand. Fingers outstretched.

Slowly, everything cleared. His memories flooded back to him.

“How long was I out for?”

“A few minutes, General.”

Sure felt like a lifetime, he thought. The construction, the family, the war... everything was as clear as crystal.

It couldn't have just been a dream, could it? It had seemed as though someone had been trying to tell him something... Someone from the past...

He eyed the wall, then turned to look at the people gathered outside. *Had the wall really protected these people, my people, all these years?*

General Chen tried to drive away the thoughts, but they kept on coming, like an eternal downpour. *Is it worth sacrificing the wall for the wants of the Republic?*

By destroying the wall, have I wasted all my people's glorious work?

The Legendary Blade of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Ho, Bryan – 12

“This way?” asked Tim, pointing at the flight of stairs inside the City God Temple which was located in the center of the Old City connected to the Yuyuan Garden. Tim was a trendy 11-years-old boy who loved to wear matching vest and shorts all the time. He was also quite tall with an athletic build. Having pointed at the staircase, Tim looked cautiously to his left, and then warily glanced to his right. To his right was a hallway, well decorated with paintings on the ceiling and elaborate carvings on the pillars. There seemed to be no one around.

“Are you sure about this?” Jack feeling all puzzled. Unlike Tim who was adventurous and daring, Jack was rather timid and shy. The boys had already sneaked pass the security guards and entered a fenced-off area that was not opened to tourists. Together they raced up the stairs, which eventually led them to a dark room.

Tall metal fences and a sign that said, *Please do not enter* blocked the only entrance to the room. Before the half open wooden doors were two bronze lion statues painted in bright red. “Don’t worry. It’ll be alright,” replied Tim as he knocked down the *Please do not enter* sign with his elbow. The sign fell on the floor with a clang. Tim whispered, “Oops,” then picked the lock on the fence with a paperclip and continued, “Follow me.”

Tim motioned Jack forward. “I really don’t think this is a good idea...” Jack began to feel worried but Tim snickered, “Why? Are you scared?” Tim pushed the metal fences aside, then casually walked into the dark room. He turned around and looked at Jack who was still standing outside the room. “Are you coming or not?” asked Tim. Jack stared at the metal fences and took a quick glance at the sign. He sighed, and then reluctantly followed his friend into the dark room.

Jack took his flashlight out from his backpack and began to wander around. The dark room was very well decorated. The walls had paintings on them and were lined with gold on the edges. There were stone statues of warrior lining on either side of the room. Some were holding swords, while others had spears or knives. “Check this out!” yelled Tim as he marveled at one of the statues’ sword. “This sword is real! This is definitely way better than the boring rooms and architecture they showed us at the Shanghai Museum during our study tour!” Tim desperately tried to pull the sword free from the statue’s grasp with all his strength but suddenly lost his grip and fell to the floor. Jack ran towards Tim and helped him up.

Without any warning, the statue began to move. Its eyes glowed, filling the room with a ray of bright red light. Immediately, the eyes of the other statues glowed in brilliant blue, then followed the statue with red eyes and heavily thumped their weapons on the floor. “The statues...they are alive?” Tim and Jack watched in awe as the statues marched into three rows of fives.

The boys trembled and weren’t quite sure what had happened. Tim suspected that it had something to do with him pulling the sword from the statue. Did he activate an ancient trap? Were the statues trying to guard something? Tim thought for a while.

The statues didn't seem to notice them. Tim glanced at the statues. Four statues seemed to be opening a trapdoor on the floor, while the others formed a defensive circle around them. Tim began to regret having entered this room. He knew that this room was fenced off for a reason. He forced a brave smile then answered Jack, "Don't worry. The statues are just opening the trapdoor." Suddenly, the statues froze. Their glowing eyes dimmed, and then finally turned completely back to normal again. Likewise, the trapdoor at the end of the room was opened. Tim whispered, "Jack, follow me. Come on. Let's have a quick look at what's down there."

It soon became clear that they were going through a secret passage. Hours had passed, and still, it was an endless passage. "We are not getting anywhere. This passage just goes on and on. The temple must be closed by now. Look at what you've got us into! I want to leave!" said Jack trying to control the quiver in his voice. They walked along the passage until they finally reached the Old City of Shanghai. The city was completely empty and looked ruined as if it was the time after the Opium War in 1842.

The boys didn't notice where they were until they came across an ancient temple right next to the river port outside the wall. They halted in front of an old wooden door. The wood was decaying and seemed it hadn't had a lick of paint for years. "This must be it! This must be what the statues were guarding for!" Tim took a step forward.

The door was covered with a thick layer of dust. Tim brushed part of the dust off the surface with his sleeves, and ran his fingers across the wooden door as there were some carvings on it. Tim managed to read out a few words:

TOMB OF THE OLD RULER OF SHANGHAI.

Tim gently pushed the door opened. A blinding light shone through, causing Tim and Jack to shield their eyes with their hands. The boys entered the room warily, and saw great pillars decorated with shimmering jewels held up the ceiling, which were encrusted with layers of gold. To their astonishment, a coffin was placed at the center of the room on a marble plinth. The coffin was covered with red silk, embroidered with gold threads.

"Check this out," Jack was all amazed, pointing at the coffin. Tim looked confused and wondered, "What is it?" Jack slowly walked towards the coffin. He hesitated for a moment, and then reached for the piece of red silk. Gradually, he pulled it off the coffin, revealing a few words imprinted on the coffin. "*A CURSE SHALL FALL UPON WHOEVER OPENS THE COFFIN.* Seriously?" Tim chuckled. "Stop! Don't open it! Haven't you seen the warning?" shouted Jack as he tried to stop Tim. "Oh, Jack. Stop being so superstitious." Tim pulled with all his strength, and lifted up the lid of the coffin. Tim chuckled again and said, "Jack, nothing is wrong. I opened the lid of the coffin and no *CURSE* fell upon..." Tim paused before he could finish the sentence. He dropped his jaws in horror and gasped.

The only thing the coffin contained was a sword. A sword that was identical to the one the statue was holding in the dark room. Tim turned his gaze from the coffin to meet Jack's. Worry had lined his face. "Something doesn't seem right," said Tim with fear.

The door behind them was suddenly knocked open, and four soldiers entered, each armed with a sword. They were all wearing ancient Chinese battle armour and brown leather sandals. “Hand over the sword!” commanded one of the soldiers in a stern tone.

Bang! At the far corner of the chamber, another set of doors burst opened, and in came an unarmed man dressed in a white robe with black trim. The soldier in command looked at this man who was full of hatred in his eyes, and placed his right hand on his sword. The man in a white robe immediately raced towards the coffin, grabbed the sword and drew it out of the sheath. “You again, General Wu,” snarled the soldier in command. “Not so fast, Jin,” replied General Wu. Then, General Wu instantly unstrapped his sword from his belt and swung it in front of himself defensively. “Attack!” shouted one of the soldiers. General Wu swiftly swung his sword to and fro, and in no time, all the soldiers were either wounded or killed.

Tim and Jack, having seen that the bloody fight was over, gingerly emerged from behind the coffin where they had been hiding. “Who...who are you?” stammered Jack. “This sword,” began General Wu as he showed Tim and Jack his sword, “contains great powers. It is rumored that whoever obtains two of these swords will be undefeatable. The old ruler of Shanghai was very ambitious. He owned one of these swords, and he wanted to find the second one in order to gain invincibility so that he can overthrow the Emperor.” General Wu gently ran his fingers along the blade. “What about the sword the statue was holding?” interrupted Tim. General Wu’s face went pale, “What? He has the sword?”

All of a sudden, the chamber became dark. The statue from the dark room emerged from the coffin, holding the sword. General Wu lost his grip on the sword, as it flew to the statue’s hand.

“No...No...” General Wu muttered in dismay.

The rest of the story was a myth. No one knew what really happened after that. Except the two boys who were found outside the City God Temple the next morning.

The Wall of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Hui, Jamie – 12

That annoying ear-splitting whistle came again from the tour guide.

“This way, please!” He boomed at the group of chattering students. The guide stopped once in awhile to explain the “beautiful history of Shanghai”, as he called it or “worthless bunch of stories”, as I called it. He had been speaking well over 5 hours now, and the sun had propped itself at its highest point.

Amongst my classmates, my outfit made me look like the odd one out. Everyone wore a Shanghai-themed T-shirt that was given to us earlier today except for me. I had refused to wear it. What was the point anyway? Shanghai sounded like old news. Just take a look for yourself: Everywhere was stuffy and prone to claustrophobia. Once you actually get through the crowds, all you can see is debris scattered around a shaft or what was once a large statue. It seemed like no one had taken care of the place for eons, the walls were cracked and once in a while, the roof threatened to crumble. The ground was overgrown with dying grass and weeds that managed to survive through the jagged cracks on the ground.

“And now we have arrived at the wall of Shanghai. Did you know the wall used to protect the Chinese from the pirates? Amazing, isn’t it?” The tour guide’s over enthusiasm was sickening, even from afar.

I crouched between a pile of stones and waited for them to pass as the tour guide ranted about the history of Old Shanghai and how the wall took a lot of effort to make. I scoffed obnoxiously and almost let a laugh out when seeing the mostly crumbled wall, “Oh please. This old thing? Seems like a toddler built a castle out of pebbles in two minutes.” I crossed my arms and turned my nose at the so-called wall.

“Why don’t you try to build it then?” spoke someone. Their voice was as light as a feather, no more than a mere breath, but it was laced with a hint of anger.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up straight. Who could’ve said that? I scanned the room, almost expecting someone to pop out behind a tree or something. I waited to the count of ten.

Nothing.

I must’ve been hallucinating.

“All these cobweb-infested bits of trash are driving me insane,” I muttered to no one but someone else replied with that same whispery tone, it sounded as if they were speaking through clenched teeth.

“How dare you? Insulting the treasure of Old Shanghai? Unforgivable, really. You deserve divine punishment if only I was able to teach you a lesson physically...” The voice paused like they were thinking and I was too stunned for words, for the voice was coming from the semi-collapsed wall.

“Well,” the voice finally said after a suspenseful pause, “I suppose a little twist in time could teach you a lesson.”

I backed up from the voice but it surrounded me instead, the word ‘lesson’ echoed through my head in a circular motion. Black dots danced before my eyes and I felt my breathing go shallow. I gripped onto a small ledge of consciousness but the words dragged me down with them and I spiralled into an unknown warp and everything went dark.

The sun beat down, each ray singing the ground. Blurred figures moved by in a choppy motion, unnerved by the heat. Sharp claps got my brain working again. I stumbled backwards, my feet felt numb and weak.

“Hey, Qiang? Did you hear me? I said we have to finish the wall before the Japanese come, got it?” a beefy looking man pointed at me suspiciously before walking away.

Qiang? That’s not my name...is it? Come to think of it, what is this place? I decided to take a little detour around the area, swerving past what looked like groups of workers and mounds of stone. I stopped when I realised there was a rather large shadow cast across the dirt. I looked upward to see what seemed like an oversized fence. A wall. It looked way too familiar, though. My mind supplied pictures of the tour guide speaking about Old Shanghai’s wall. Wait a moment, didn’t the wall look just like this one? I mean, there were a few differences, but...no way!

In short, I freaked out. I ran in circles until I was dizzy and I yelled at the wall, “Hey! Bring me back to where I belong! I didn’t sign up for this ‘Magic Treehouse’ lookalike.”

Immediately, someone pushed me to the ground, “What do you think you’re doing? If any of the guards catch you fooling around, the Emperor will punish us for sure.” It was that same beefy looking man from before.

“We have an emperor? What dynasty is this?” I asked.

“The Ming Dynasty,” a flash of confusion crossed his face but was quickly replaced with anger, “Now get to work.”

Trying not to anger him further, I nodded and hurried away. Suddenly, people started screeching and hollering. I only caught a few words which were ‘Japanese’, ‘danger’, ‘not finished’ and ‘wall’. All around me, people fled from the building site to hide in their homes and I was left alone with nowhere to go. Exposed to danger. Right...the wall was used to prevent the pirates from entering but how was it supposed to help when it’s only half finished? The voice from before had said that I should try building the wall myself, but I didn’t expect him to be serious.

Glaring at the half finished wall, I shouted, “I can’t do this alone!” I was greeted by silence. Groaning, I grabbed a flat stone and awkwardly placed it near the unfinished parts of the wall, “There. I did my job. Now let me go back.”

A gust of wind rammed into my back and a whisper was carried along with it, “You are not finished.” It was starting to feel hopeless. I felt like giving up and wait for the Japanese to murder me. Then, from nowhere, a surge of determination rushed through me. I couldn’t let that happen, I couldn’t throw myself into the hands of the grim reaper. That would surely make that voice—spirit—whatever—it—was feel triumphant. I do have a sense of pride, you know.

I sprinted back to the local village, the ground crumbled slightly under the weight of my feet. Looking down, my shadow had grown larger, the dark seeping into each crack in the ground. I was wasting time. I hurried over, the sound of my footsteps had alerted the people of my presence. The village was a collection of houses with layered roofs huddled along what seemed to be a stoned pavement. A nearby stream gurgled and trickled down a miniature ravine. A larger temple—esque building towered in the distance. I supposed it was the Emperor’s palace. Looking back at the village, I noticed the adults held their children closer to them and a good handful of guards were also advancing towards me, a glint of suspicion in their eyes.

I decided on a whim to make my speech quick, “Why don’t you all go back to finish that wall? It’s the only chance you have to keep your family safe!”

When no one answered and the guards were getting closer, I continued to improvise, “Don’t hide, we still have a chance. But only if we can all work together to finish that wall! If you give up on hope now, Japan will surely take over!” Murmurs rose throughout the village, nods and smiles exchanged. “We have to work as a team to get that wall finished!” With that final statement, the crowd finally came to their senses and cheered for me. The crowd surged forward with newfound motivation, knocking the guards down and pushing towards the wall.

I was definitely astonished by how fast that we could work together. I poured the clay mix to glue the stones together, children passed slabs of stones to each other, woman supported the lower wall and the men strategically placed the bricks around the cracks and crevices. The wall was finished in no time.

We stood back to admire our creation but a crash made us all jump and switch our focus to the sound. It was muffled from behind the wall and it seemed that the pirates were having trouble with getting through our wall. The

Chinese army scrambled towards the wall and pointed their bows and arrows upwards and made them fall onto the incoming pirates on the other side of the wall, leaving some to retreat. The people of Shanghai rejoiced, for they were saved. I stood near the wall and watched their celebration.

A voice coming from the wall whispered to me, “Well done, I hope you’ve learned your lesson.”

“I have,” I replied as the edges of the world began to grow fuzzy until my eyelids felt heavy and everything went black.

“It’s time to wake up now,” a clap on my shoulder woke me up immediately.

My roommate had already gotten dressed and I was lying in a hotel bed. “Hurry up. We’re visiting the city wall of Old Shanghai today!”

I felt the slightest twinge of disappointment once I realised it was a dream.

“Or is it?” a whisper came from nowhere.

The Accident

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lam, Errin – 12

I threw my arms up as Mother swung a lamp at me, shattering a nearby Chinese vase. Shrapnel flew everywhere, large and small pieces shredding my delicate skin. I was still examining my various injuries when Mother's hand cracked across my face, leaving my face feeling like an open fire was searing across it.

Mother casually took a sip of tea from the cup she was holding delicately.

"Mother!" I screamed, clutching my rapidly reddening face.

"Don't "Mother" me, you witch! Time and time again I have told you that you belong to China, and Shanghai within it! Sky-Flower, you disgrace the noble name of *Hua*. Your behavior towards your tutor was downright disrespectful!"

I felt crushed. Mother only ever used my English name when she felt I was unworthy of my Chinese one, *Tian-Hua*. "It was an accident!" I protested.

"*Shut up!* Accident or not, you will apologize to your tutor politely! And you are forbidden to say that you hate Shanghai and that you wish to go to America for *college*!" Mother sneered at the word "college". In her opinion, girls shouldn't go to college at all. They shouldn't go to *school*. She was old-fashioned. Normal people punished their children by giving them some hard blows across their hands with a discipline wand. But Mother was unpredictable. She would slap me, or whip me, or just grab whatever was available – like a lamp, for example. As a matter of fact, the wreckage of said lamp would simply be written off as another "accident".

If the chance ever arrived at Mother's doorstep, I'd be flung straight out of the house headfirst like a sack of rotten potatoes. Or I'd be married off to some wealthy man.

Mother never gave a single thought to anything but herself and money. She always said that I was an "accident". "You possess the face of an angel, but the heart of a demon. Others may have been ensnared in your trap, but I will not be." Her eyes were cold and black as she said those words, standing before a younger Tian-Hua. But she wished to use my beauty, she told me. "For it is a great gift, only bestowed on the worthy." She paused for breath. "You are not worthy." She said scornfully when I perked up. "You stole this power. It is not yours to wield, but you can take advantage of it." As such, I was taught that I always needed to have a fancy hairdo with fresh flowers in it, paired with makeup and jewelry. Mother forced me to pull on tight dresses covered in intricate weaving and to stuff satin shoes laced up with ribbons onto my feet. It was a living nightmare. But she only snarled "It's for the money."

But the worst thing she ever did was to let Father use me. Father gambled. And whenever he was low on money, he would sell my virginity to finance his “winnings”.

If I misbehaved, she would threaten to throw me out. Or to marry me off.

“Just one more time, and you’re out of this house. The end of the road for you.”

“Better than being married.” I mumbled, still dazed from her hard blow. I could feel thin rivulets of blood trickling down my cheeks and dripping off my chin.

Mother brought her face right up to mine with eyes flashing like lightning.

“I will arrange a marriage for you, seeing as you dread one so much. The further away, the better. You know your father will always side with me.” She purred.

It was true. Father adored Mother. He only ever showed affection for her.

Cackling, she tossed me the lamp and sauntered away.

Suddenly, I started to see red – everywhere. In a fit of anger and with a show of strength that I never knew I possessed, I hurled the lamp across the room. I didn’t

even know what – or who I was aiming at. I just kept on throwing things.

A scream woke me from my furious but brief tirade.

I whirled around to see a chaotic scene. The lamp I’d thrown lay shattered on the floor, small pieces of it reflecting off light. Then I saw Mother, coughing up blood. I gasped at the same time that she did. Her chest heaved once. Then it was still. But an expanding pool of red still kept on spreading, and translucent bubbles formed on her lips. That was a dead giveaway. The shards must have punctured her lungs.

The huge front doors shuddered once. Father was here. If there ever was a horrible time for him to arrive home, now was it. But I couldn’t do anything. I was paralyzed. *No no no, not now please!* My heart prayed. *UH OH!!!* My brain screamed.

The doors opened.

Father entered wearing blood-red robes and a tall black hat covering his bristly hair. They clothes were signs of his high status in Shanghai. He was the judge in our small town, and he was paid well for it. “Darling?” He called out. When he saw his “darling” lying on the floor, his eyes bugged out. When they landed on me, his face turned the same color as his robes.

“YOU!” He stomped towards me. “YOU DID THIS!” He bellowed.

“No, no I didn’t, I *swear* I didn’t!”

“THEN WHO?” He boomed, looming over me.

I stayed silent. With one gigantic palm, he backhanded me and I flew straight into the staircase. I was in agony. I could barely think straight.

I felt Father’s ground-shaking steps come towards me.

“You lie.”

Through a haze of tears, my eyes opened, but the scene was still blurry.

“I will make you suffer the way she did!” Father promised, breathing heavily.

“She didn’t. It was an accident...” I could barely drag the words out.

“You will pay.” He threatened.

He failed to notice the glass sticking up out of my chest.

“Too late.” I gasped, my breath coming in quick, uneven bursts. White foam bubbled on my lips. A red puddle started forming around me.

The glass struck home.

And I drowned in my own blood.

My eyes fluttered open. I was in an unfamiliar place. With increasing anxiety, I tried to move, but found iron ringlets encircling my wrists and ankles. I tried yanking them away, then shrieked shrilly as the iron burned into my skin, lacerating the flesh.

“I would not recommend doing that.” A woman’s voice rang out. The tone suggested that she was amused. Then she stepped out of the shadows, and my brain went numb.

It was Mother.

She stepped towards me and smiled coldly, but it didn’t reach her eyes. They remained cold, indifferent, and... lifeless somehow.

“I have something to offer you.” She said.

“What?” My voice was wary.

“Would you like to live again?” It took a moment for me to register her words.

“In exchange for...?”

“Nothing. This is a one-time offer. But if you do this, I can see my lover again. For I cannot bear to be parted from him. And you can see life again. Your father agrees with this. But be warned: He will come to join me as an undead spiritually, while you will return alive physically. And you won’t like it.”

I barely heeded her “warning”. I could be reborn? I could live again?

“I do have one request, though.” Mother stared at me. “Don’t blame me.”

It’s a trap. My brain warned me.

But I didn’t to die. More than anything, I wanted a fresh start. “Yes.”

Mother smiled, and she started to fall away, along with the room and the cuffs, fading slowly.

“You were born to be an accident.”

You’ve been duped! I scolded myself.

Then suddenly, I felt solid ground beneath my feet.

“Yes!” For some reason, my voice sounded rough and gravelly. Like Father’s.

Then I looked down. The body of a young girl lay on a staircase. I recognized myself, bloody, bruised and battered. A few meters away was the body of a woman, a shattered lamp not far from her. Both dead. I looked down at myself to see a robe the color of blood. I felt the light pressure of a tall hat on my head. I could no longer feel my long hair tumbling past my shoulders. Instead, my hair was now bristly, sticking up. Just like Father’s.

Then, the truth dawned on me. Mother had somehow dragged Father’s spirit to her so that they would be together. And me?

She’d put my spirit into another body.

I turned fully to face the hallway mirror.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

The Legends of Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lam-Decker, Ryan – 12

Ralph Toa Von Strucker, the greatest adventurer in the world, who was scared of nothing, and the biggest dare devil. Ralph scurried into the woods in search to find the great mountain above the clouds, just like in his dream. A dream so real it was almost like a vague memory. He climbed up the treacherous mountain until he came across an old crumbling, abandoned temple. The sides of the walls were covered in thick green moss. Ralph scraped off the moss and saw ancient carvings. He suddenly realised which mountain he was on – Mount Penglai.

Ralph hurried to the peak of the mountain, for an ancient carving spoke of the Elixir of life. When Ralph reached the peak he saw a big Shinto shrine, the walls were bright red and the floor was a polished marble and there were jade statues of immortals who live on the mountain such as Fāngzhàng (方丈), Yíngzhōu (瀛州), Dàiyú (岱輿), and Yuánjiāo (員嬌)*. In the centre was an old tattered suit of armour hooked on wall. Beside it was an old monk with a great white beard and scars all over his back. He was holding two candles in his hands, sitting there shirtless with the cold wind blowing at him. All was quiet until the candles blew out and the monk slowly and softly whispered: “Toa”.

The wind howled in the shrine room and Ralph felt a slight chill run down his back, he slowly turned and looked with a confused face and spoke: “Have we met before?” The monk slowly replied: “Yes...but not in this life time” The wind blew and whistled, Ralph was about to talk then the monk interrupted and said: “Shhh...I know you will question what I say, but listen, what I am about to tell you is true. Come closer son” Ralph slowly walked towards the monk. The monk stuck out his hand and reached for Ralph’s head. He placed two fingers on the side of Ralph’s head.

The eerie sound of Ralph’s scream filled the air. Ralph panted heavily, pushed the monk’s hand away, looked at the monk and said: “The destruction of the world! How did you just do that! What was that, was that the future?” Ralph panted heavily, he looked at his surroundings, but nothing had happened. “Yes, that is indeed the future but now you can change it, because I have found you, Toa” the monk replied, “Now listen child” again the monk reached out for Ralph’s head. Ralph saw a flash of light when the monk began, “Almost a hundred years ago there was a team of heroes that travelled through time to protect our world from LIVE ‘EVIL’ incorporation, a society that wanted the destruction of earth; the heroes were called ‘The Legends’. There were 6 members in the team including you, Toa. This suit of armour belongs to you. With this armour you fought through time and saved the world countless times; the death of Adolf Hitler, they said he killed himself, but it was you.”

“That was me? All I remember from my dream has something to do with... Shanghai?” Ralph tried his best to remember about his adventures in Shanghai. “Right. The Old City in Shanghai nowadays contains some ancient but renovated features, such as the Yuyuan Garden complex, which was really beautiful and also the City God Temple.

Overall, the Old City is a combination of ancient winding streets, with some modern high-rise buildings progressively encroaching at the older areas,” he added pretentiously thinking how much he knew about the city.

The monk smacked Ralph on the head and said, “No! I mean about Old Shanghai. Record what major events happened.” Ralph saw a flash back and replied, “The Shanghai massacre!”

The monk had a smile on his face and slowly nodded his head for Ralph to continue, and Ralph again tried hard to remember then said, “It was a crackdown on the communist party of China by Chiang Kai Shek and the GMD, Guo Ming Dang. The GMD secret police went rounding people up they knew or suspected of communist activity and summarily executed them in 1972.” The monk started to laugh, “That’s what the world thought all this time!” the monk continued to laugh uncontrollably while he spoke, “let me tell you the true story.”

“In the year 1972 the legends heard a distress call from one of their time spies, he reported that he had found when and where LIVE EVIL Inc. base was located – Shanghai. There were reports of people smuggling dangerous items into the river port of Shanghai. The smugglers were tracked down and forced to reveal who their contact was. It was Chiang Kai Shek, the leader of LIVE EVIL Incorporation.

The legends team hurried to Shanghai 1972 and they all went undercover. Toa decided to try to get more Intel on what they were doing, and he slowly crept into the base of the incorporation. Their base was vast and futuristic. Toa slowly climbed onto the ceiling; Toa could see lots of thick green bio-hazard chemicals being carried around. He also noticed that the chemicals were being put into boxes, some of the boxes wrote: *Huangpu*. Of course, Toa tried hard to find out what the words in Chinese meant, and he could have sworn he knew the answer. He tried to contact the team, but his communication systems broke down. All the machines were all suddenly shutting down by themselves, and then a voice spoke aloud. Chaing Kai Shek knew everything, like it was being set up.

Toa was captured, tortured and brainwashed. He became a psycho killing assassin that only worked for LIVE EVIL incorporation rounded. Toa rounded up his team and slaughtered them on the spot with no mercy; the team understood and accepted what was going on. The blood of his friends was on his hands. The blood trickled to the floor, a bloodbath. I was there, I saw everything that happened. I went towards you and the brainwashing they did to you was forgotten, I helped you to remember, father.”

Ralph woke up with a gasp “That was me? Wait! You are my son?” The smile of the monk gave Ralph the answer he needed. The monk still pressed a tile on the floor where the suit of armour stood. The floor began to open, and that was when Ralph heard a voice, “Hello, it’s been a long time since I last saw you. Well, that’s a lie as I can be anywhere at any time.” The mysterious voice started to laugh, Ralph puzzled, “Who are you?” The mysterious voice replied laughing, “I am time! We don’t have long. We have to choose our new recruits for the new team! Now enter the vortex!”

Ralph slowly entered...

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee, Eunice – 12

My summer holiday was totally ruined by my stupid parents! They forced me to go to Shanghai with them, and now I was being dragged along to an awful ancient antique shop with them! I hate these Chinese pots and plates, what is so special about them that attract my parents? They are just ugly old stuff. I was almost bored to death when a dark shadow loomed over me. I glanced backwards, and saw the shop owner standing behind me. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his black belt. He was wearing a thick long coat which swept the rusty ground, and high heeled boots. His green eyes were light, bright and twinkling behind half-moon spectacles. His nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken numerous times. The old shop owner peered at me through his spectacles and smiled. He handed me a pocket watch. It had a bronze cover, which had some delicate flower patterns on it. I pressed gently on the watch knob and the cover sprang open, showing a picture of Old Shanghai on it. I stared at the watch, the hands of the watch were not moving. Curious, I turned the little knob clockwise to wind the watch, trying to set the time. Suddenly, the world around me whirled and twirled, I felt very dizzy. My surroundings spun faster and faster then everything was still. Totally still.

I looked around, I was still in the antique shop, but my parents were nowhere in sight. ‘Mum? Dad?’ There was no answer. I looked at the calendar at the shop cashier. 1916? I was a century back in time! I gazed around the shop and decided that it would be perfectly fine to go outside and explore Old Shanghai. So I turned on my heel and walked briskly out of the shop. A rickshaw passing by caught my eye. A tired man was pulling the rickshaw with difficulty. Sweat was dripping down his forehead as he wiped it with the back of his hand. He seemed to be suffering enormously while trying to draw the rickshaw, where a very rich man was seated comfortably. The rich man was big and beefy with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. He seemed to be complaining and shouting at the rickshaw puller to go faster. I would have giggled uncontrollably at his obesity, but the sight of the poor rickshaw puller saddened me. I felt very sorry for him, and realised how fortunate I was.

Looking away from the rickshaw, I started strolling along the Shanghai streets. There were night clubs everywhere as well as street performers. I peeked inside a nearby night club and saw a lady singing inside it. The lady was thin and blonde with pale skin, her neck was twice longer than usual. She was singing a traditional Chinese opera song in a shrill, high-pitched voice. I had to cover my ears to prevent her piercing voice hurting my ears. However, everyone in the club were cheering and applauding in response to the lady’s singing. I ran away from the night club and stopped in front of a snake charmer, who was about to perform to an excited crowd. The snake charmer was a thin man with sallow skin and a hooked nose. He was wearing a white turban on his head, sitting on the stone floor in the bustling street, playing a wooden flute. There was a big basket standing near him, and inside the basket was a cobra. It slowly rose upwards and swayed from side to side, dancing to the tune played by the snake charmer. The performance was quite interesting, so I stood there watching the cobra dance for a long time before moving on. As I walked, my surroundings turned darker and darker; the street became quieter with every step I take; there were fewer and fewer people around me, until everything was silent, and the lights were so dim I could barely see where I was going.

I walked into a dark alley, curious about what was inside, when I heard muffling voices. I froze in my tracks. A torch light flashed at me as I turned around to see who was there. I gasped. My heart was beating faster and faster. A huge man was standing at the end of the alley. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He had long tangles of bushy black hair and beard that hid most of his face. He also had hands the size of dustbin lids and feet the size of baby sharks. He was wearing a black cloak with thick golden chains around his hairy neck. Judging by his size and clothing, he was one of the criminal organization gangsters that existed in old Shanghai. My parents told me all about them, but the huge man was ten times scarier than I imagined. He was holding a bloody knife. I screamed at the top of my voice and started to run rapidly, as fast as my legs could carry me. The huge man followed me, stomping towards me with his gigantic feet. I sprinted quickly through long passages and roads, trying to get away from the huge man, but I was just like an ant to him. I got out of breath and my legs were like jelly. However, the huge man was only a few miles away from me by now. There was a dead end in front of me. I panicked. What should I do? Would I die under his sharp blade? I searched in my pockets frantically, desperate to find something to defend myself against the huge man. Unfortunately, there were only tissues and some paper scraps inside. I dug deeper in my pockets, when I finally touched

something hard. It was the pocket watch that the shop owner gave me! Maybe if I turned the watch knob the other way round, I could go back to modern times? I got the pocket watch out of my pocket and turned the knob anticlockwise. Suddenly, the world around me whirled and twirled, I felt very dizzy. My surroundings spun faster and faster then everything was still. Totally still.

I glanced at the world around me. My parents were still at the shelves, examining the old pottery. I was back at the antique shop, thank goodness. The old shop owner strode towards me and put his hand on my shoulder. He peered at me through his spectacles and grinned, 'Was it interesting?'

Dragon

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Ng, Katrina – 12

I flapped my wings. Glancing back, I started – my wings were dissolving! I could only see wisps of green at where my once bright green wings used to be and as I stared, the traces were blown away by the bitter wind. Not only that, the tips of my wings were transparent, just the faintest dull green. My wings were smoky and translucent, hardly providing me the ability to stay in the air. But I was so light now, I was suspended in the air without moving my once magnificent wings. I knew I was dying. As a nature dragon, I would simply dissolve into smoke once I died.

Brushing against a nearby patch of trees, I subconsciously drew a fraction of energy from them in hopes to become more solid, less spread out and translucent. With little power that remained, I slowly glided down to the little village next to the sea that I saw before. When I landed, I called, “I am dying! I came from a faraway corner of the world. I am a nature dragon from a beautiful city, full of gardens and trees. I took my power from the nature there. But those foolish humans destroyed all the nature. They claimed it was more practical to build a few stone houses instead. With my power being diminished, I decided to seek a forest to live in, with what is left of my strength. Let me draw energy from your city and I will leave quickly, to the forests far away. I warn you though, I will need a lot of energy and some of your crops will wither and die.” The villagers accepted without hesitation and my power grew strong again. Soon, I was restored to my former glory, with a stunning emerald body, golden claws and sapphire eyes, each scale glinting in the sun, a nature dragon at its greatest. In return, I taught the villagers to build a wall that would last for centuries and defend them. I knew the village would be destroyed by pirates eventually if I left it alone. They had saved my life and it was the least I could do. Deep in my heart, I knew the wall would not be enough – the stones were just too weak. But I could only hope they would survive. With that, I flew away.

Decades later, I grew old and I knew this was the time to die. Yet there was something I wanted to do. I wasn’t content with dissolving into smoke peacefully, being absorbed back into nature. I found myself flying across the oceans, feeling that answers must lie on a shore somewhere far away.

A ship threw stone bricks at me as I passed, alleging that I had eaten all their fish. I felt the stone leach all the energy away where it hit me. Stone tends to absorb my energy and become stronger whenever it touches me, similar to me with plants. The soldiers on the ship yelled at me to leave those waters and hurled a few spears at me. Already weakened, I left rapidly. I remembered a village next to the sea that had once helped me regain my strength. Was the village still standing?

When I arrived, the village was still there, but barely surviving as I had predicted. The village had gained a name – Shanghai. The walls were smashed in many places, the breaches were barricaded by a jumble of wood planks and broken stone blocks.

Despite their poverty due to pirate raids, they still offered me crops so that I could draw energy from, knowing full well if I took all of the energy from the meagre crops, they would crumble into nothingness. As I regained some

energy that would give me the chance to choose my desired resting place, I couldn't help feeling guilty at the famished looks on the villagers' faces as they watched their food being withered again.

I knew what I had to do. As a final present or gift, to return all the generosity the villagers of Shanghai had shown me, I decided to embody the stone wall. I could magically sustain it for centuries to empower the stone, so it didn't break. This way, I was essentially immortal until the rock crumbled, which would take a long time. My consciousness and power would remain inside the block of stone. But as a nature dragon, my power – and hence the power of the wall – would rely upon the energy of the nature within the village.

With my help, Shanghai prospered and turned into a thriving city. The walls were as strong as a diamond, able to withstand any attacks. Eventually, the pirate raids stopped and Shanghai flourished once more. Over time, I found that Shanghai was part of an even larger country, called China.

One day, much later, someone decided to take down the Wall of Old Shanghai. I was stunned – why weren't the citizens of Shanghai opposing? They hit the walls with powerful machines, and I had to use all the energy to resist the force. They went home disheartened and unsuccessful. At night, I realised that eventually, even if I took all the energy from every plant in Shanghai, I would run out of energy much sooner than the people operating the machines would give up. I hadn't realised how taxing it was to endure such an attack and half the plants in Shanghai were on the brink of death. At best, I could struggle against it for a few more days. So I channelled all my strength into a single section of the wall and soon the rest of the wall disintegrated to dust.

After many attempts of destroying the wall, the workers decided to leave my section of the wall standing as a cultural landmark. So there I remained, watching over the city of Shanghai.

In just a few decades, Shanghai's nature suffered greatly, due to air pollution from smoke and smog and I could only watch helplessly. I lost most of my remaining power and only a few traces of my consciousness remained. I can barely concentrate enough to review my story and I am falling asleep, within wall, too frail to stay awake. Someday, maybe nature will return and I will wake up once again.

Decades later, a landscape architect beamed at the newly designed and improved Shanghai. It was filled to the brim with nature, and all the pollution gone. He heard a reverberating noise and instinctively glanced towards the remaining few meters of the Wall of Old Shanghai. He had always suspected there was something atypical about the timeworn wall. It was no regular wall. It was... rising? Yes, it was rising! The entire wall was rebuilding itself, with rocks that were new and polished. Ancient and previously dusty – now immaculate – pieces of rock rose from the ground and flew to complete the wall. All the towers were rebuilt, everything shimmering under the sun. He saw a transparent, almost invisible green form rise from the rock and caught his eye – a dragon? The dragon had striking azure eyes and it spoke to him.

“At last, nature is restored, Shanghai is protected and I can sleep in peace.”

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Tam, Tiffany – 13

“**M**istress, your father and mother wishes to see you.” The young maid curtsayed, bowing her head respectfully.

Lin refrained the urge to roll her eyes. “Mei, how many times do I have to tell you to call me Lin when my father is not here?”

The petite girl kept her eyes downcast. “It is simply not acceptable for someone with a low ranking such as mine to address a lady by her name, Mistress.”

“That’s stupid! You’re my friend. There are no statuses between friends.” Lin sighed, standing up. “Ah, I might as well go and see what they want me for.”

She smoothed down the creases of her silky long dress, trying to look more acceptable (it would only bring more needless fussing from her mother anyway) and headed down the long hallway. Mei trailed behind her like a shadow as they passed priceless artifacts and tapestries hung on the dragon scale walls on display. Fantastical myths and legends of jade rabbits and monkeys filled the walls, animated by spun threads of pure gold and silk.

They arrived at the chamber room, where her father and mother were waiting. She daintily curtsayed. “You called for me?”

“Yes, my dear,” Her father gestured at one of the empty, high back seats next to them. “Have a seat. This may take a while, and it may come as a shock to you.”

An uneasy doubt began to settle in her stomach, but she tried to convince herself that everything would be fine. “Of course; you can leave now, Mei.”

Mei nodded once, and backed out of the room.

Her mother frowned. “Lin, you are not supposed to address your maids with respect.”

Lin didn’t trust herself to say anything, so she kept her mouth shut, just mutedly nodding.

“She’ll grow out of it eventually.” Her father, dressed in his regal and formal government official robes and hat, regarded her from his position upon the platform. He must’ve just came back from his early morning duties. “That isn’t the reason we called you here, Lin. Recently, we’ve been – ” he exchanged a look with her mother, and Lin’s unease grew, coiling tightly around her, “ – concerned, for a lack of wording, about your marriage prospects.”

Oh no, here we go again! Lin's parents had been egging her about getting married ever since she turned sixteen. It started with simple innocent questions, and then suddenly, suitors started to arrive. Why couldn't they understand she didn't want to marry a stupid, stuck up old man who just wanted her for her inheritance?

"So," her mother smiled as a poor attempt to lighten up the mood once she saw a frown that was starting to form from Lin, "We've met with many possible candidates!"

"And you've been doing this behind my back, for how long exactly?" Lin's voice was flat and emotionless.

"A few months, perhaps. We only want the best for our precious little treasure."

"And you have found someone for me?"

Her parents seemed oblivious to the growing anger building up inside Lin. "Yes, there's an excellent one who is willing to take you, child. He hails from the rich family of Xin."

"And he's very handsome. Nice, defined features and perfect smile!"

"I suppose the wedding will be taking place soon?"

Her parents exchanged surprised glances. Lin had always been a fierce girl with her own opinion. To see her being so submissive was a startling but pleasant change, perhaps there was hope for her yet. "Why, yes! In fact, it'll be taking place two weeks from now."

It was like something within her snapped. It's funny how much her parents could rile her up; she had been placid and calm only just a few moments before. Now, all she wanted to do was tear one of the hanging portraits behind her mother to vent her frustration and anger. How dare they decided who she should marry, someone she was going to spend her entire life with, just for something as trivial as...as money! Alliances! Appearances! Was she not a human being, capable of independent thoughts? She was tired of being a puppet for her mother and father. All her life, she had to deal with long silk dresses and social greetings of suitors when she much preferred to be roaming around the streets of Shanghai, exploring the fascinating stalls dressed in casual clothes. Her parents had limited her outings, telling her she had to learn to be the perfect wife, stay pretty all day. Well, she wanted someone to see her more than her face and wealth! She didn't want to marry someone she had never met before!

"No, I will not wed." Her voice was forcefully flat, betraying none of her fury. She stood up, intending to escape as soon as possible. "My decision is final; I will not be marrying a random stranger."

"Now, Lin—" Her mother started.

"Don't attempt to persuade me! I Am. Not. Doing. It." She started walking away when her father's words halted her. "I've put up with enough of your dram over the year, Lin Yu! But if you do *not* agree with this match, then you

shall be denounced from the family of Yu and treated as nothing but a lowly commoner!”

Rage and restlessness itching her skin. If that was what her parents wanted to play with, then so be it. Without turning to look back, she said, “Then I shall leave first thing next morning. Consider me gone!”

She stormed back into her room, despite her mother’s frantic protests.

In the safety of her room, she collapsed on her bed, suddenly scared. What would become of her? Her future was compromised. She hated the fact that she was so dependent on her mother and father. Without them, she was nothing. How would she survive?

She composed herself. She had gotten the freedom she had always wanted, the independence that had been a mere dream just moments before. If her comfortable life was the price, then she was more than willing to pay it. A meaningless life of luxury but restriction was nothing.

The door opened, and Lin braced herself for her parents. Knowing them, they’d probably kick her out right now instead of letting her stay until the morning.

To her surprise, it was Mei. The girl was holding a bundle in her arms, as she looked down at the floor avoiding eye contact, as she always did. She handed it to Lin timidly. “I’ve packed your essentials, Mistress,” the girl said.

“Thank you, Mei. And you don’t need to call me Mistress anymore, I’m just a commoner now.” Lin gratefully took the bundle, aware how much it must’ve cost for the young maid.

Mei seemed to gather her courage before finally managing to whisper, “I really admire your decision, Mi—Lin. But isn’t this a little reckless? Once outside, how will you fend for yourself? How will you—”

Lin silenced her with a small laugh, realizing how her actions might’ve appeared to be spoiled and bratty to any poor outsider. “Your concern is appreciated, Mei, truly. But this is what I’ve wanted. To be more than a pretty face. Maybe you won’t understand...” She sighed. “But I’ll be fine. I’ll survive; I’ve always had.”

She stood up, eyeing her room for undoubtedly the last time. “I think I won’t wait until the morning to leave. Take care, Mei. And thank you.” She smiled, and casting her long dress off to reveal the loose flaxen shirt and pants of the working community in one smooth move, she walked out of her room, past the hall until the entrance was in sight. Her heart jumped. This was it. Once she went out, she would no longer be welcome. She would be nothing, and nobody would care for her. No more baths, ornate hair accessories, days spent in boredom.

She didn’t regret it; there was no room for regret or doubts now. This match for marriage had been the last straw. It was past the point of no return.

“Wait!”

The sound of a desperate cry stopped Lin. It was her mother, looking bedraggled and clumsy for once. Any ounce of grace or power she had exhibited before was gone. "Please, I'm sure we can sort something out; your father's just mad and you..."

"Mother, this is what I want. Please don't try to stop me." Lin looked at her mother, willing her mother to understand.

Her mother stepped back, her eyes glimmering with tears, knowing how stubborn her daughter was. "Then...stay safe, my dear. No matter what...I've always just wanted the best for you."

Lin nodded, and gave her mother one last look.

Then, she stepped out of the confinements of her old life and into the crisp and busy street of Shanghai.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Young, Vian – 13

MaZi whistled a short blast, and they quietly observed as the couple stride confidently to their rickshaw. “Oh lord! She’s wearing a Qipao, and the *monsieur* is wearing a Changshan! What absurd party are they going to?” MaZi exclaimed as his eyes followed the rickshaw. “Shhhhhhh...” XiaMao whispered as they silently crept into the mansion once some of the guards dispersed into the streets, enjoying the momentary reprieve while their powerful lords are gone. They scurry through the main doors of the mansion past the guards positioned against the walls and sleeping ever so slightly and find a familiar face in front of them. “Quick, their bedrooms are behind the dragon patterned doors of the second floor, and they are snuggling in bed!”

The door creaks faintly; a moment feels like a lifetime as the two intruders wait for the echoes to subside. They step in as lightly as aspen leaves with their leather flats brushing the marble floor. They have a clear view of the room. A brunette haired girl is laid on the teal bed. Pink wallpaper with white flowers surround the three. A magnificent room that oozes grandeur. WenXuan gently lifts the light goose feather-filled blanket and sighs. It feels like cotton candy, his fingers sinking into the soft silk cover. In one swift motion, he shoves the child into the black bag in his left hand, making sure she wouldn't wake up.

They creep up to the second room, this time with ease. The halls are silent and without the wealthy family inside to protect, the guards’ presence is as distant as childhood memories. The dragon doorknob to the second room is much easier to handle as they know to how to twist it. It was much darker than the first bedroom, with curtains drawn, of course by the children’s command. XiaMao follows WenXuan’s example to steal everything of value in the magnificent house. The child of this great family surely would have gifts of a very rare and expensive nature – it would bring the pair much fortune! But they needed to remain focused; this was not their main objective. For all the valuables, nothing is more cherished than a child. Everything is going so smoothly and XiaoMei even begins to giggle with glee at the sight of a waking guard, with his slow reactions, lunging towards the two intruders. He never stood a chance. With little difficulty XiaoMei and WenXuan subdued the soldier and knew that they had found the right chamber.

The burglars however had not considered the stubbornness of their prime targets as they desperately tried to understand the rapid gibberish of the French children. They needed to get the two children to come freely if they were to navigate out of the palace. The infant threw a tantrum when they brought food for them to feast on. The children hated their puppet show and thrashed at their faces. At the hopeless moment, when nothing seemed to content the two, their glass bead flipping game made them roll over with glee. Jubilant at their positive reactions to an entertainment, XiaoMei and WenXuan played longer, giving them tasty snacks, and slowly managed to sneak the children away. Then they patiently waited for chaos to stir in the mansion.

And stir it did.

Word spread quickly that the French King had lost two children— and that a quarter of their guards were flogged to death. Whispers went round about the foolishness of a king bringing His children when negotiating with the Emporer. XiaoMei and WenXuan had seen no other way to get the French King to listen to reason. *You all know the aggressive Green Gang leaders, they will take back the country, and China will be in good hands.* XiaoMei thought. SuLee, a rather feisty woman as viewed in their gang responded to them after reporting the propaganda from the club that she passed the night before. Then she turned to the two childr... “Oh no! Where in the world did the girl sneak to?” MaZi whispered. “There is only one answer. Yangtze. But stay calm. We *know* that the NRA will bring her to the French Concession Ambassador’s to interpret the foreign language.” Within seconds, the gang breaks into sly grins. And she continued, “XiaoMei is here with us, so we might as well succeed in our first encounter with the army.”

The Revolutionary soldier found the girl wandering on the port of Yangtze, where they were always on guard, and anticipated answers of her whereabouts in the recent days, but he could barely make out the rapid French she was

answering. Accompanied by two soldiers, the girl traveled to the Ambassador's building on foot... "Plop!" the first soldier was knocked out from behind, then with a lightning brisk Karate punches, they wrestled with the second soldier. MaZi knocked the caliber from his firm grasp and WenXuan brought the sobbing girl back to their hiding place. Confused with all the commotion, the girl sat down in the shaft dazed and fumbled with the glass marbles on the floor.

The French King's search persisted, becoming more desperate by the minute. They again questioned the surviving soldier in their mansion. The post guard inside the room with the dragon door knob. Having just come back from her day off and seeing the soldier right in the mansion, XiaoMei trembles from head to toe outside in the backyard. The questioning dredges on until evening. What could they still be discussing? Then she silently exhales a sigh of relief, watching as the King dismisses the soldier.

XiaoMei finishes mowing the grass and shaping the trees, until they are impeccable, uniform and tidy – just like the soldiers. She had served her country well and hope the gang had done enough to help China's negotiations. Night fell and she would soon return to release the children, believing her part to be done. At the dead of midnight, she did her rituals as usual. She crept. Climbed the gates. She had almost reached the ground when she was blinded with eerie lights on all sides. "You, traitor, we're putting your head on a stake!" It was post soldier again, standing in front of her, but this time he was facing her, with ten other soldiers surrounding her. Time stopped. Just when he was about to strike her down with the baton she had used before, she made a wild leap with deadly accuracy onto his shoulders, snatched the baton and made a lunge for the trees nearby... then flung the bat towards him one last time!

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Pui Kiu College, Mok, Tsz Siu – 13

Who am I? I am nowhere but yet I am everywhere. I cannot be seen, smelt or touched, yet I can be felt. To some I seem limitless but to others I am limited. I have seen the most joyful and tragic moments of humanity but yet I almost always remain emotionless. In all these years I have only been emotionally touched by one lone person. He is not anyone great in the history, he is just one little shabby street urchin called *Xin*.

In 1920, *Xin* was born in Shanghai. His parents were the servants for a British family living in the International Settlement. *Xin* had an adorable sister called *Xi Wang*, literally means “hope”. His parents hoped for a better life for their kids as Shanghai had been in constant turmoil at that time. I had always heard from other people that this family had the luck of the devil.

About two years after the birth of *Xi Wang*, a fire broke out mysteriously in their house. *Xin* was alert and brave enough to rescue his sister from the blazing scene. I watched the flaming house crumbled upon itself. *Xin*’s parents were found dead in the ashes.

Xin and *Xi Wang* had nothing left. The merciless fire took away their parents and every single piece of treasures. The two young siblings became orphans and street urchins. I silently observed as the twelve year-old *Xin* looked after his vulnerable five-year-old little sister. *Xin* was not as powerless as he seemed. He quickly learned the ways of a street urchin lived and the skill of pickpocketing. Slowly but confidently, *Xin* and *Xi Wang* survived.

Time passed on, and the war had gotten worse. In the middle of a freezing night, *Xin* and *Xi Wang* were sleeping tight in an abandoned church. Out of nowhere, a bombing came. To *Xin* and *Xi Wang*, it seemed as if all hell broke loose. Due to their low status, they weren’t allowed into the bomb shelter and so they wandered in the streets, hoping against hope that they would survive the bombing. I followed them unseen, as the witty boy led his sister into the sewage system. It was awfully disgusting inside, with incredibly huge rats, cockroaches and slime clutching the walls. “Ah!” shrieked poor little *Xi Wang*, ankle-full with murky sewage water, “Something touched my leg! I don’t like this place. Can we go outside?” *Xin* replied gently, “Not now, I’m sure that it’s nothing. Let me carry you.” And so they waited, holding their breath, as the bombing struck again and again.

By a miracle, both of them survived. They climbed out of the sewers when *Xi Wang* started complaining “Brother, I’m starving.” “Don’t worry, I’ll get some food now and you stay here and wait for me.” *Xin* comforted her. He slowly crept towards a house, thinking that it was empty since the owner should be in the bomb shelter. *Xin* was partially correct as the owner was not home but he was coming back. *Xin* went to the kitchen and was desperately shoving food into his pockets.

“Oi!” yelled the house owner as he walked into the house and saw *Xin*, “What are you doing here?” He stomped up to the helpless boy and slapped him hard in the face, then started a brutal process of punching and kicking *Xin*. The

little kid could only curl up into a ball and absorb the pain. A while later, I watched as the man threw *Xin* out of his house. “If you ever come close to my house again, I will literally kill you!” roared the owner as the bruised boy crawled away. What the man never noticed was that *Xin* never gave the food back. Victoriously, *Xin* brought the food to his sister. Innocent *Xi Wang* devoured all the food. “Thanks brother!” she said cheerfully. Ignoring the hunger pangs of his stomach and pain in his body, *Xin* smiled back at his sister. At that moment, I was ever so slightly moved. This was the first time ever when I felt a tingle of emotion. This scene was deeply engraved into my mind.

A few weeks later, the Japanese troops arrived to Shanghai. Everything had devastatingly changed. Shanghai people had been forced out of their houses, the food rations had dropped by a landslide. There were armed Japanese soldiers patrolling everywhere in the streets. *Xin* and *Xi Wang* had been forced into hiding due to the endless slaughter by the enemy soldiers. They could only stay in a small cardboard box hidden in a shadowy and narrow gap between two buildings. They were soon confronted the problem of immense starvation. On one cold winter morning, the bone-skinny *Xi Wang* could barely stand a moment longer. “Brother,” she pleaded, “get me some food to eat.” *Xin* smiled weakly at her and took her out in the opening. As I walked beside them, I noticed that the big brother’s face was stone-like, as if he had made a grave decision. The self-sacrificing boy walked up to a gang of soldiers and said “Please, send my sister to a caring family, let her be well-fed and happy. I will sell myself as a slave, I don’t care if you make me your entertainment or even torture me. Just please do what I asked.” To my surprise, the gang looked amused, “Kid, what you’re asking for is pure death.” The boy replied “I don’t care! Please just do what I have asked for.” That made the soldiers laugh out loud. “Alright kiddo, come closer.” As *Xin* inched closer, a soldier lashed out, hitting him straight in the face, the force making him lie on the ground and creating a sudden nosebleed. Instinctively, *Xi Wang* came to his side and asked worriedly “Are you okay, brother?” “Yes, I’m good. Follow these people and you will get some food.” “Yah!” shouted the little girl as off she went with a soldier. This was the last time *Xin* ever saw his dear sister as he closed his eyes to let it be.....

Thirty years later, I watched as a woman and her son stood in front of a grave. The woman was saying “Do you know how you got your name?” “Why?” the little boy asked, looking at her with curious eyes. “Your uncle was a great man, he sacrificed his life to protect me. That’s why I named you *Xin Er* in memory of your uncle!” At that moment, this heroic and self-sacrificing tale was carved into my memory. It was one of the greatest moments of humanity that I have witnessed and it is one that I will never forget.

A spider had a conversation with a silkworm.

“You are strange,” said the spider, “why do you always make silk when you know the humans will take it away?”

“To me you are strange too!” replied the silkworm. “Why do you always make webs to take away others’ lives?”

The reason why *Xin* emotionally touched me was that he was the silkworm – he is willing to give his best for his sister. Many human beings nowadays have become spiders because they have all forgotten one important thing: “The more you take, the less you have!”

In this point of time you should have figured out my identity. Even now I may be watching you as you read this. I am known as time, and it’s nice to meet you!

The Visit to Old Shanghai

Renaissance College HK, Ang, Christy – 11

In the summer holidays, I decided to visit my old friend.

“Hey! Sophia over here!” My friend, Ella waved to me and said. “Do you want to come see my latest invention?” You see my friend loves to invent stuff, last year, she invented a automatic mop.

“Uh, sure.” I said and she led me to her underground workshop. There were different machines, but one was covered in a white sheet of fabric.

“Come and see my new invention, I call it, The Time Machine.” Ella said as she pulled off the fabric, the time machine was huge, like an elevator, made with silver iron and metal.

“Wow! Its very cool!” I said as I examined wisely at the different colored buttons.

‘Do Do’ “Oh no, Its a burglar alarm.” Ella told her.

“Hi, Ella. Miss me?” The burglar said with smirk.

“Oh, what a pleasure to meet you, Harold.” Ella said to him.

“You know him?” I asked quietly.

“Yeah, he comes here once in a while to try and steal my precious inventions and sell them.” Ella whispered back.

Harold walked closer and closer to the girls while the girls backed away from each step he took. There was no place to go, they got to a dead end. Oh no, we are gonna get killed! I thought. But just then, I spotted the time machine and the door was opened! So without thinking, I took Ella’s hand and ran into the time machine and slammed the door, but I tripped onto a lever and I accidentally pushed some buttons and there was a big hurricane that led me and Ella to a place.

“Wh—where am I?” I asked as I realized we were not in the time machine at Ella’s house anymore, we were in a small town.

“I don’t know, but I think if we get a taxi we can get home right away,” Ella said to her. “Um, excuse me sir, could you please tell me where we are and the date please? Oh and where are the taxi stands?”

“Oh, you are in Shanghai, and today is 1935 10th of August — ” A man answered her, but was quickly interrupted by her.

“Wait, are you telling me we are in Shanghai, 1935 10th of August!?” Ella repeated surprisingly, then I realized

and remembered everything and pulled her aside.

“This man is crazy! I am positive today was 2016 20th of November.” Ella told her confidently.

“Wait! Listen to me, he maybe is right, we went into a time machine, remember?” I reminded her.

“Oh right, but I didn’t remember launching a place change, or maybe I did! It was a red button, and you pressed it!” Ella said remembering everything again and pointed at me.

“Okay okay, I’m so sorry. Then now we need to find a way to go back.” I said trying to make her relax and not blame me for everything, even though it was my problem. “We could make another time machine or something.”

“You can’t! The materials are not even here!” Ella whined.

“Hey! Are you girls lost? You could come to live at my place.” A man said.

“And why are you offering that?” I asked.

“Well, because when I look at you,” The man said pointing at me. “You look so familiar just like one of my family members. By the way my name is Adam, and this is my wife, Sally.” Sally waved at us and smiled brightly.

“Your name is Adam! My dad’s name was Adam, and you’re Sally?! My mom’s name was Sally!” I said surprisingly while taking a family picture out of her pocket to show Ella.

Then, Adam and Sally showed them the way back to their house. He gave them each a room of themselves with a wooden bed, wooden desk and a wooden wardrobe filled with Sally’s old clothes.

“I’m so sorry, but we are still poor so we couldn’t afford a lot of things and they are all wooden. So sorry.” Adam said to the girls guiltily.

“Its fine Adam. Besides, we won’t stay long because we got to figure how to go back home, so don’t be sorry.” I said to him and cheered him up.

“Great! You girls can do whatever you want before dinner.” Adam told them. “But, if you want to go out, you need to tell me or Sally first, okay?”

“Okay!” Ella and me told him and scurried back to our rooms.

“Can I go out for a while, so maybe I can check this place out?” I asked Adam.

“Sure, but wear one of the clothes in your wardrobe or other wise people will have bad thoughts about you and maybe they would think you are from somewhere else.” Adam said to me, then I quickly went back to my room and picked a white dress with blue and purple flowers on some places. I also wore a pair of light blue high heeled shoes and got a white shiny hand bag then went to Adam, so he would give permission to go out of the house.

“Is this look okay to you?” I asked hoping a yes so I can go out.

“Yes! But remember to come back to eat dinner in 6:30, okay? Don’t be late.” Adam told me.

“Okay, bye.” I said as I went out of the house.

I went to one of the most famous street in the City, Hua Shan Road. There were a lot of people shopping clothes, eating dim sum in restaurants, playing different kinds of gambling games like Mahjong for example. I went into one of the shops, there were lots of beautiful dresses. Then, I check my watch it was 6:00, so I decided to go back home.

When we were eating dinner, I asked Ella the materials for the time machine, she said the materials were :

1. A ring of love
2. A picture of happiness
3. A spike of hardworking

The next day, I figured what we need. A picture of happiness was the photograph of me, dad and mum. A ring of love was the ring of my mom and dad. A spike of hardworking was the spindle mom used to use it to do her job. When I figured it out, I asked Adam and Sally if I can use those materials, and they agreed to let me use it. So I took the stuff and putted them together. Suddenly, the materials start to float around in a circle, shining brightly that it hurt my eyes and changed into a time machine. Ella and me gave the last goodbye and waved. They gave us the last farewell and waved at us too. Then Ella and me gathered around the buttons and located back into the 2016s and then again, like before, a hurricane swopped us up and we landed back into Ella’s underground workshop.

We captured the burglar, Harold and when I got back home, I didn’t see my mother’s ring, and spindle ever again. Maybe Adam and Sally were my mother and father, and I met them.

~ The End ~

Lost in Paradise

Renaissance College HK, Karthik, Markandeya – 11

The sky was a light pink as the sun slunk behind the tall skyscrapers and cranes that loomed over old Shanghai. As lanterns glowed to make up for the fading light, the smell of steamed fish balls enveloped the rank of the turbid Huangpu river and permeated through the sultry evening air. The old shops with paint peeling off the walls lowered their steel shutters as one batch of tourists shuffled their way out to the taxi stands and a fresh bunch started trickling in to take in the sights of the old city by night. Dusk seemed to be the only time of day when the ‘village that never emptied’ at the heart of Shanghai, was forlorn. And, this didn’t help the despondent 8 year old boy standing in the middle of Sinan Road, clutching a teddy bear in his hands. His name was Zhen Qu. He was lost.

Zhen Qu was from a simple village called Xiushui on the outskirts of Guilin. His parents were thinking of moving to Shanghai where his father had been offered a teaching role at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s department of Economics. This trip was part of a sequence of short ones that his parents had undertaken to Shanghai in their effort to gently introduce Zhen Qu to where he’d be growing up. In his quest for trinkets, Zhen Qu had gotten separated from his parents as they strolled along the narrow streets of Old Shanghai.

Zhen Qu eyes teared up. He covered his ears and moaned. The noise of store shutters being downed mixed with the exuberant laughter and loud chatter of people around him got to him. He wasn’t used to this. His hometown was so tranquil, you could hear a pin drop. He broke into a dash to try and escape the madness. He needed to find his parents. He couldn’t bear being alone.

He turned a corner, and slowed. As the noises faded behind him, the sound of his raspy breathing took over. He plopped down on the stone sidewalk and realized he was in the midst of one of the most breathtaking views he had ever seen. That was quite something for someone who born in the jewel of China. He stared dreamily at a long stone bridge underneath which water reflected the sunset. As his mood lightened, a sad smile played on his face. He stood up and stretched, his confidence renewed by the thought that his parents would be looking for him too.

And so Zhen Qu renewed his search around Old Shanghai. He scanned the dimly lit lotus pond where he last saw his parents. He ran where his heart told him to, till his legs fell like falling apart, till his feet became painful and he could run no more. He peered through the black stained windowpanes of the antique shops. He ran over the bridges that stretched across the lotus ponds and goldfish rivers. In some superhuman way, the desperation to find his parents kept him going. He even scaled the tallest building in the old city to try and spot them, but to no avail. He slowed down, eventually, near the dilapidated stone wall that separated the old city from the modern megalopolis. He had covered the entire old city of Shanghai. He sank to his knees. Hopeless. That’s what he was.

As he consoled himself, he overheard a few soft voices. Lifting his tear blotched face from his palms, he slowly, silently, moved towards the sounds until he was staring at the backs of 4 men with leather jackets. Mustering up what little courage he had left, he walked over to the group.

“Excuse me? Uh, um, I’m lost. I, uh, can’t find my parents.” Stuttered Zhen Qu. The men turned around, and gave Zhen Qu a weary look. They started to snicker and one started to laugh. Zhen Qu started to back away. One man, who seemed like the leader of the group, hushed the gang. He put his hand on Zhen Qu’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry. We saw your parents. They headed down that alleyway over there.” as he pointed towards a dark and murky path. Zhen Qu’s heart leapt with joy. “Thank you sir! Thank you!” The man smiled.

“Don’t worry, we are glad to help anyone in need.”

Zhen Qu reached the narrow lane and as he turned into it, came up against an old man who took up all the space between him and the path forward. Snapping out from his state of trance, the old man smiled, baring his chipped and jagged yellow teeth. He began to move his mouth.

“This place is a lost secret, with lots of twists and turns. The dangers here can just make your stomach churn. But don’t be disappointed because behind this curtain there is a golden light. It can either make you smile with delight or make you shriek with fright.” With that, he slumped to a side and dozed off.

Unfazed by the poem, Zhen Qu continued to walk along the slushy path. Only when he came to the end of the street, did the words begin to start making sense. There, at the foot of an ancient Chinese building, stood his parents. However, his joy evaporated as he spotted a machete-wielding man with a straw hat standing in front of them, clutching his mother’s bag in his hand.

Zhen Qu, was speechless with horror, which in this situation, was a good thing. He dove behind some wooden boxes, and peeked through the slits in the wood. The stranger brandished the knife in his parents’ faces, and let out a maniacal laugh. Zhen Qu could pick up a few words. “Thanks...Money...Kill...Man...Woman...Nice gift...For...The Boss.” As Zhen Qu put these together, a middle aged man wearing a shiny suit and tie walked out of the building. “Ah! What a beautiful couple! Yet, completely and utterly useless since I have their money now. Finish them. But not in front of me. You know how much I hate blood.” said The Boss as the straw hat man nodded eagerly.

Zhen Qu, desperate, screamed at the very top of his lungs “HELP!”

Startled, the men turned around. The straw hat man was lightning quick as he lunged for Zhen Qu and pinned the boy down. The Boss spoke, “Tut Tut. Never interfere in my business boy. And my business is with your parents. Let me tell you a story. Do you know who Du Yuesheng is? No? Well, he was one of the most powerful gangsters in the old city in 1887. He ruled this land and was the leader of the criminal underworld. When he died, my grandfather took over. And that’s family business now. Kiddo, I’m Du Yuesheng’s great-grandson. I own this city. Your parents have a lot of money, all their savings that they brought over from Xiushui. Money that I want. Money that I need. And your father tried to play smart by going to the cops. He doesn’t realize that I can do whatever I want here. Your parents need to be taught a lesson and become an example for others. You won’t be seeing them again.”

The sound of rapid footsteps drowned out what The Boss was saying. Zhen Qu's eyeballs moved and refocused just in time to see Du Yuesheng's descendant get rammed to the ground. Suddenly, the pressure on his neck was gone. He scrambled to his feet, to see the gang of men in leather jackets he'd seen earlier batter the machete flourisher and his boss. The scream must have done it! Thought Zhen Qu.

The gang finally lowered their fists when the two men raised their hands in surrender. The leader of the gang brushed his shoulders, approached Zhen Qu and said "Remember what we told you boy? We are glad to help anyone in need." As he turned to lead the bad guys away, the tails of his jacket fluttered to keep pace, Zhen Qu caught a flash of the gun and the police badge on his waistband. He stared at them in awe.

"Zhen Qu! My little peanut", a familiar voice startled Zhen Qu. His mother ran towards him and smothered him in her arms. "We were so scared! We thought we would never see you again!" his father whispered. Zhen Qu looked at his mother, who was fighting unsuccessfully to catch her dripping black eyeliner from staining her cheeks. Boy, was he glad to see his family again.

As they walked back down the murky alley he caught sight of the old man who snored steadily while lying in the slush. His mind made full sense of the poem now. The danger was the man who threatened to hurt his parents for their money, the golden light was the gang that helped him. He smiled. He was reunited with his parents and that meant more than anything else!

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Renaissance College HK, Koh, Si En Charis – 11

All of a sudden, I realized that I didn't know where I was. I looked around. It was late afternoon. There were historical looking buildings, which was strange but interesting simultaneously. There were cars of many colors, but not the type of cars that you are used to seeing on the road; they were, just like the buildings, a vintage style. There were ladies dressed in traditional Chinese clothing, and when I saw this, I knew that I was in China. But why did everything look so unusual? It looked like the pictures of China that you would see in your history textbook. I saw a foreign lady walking by and decided to talk to her. "Hello, my name is April," I said as politely as I could. "Would you please be so kind as to tell me what country we are in and what the year is?"

The lady looked at me as if I was crazy but replied me anyway.

"Shanghai, 1930," she mumbled, before hurrying off.

I just stood there in shock. After a few moments, I carefully processed my situation in my head. I was stuck in the past, 1930, Shanghai, in the middle of nowhere. I needed to find my way out of that place, out of that time. Plan A: Simple. Just ask for help.

I looked around to find someone to help me I couldn't see any one that looked like any help. All the people who I had tried to ask just ignored me; they were all too busy fussing over things and rushing about to give me any help at all.

The sun was now hanging low above my head. If I wanted to get home before dark, I would have to get going. And fast. The first step was to at least know how to do it.

I walked around for a little while longer, desperate to find someone that was helpful. Eventually, after walking randomly around for ages, I happened to see someone that could help. It was a tall, foreign man, who was just strolling about. I wondered why there was so many foreign people in Shanghai, even in the 1930s. This guy was quite fierce looking, but my situation was despite enough to go up to him anyway. I was going to ask him for help when he mumbled, "Time machine is near the Bund. Time machine is near the Bund."

Huh? Things here were just getting weirder and weirder. I mean, there's a TIME MACHINE? I had always thought that couldn't even exist. And even if it does, how does he know that it's near the Bund or that it even exists? And how does he know that that is what I need. That's Strange. Very Strange. However, I still settled on following him.

The Bund was a really cool place. There was a few tower like things sticking out here and there. The other buildings had different words on them, most of which I couldn't read, apart from a few simple words. There were many vintage cars driving on the road, and even more people walking around. There were a few planes in the sky, and hardly any clouds. Good. It was not very likely to rain that day. Which means I could continue on my search. Which means I would be able to get home faster. I continued to follow the strange man even though I knew that it would be risky seeing that he could be a crazy maniac. But maybe, just maybe, he was from the future too. With this in mind, I decided to ask him. "Ahm... Excuse me? Just a few question. Are you from the future? Is that the reason why you know about the time machine? How DO you know about the time machine? Where are you from?" I blabbered none stop.

"Hey! Slow down girl," the man said in a surprisingly quiet voice. "Give me time to answer your questions. To answer your first question, yes, I am from the future. For your second question, yes, that is why I know. Number three, is a secret. So can I trust you?"

"Yes," I answered. "The only problems are that, for one thing, you don't even know what *my* name is and problem number two, I don't know what *your* name is. So let's start our conversation again. Hello. My name is April. What is your name?"

"My name is Bruce," he said with a small grin. "Suits me, doesn't it?"

I agreed and asked him my third question again. "Just be patient," he said. "I'll get to it. But first you have to come with me to a more private place. So come on. Hurry. It is almost dark. Time machines don't work in the dark."

I followed him and he lead me into a little corner in a little ally. And in that little corner in that little ally, sat a distinguished looking machine. The time machine. My search was over! But I still wanted to know Bruce's secret. So I asked him again, for the third time. And finally, he told me. "You promise not to tell soul?" I promised. "Okay then. This secret has been in my family for many, many generations, with only two exceptions, two people outside of our family, know about this. And you will be the third. I'll write down the secret for you, just in case anyone decides to listen in."

He grabbed a piece of paper from his pocket and started to scribble down a note. When he was finished, he passed me the note. It read, "We know that there are time machines in every single country, every single city, every single town in the entire world. And we know where each and every one of them are located."

When I was finished reading, I didn't know what to say. I just stood there, my mouth hanging open, staring at him. He laughed at me reaction. "Keep reading."

So I continued reading. "Signed, Bruce Banner, from the year 2999, age 21."

I gasped. He was from a year even further forward than my year. That meant the I was technically a few hundred years older than him, even though I was 11 at that time, and he was 21.

But I had no time to lose, no time to think about these things, because he told me, “I know what you what to do now and you have only a few more minutes to do it before it gets dark. I know you badly want to go home,” he said, very serious now. “So quick. Get into the machine. I will go in with you. And I will press this button, then... we will both be teleported back to where ever we came from”. I obeyed and he followed close behind. He pressed the button and then... and then... and then I felt my warm blankets around me and I snuggled in deeper. Wait a minute, my blankets? I felt sad thinking that my incident was just a dream. But then I turned my head and saw something that made me smile. It was Bruce’s note. When I saw it, I knew my adventure really happened. I don’t know how it happened or even why it happened, but I knew that I would never forget this happening.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Renaissance College HK, Kwan, Hayley – 11

Is it harder to fall asleep or to wake up? One might say that falling asleep is harder, but Allison, Alisha, Agnes and Avery felt relief every time a dream ended and every time their alarm clocks sounded.

The four girls had absolutely normal lives. They went to school like any other kid. However, all that changed as they went to bed at a sleepover in Allison's house.

That sleepover was one of the best ones they ever had. They played games and gossiped. It was impossible for them to fall asleep. They tossed and turned for what seemed like forever. Finally, after the third time Allison's mom came to ask them to be quiet, they managed to lose consciousness. As the girls dreamt on, they mysteriously got transported to a different dimension!

The girls ended up on a beach. Alisha looked around and exclaimed, 'we're in another dimension! Judging by the things around us, I think we're in Shanghai.'

The girls started down a straight path. They saw a young woman, and without thinking, Agnes jumped up to her and screeched, 'hi! I'm Agnes. This is Allison, Alisha and Avery.'

The woman replied, 'and I, am the famous Pan Yuliang!'

Alisha stepped up and greeted, 'I'm Alisha. Would you be so kind as to tell us the date right now?'

Pan Yuliang answered, 'it's the 25th of July. Why do you ask?'

Allison answered, 'we're from a different dimension. What year is it?'

Looking at them like they were the weirdest people she ever met, Pan Yuliang replied hesitantly, 'It's the year of 1926.'

The four friends glanced at each other. They travelled back in time!

Allison pleaded, 'could we please stay with you for a while? We're completely lost!'

Pan Yuliang replied kindly, 'sure. You poor girls need a place to stay!'

The girls followed Pan Yuliang back to her house. The city was filled with beautiful women in flowery dresses and men in coloured robes. Heads turned as they walked down the path. Avery whispered in fear, 'why are they staring at us?'

Pan Yuliang laughed and answered, 'they're staring at me! I'm a celebrity!'

After a very long walk, the girls arrived Pan Yuliang's house. She announced, 'I'm going to go shopping. You girls stay here and rest.'

Right after she walked out the door, Allison announced, 'girls, we have to act fast. How do we get back to our dimension before people find out?'

Agnes whispered back, 'but if they do, they would come looking for us while we could party in this place!'

Alisha couldn't hold it anymore. She yelled, 'Agnes, stop being so stupid! We have to get back as soon as possible. End of story!'

Allison snapped in a low voice, 'we need to come with a plan as soon as possible.'

Alisha racked her brains for information, but knew nothing about different dimensions. When the girls saw that she had no ideas, they thought that they were going to be stuck here for eternity, until a tiny voice said, 'I might have an idea.'

All three girls looked at Avery in shock. 'Avery! Tell us what you're thinking!' exclaimed Allison.

‘When we were walking back, I overheard a few people talking about some time—travel machine near here. They were wondering if we were going to use it.’ explained Avery.

Alisha was hesitant. She asked, ‘why didn’t Pan Yuliang tell us about it?’

Avery replied, ‘I doubt that she knows about it.’

Alisha exclaimed, ‘we can’t tell her! One change in history could change our whole world. We have to find it without her knowing!’

Agnes sighed, ‘let’s find that machine and go home!’

Alisha stared at her in confusion, ‘I thought you just said that you wanted to stay in this place for longer.’

Agnes ignored her and turned away. Alisha tapped Agnes on the shoulder and said, ‘I’m sorry for shouting at you.’

Agnes glared at Alisha and continued ignoring her. Alisha’s face turned red. It was actually Agnes’s fault. If she weren’t so stupid all the time, none of this would have happened, she thought. She sighed, ‘Agnes, stop being so naive!’

Agnes was extremely offended at this, ‘just because I’m not the world’s smartest girl doesn’t mean I’m a retard!’

Alisha was about to holler something back but stopped herself. There’s no use arguing with a useless crimp, she fumed. Although they strongly hated each other, Agnes and Alisha decided to remain civil for the time being. The girls searched every inch of the house for the time—travel machine, but couldn’t find it anywhere. Suddenly, Alisha spotted a mysterious looking bracelet. She thought that it would have to do with time—travel machine, and snuck it in her pocket without anyone noticing. Suddenly, they heard footsteps. Panicking, they tried to put everything back where it was but didn’t have enough time. Everything in drawers, closets, and shelves fell. Pan Yuliang walked in to see that mess. She screamed, ‘WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY HOUSE?!’

Agnes tried to explain, ‘we’re really sorry! It’s just that we need to find a time—travel machine, and Avery heard someone say that there’s one in your house —’

Uh—oh. Agnes wasn't supposed to let Pan Yuliang know about the time—travel machine! Alisha tried to cover up, 'I'm so sorry, Agnes doesn't know what she's talking about. The truth is, we saw something that looked super cute in your closet, and we couldn't help but have a look. We're really sorry!'

Pan Yuliang yelled, 'this is my beautiful home, and you fatuous girls messed it up! Get out!'

The four girls had nothing more to say and slopped outside. Alisha screeched, 'Agnes, WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?!'

Agnes shrieked, 'it's mean to humiliate people in front of celebrities!'

Everyone was furious with Agnes. Allison growled, 'I knew you were going to be a problem for us!'

Agnes couldn't believe this. She didn't want to admit she was wrong, but with everyone against her, she had no other choice. However, everyone ignored her. Allison, Alisha and Avery discussed climbing through the window and trying to find the time—travel machine. Agnes interrupted, 'it's not going to work. We searched every inch of the house!'

Suddenly, a cold breeze swept through them, and a tiny piece of paper appeared. The four girls gathered around it and read, 'friendship is the power that could save you.'

They exchanged looks of confusion. Allison shouted to no one in particular, 'a little more information would be helpful!'

Another cold breeze swept through them, and a second piece of paper magically appeared. Avery read, 'friendship, the key to returning home.'

Agnes cleared her throat and announced, 'I think it means we have to befriend each other again.'

Allison, Alisha and Avery exchanged glances. Allison said softly, 'I guess it has been weird being angry at you.'

Avery nodded, 'it feels wrong, not laughing around with you.'

Agnes smiled, 'does that mean we're friends again?'

The three of them glanced at Alisha. She was having a mental debate with herself. If she forgave Agnes, who knew if she would continue being a stupid, annoying brat? However, if she didn't forgive her, all four of them would be stuck in this dimension forever. For the sake of everyone, she smiled and said, 'yes, it does. I'm sorry as well.'

As expected, a third cold breeze swept through the girls, and this time, a tiny object fell out of the wind. It was a square with four metal bars sticking out of it. It had a piece of paper attached, saying, 'hold on to metal bars.'

Alisha said, 'wait. Before we go, we have to say goodbye to someone.'

The four girls ran to Pan Yuliang's door and knocked until she opened up. 'I told you to leave!' she growled.

Allison said, 'we're sorry for troubling you.'

Alisha seconded, 'we will be going back to where we came from now.'

Agnes added, 'thank you for having us, even if it was just for a while.'

And quiet Avery said in a loud clear voice, 'although we know you're annoyed with us, we will always remember how you helped us when we were in need.'

Pan Yuliang was touched. She waved them away, 'although you did mess up my house, I'll miss you.'

The girls smiled and were soon sent flying in a tornado and back to their dimension. They woke up the next morning, exhausted. Allison gasped, 'I had the weirdest dream!'

Alisha smiled and said, 'it wasn't a dream. I still have Pan Yuliang's bracelet. I thought that it had something to do with the time-travel machine, so I took it and forgot to give it back.'

Agnes exclaimed, 'this was the best experience that I ever had!'

Avery added, 'going to Shanghai has made me feel so much more confident in myself!'

They all laughed and launched into a group hug. The time-machine was so proud...

The New Tales of Old Shangai – Friendship's Odyssey

Renaissance College, Hong Kong, Srinivasan, Shriya – 10

“Ning! Come at once!” shouted Ning’s mother. “See what you’ve done!” It was at times like these that Ning felt like she didn’t live up to her name. She always felt like she was the complete opposite of her name. Ning meant PEACE. She felt like she looked or behaved nothing like her name. Her thoughts were interrupted when she suddenly realized, *Oh, no! What have I done! Half of mother’s earnings are lost! I forgot to cover the rest of the meat when I took some out to prepare dinner and now it will all be rotting and swarming with flies!* “You will now have to feed the street dogs after work!” said mother sternly. “No! Please! Anything but that!” Ning groaned. “Hurry up! And do be careful while going to work!” said mother in the same breath affectionately, ignoring Ning’s pleas. “Alright! Bye!” said Ning candidly as she stepped out of the house.

“Ning! Over here!” Ning’s only friend, Fen shouted. Fen was a pretty girl, about 13 years old. Just like Ning, Fen’s hair was disheveled and her hands and face were stained with coal. “What do you have for lunch?” Fen eagerly asked. “The usual!” Ning replied dejectedly as she was opening her rustic lunch sack. Fen readily offered her momos to Ning. This had been their usual routine every lunchtime. On their way back from work, Ning was sulking about the impending chore – feeding the stray dogs. As she was approaching her house, she saw some Chinese soldiers approaching. *Oh no! I should warn mother!* Ning sprinted into her house but it was too late!

Ning’s heart skipped a beat. She could not find her mother in the house. *No! This couldn’t be happening now. We had been safe for the past few years, why now?* Ning panicked. She ran to the back door and saw some soldiers leaving. She followed them screaming and kicking, but one soldier held her arm and pushed her to the floor. She quickly scurried to safety with her heart racing. *Follow the instructions. Mother has told me many times. Run! Hide!* Grabbing her bag from the house, she ran to Fen’s house just in the neighborhood. They both lived in a Mongolian settlement.

Fen had been hiding in her house hearing the panic and chaos. *There is utter disaster and smoke everywhere! The village is on fire. The army is going to kill everyone.* Suddenly, she heard banging on the door and Ning stood there crying with her palm covering her cheek.

“Ning!” Fen screamed. Ning was sobbing and bleeding uncontrollably from the gash on her left cheek and her right arm was as red as beet. “The...they took m...mother. We have to run...save ourselves!” Ning gasped. Fen’s mind was racing. *It was not possible. But it wasn’t impossible either. If she had to do it, she was going to do it. She was going to fight.* Fen put on a brave face and comforted Ning in her arms saying “We’re helpless! But we’re prepared for everything.” She was determined.

“Are we there yet?” groaned Ning tiredly. They’d been treading the heavy desert sand for hours now. Finally, the pair reached Lhasa station only to find out that they’d missed the last train to Xi’an. “Don’t worry!” assured Fen. “Climb over the security bars and wait for me.” Fen snuck into a tuck shop, as quiet as a mouse and two seconds later, confidently walked out holding momos in a large paper bag. “Fen! Please tell me that you did not just steal that!” “I’m sorry, Ning! It’s food and water.” Fen whispered. “Now, quick! There’s a train to Nantong in five minutes.”

The duo crawled up into the last train coach and peered over the railing into the window. Sensing no one inside, Fen urged Ning to get in and under the seat quickly. They didn't have tickets. The swaying train gradually rocked them to sleep. They woke up ten hours later, very hungry. Stuffing a piece of momo into her mouth, Fen whispered, "Now, we need to free your mother from the prison headquarters at Shanghai." Ning was thinking aloud. "The prison guards wear a red and khaki clothes with a straw hat. It's probably easy enough to find those clothes in Shanghai. How much money do you have?" "Umm, about 6 yuan, it's half my mother's salary." Fen replied. "Perfect! I have exactly 6 yuan too!" Ning said. Feeling positive, Ning and Fen fell asleep knowing fully well that this could be their last night alive.

"Mother!" Ning whispered. Ning and Fen, disguised as guards had snuck into the Mongolian prisoner cells. "Quick! Get me and everybody else out of here!" Mother said. "Uh, um, wait a minute" Fen fiddled with a bobby pin from her head, struggled to unlock the cell, but managed finally. Ning ran to her mother and hugged her tight. They were free! The Mongolians cheered, but Fen was unusually quiet. "I... is my mother in there?" asked Fen softly. When Fen was about 7 years old, her mother had been taken prisoner. Fen had been trying to find her mother ever since. "I think so, dear! I have made a few acquaintances here. But there's a lady who has never spoken, is always veiled. I wonder..." before Ning's mother finished, Fen had rushed in to see the lady, veiled with her head scarf, her face barely visible. Instinctively, she shrieked, "Mother!" The lady immediately recognized her own blood. Fen had found her mother! There wasn't a single dry eye in the room. Suddenly, a guard appeared in the room, he was surprised to see guards already inside the room. Looking at the prisoners, he said, "Err...Your names have been cleared, you're all free to go back home, or you can choose to earn your living in Shangai" Tears of joy flowed. It was a journey to remember. The odyssey in Shangai had just begun.

The End.

Triad King

Sha Tin College, Chan, Cyrus – 13

A new life. A new beginning just beyond these walls. This was everything that I yearned for. A new start at the Old City of Shanghai, where nobody knew who I was; this was where I redefined myself. “You may enter the city.” Those words rung so sweetly through my head, as I had dreamed of this moment for as long as I could remember.

The change was instantaneous. I was greeted with swarms of people hurrying up and down streets and alleys. As I made my way through the hustle and bustle, I couldn't help notice the atmosphere here, everyone walked around with poise and purpose, their heads held tautly as they went about their day. To them I appeared as someone foreign, the neophyte within their tight-knit community.

One focal purpose resounded in my head as to why I was here in the Old City, the Green Gang. A small but successful triad whose power was growing exponentially. A surreal feeling of awe and disbelief came upon realising the level of corruption the city was driven by. That of course enabled the triad to go unnoticed going about their usual business; drug trafficking and collecting protection fees. As inconspicuous and secretive the triad had seemed, there were an awful lot of people who knew how to join the triad itself. Each person I had asked responded in the same way, writing a person's name onto a piece of paper. His name was not allowed to be said, but he was rumoured to be the go-to person. Upon talking to me someone had wrapped my head in a cloth bag, leading me through the streets until I was let go.

It all started with an initiation. I stood amongst a circle of cloth clad figures, each of them not willing to raise their heads to look at me. In the middle of the circle was a goblet that I had been told to hold onto. A ghastly voice came through the circle, sending chills down my spine. “Do you vow to treat your sworn brothers as your own kin?” A swirl of unease settled into my brain. Was I really ready for all of this? Without any warning I had replied “Yes.” A sudden wave of realisation hit me. I was taking an oath to join the Green Gang. The rest of the oath had seemed like a blur in my memory. A sharp surge of ushered me back into reality, as my blood flowed into the goblet, the final step of the initiation. The circle opened up...

I woke up the next day with very little recollection of what had happened the day before, only remembering that I was now part of the Green Gang. Stepping onto the streets I saw a man beckoning me to him. Amongst him stood what appeared to be members of the triad, whose dark overalls clouded the view of the alleyway. Following them through the alleyway I saw multiple people sitting around a wooden table. In the middle of it was a handwritten piece of paper, a message in black ink spiralled through the paper in calligraphy. Picking up the piece of paper and looking upon it with a quick glance, the Vanguard (more commonly known as the Operations Officer) replied with no hint of emotion, “The union of the city has given orders to relocate with the Nationalist troops to the outskirts of the city by tomorrow.” A silence later, the Vanguard sent the triad into a hurried scramble. Officers were barking orders at members to go to different places, while I remained where I was, unsure of what I had to do. “You over there, come here quickly.” An officer signalled me. The Deputy stepped forward, with a trace of authority he said “A message received today is being questioned of its authenticity. We require you to infiltrate the Union and find out why they want us to relocate. Take advantage of your fresh face and show up to the Union asking for a job. You'll continue on from there.” Obediently, I nodded acknowledging my orders.

In front of me stood the Union building. “It's going to be okay.” I repeated that phrase until I genuinely started to believe in those words myself. A man appeared at the door. One glance and he questioned “Are you here for the new job?”. My head resounded with the word yes, but my mouth failed to orate it. Nodding at the man, he escorted me into the office area, where he ordered me to wait. Before my own thoughts took me away, a worker walked past, dropping a small brown envelope onto my lap.

Trying to keep it low key I carefully unfolded the envelope, revealing the message inside. Containing a note, it said:

Well done infiltrating the Union. As you may have figured out we have eyes everywhere, you're not operating alone.

Your first task is to keep tabs on a certain few individuals within the Union. First, the newly appointed secretary Lee Yu. Suspected of aiding the communists to overthrow the city. The second, is a seasoned commanding officer who goes by the name of Xin Jiao. Through the decades of his time in the Union, his morals have always been hung quite loosely, highly suspected of coordinating communist attacks. The final and most important target, the Chairwoman of the Union Chen Hua. One of the most powerful people in the Old City. However, ever since the loss of her father she has become awry a loose cannon. Getting involved with various unorthodox corporations alongside communist supporting parties.

Collect any relevant information regarding these individuals, understand their plans, infiltrate their ranks. That is all you need to accomplish.

I began my first day of work at the Union, addressing my role meticulously. After finishing with the work assigned to me, I couldn't help but notice the secretary glancing at his watch constantly, almost as if he was waiting for something to happen. After a few minutes, the secretary collected a newly printed piece of paper and handed it to a commanding officer. As I edged closer to see who it was, I immediately recognised the officer as Xin Jiao. I caught him reading what was written on the paper intently, then he whispered something into Lee Yu's ear. With that, Lee proceeded to rush off into his office, with a smile full of malice. The message was then torn to shreds and tossed into a bin, while Xin Jiao entered Chen Hua's office to discuss the matter.

Slinking into his office, I carefully slipped my hand into the bin, taking out the shreds of paper. Sliding them into my pocket, I walked out casually. It was when I had arrived at my desk I started to reconstruct the message. The message seemed to spiral and build into more and more dangerous territory, with each word carrying a venomous intent. A few sentences stood out from the paper, snaking into my eyes. The Communists plan to launch an attack on the Old City. They plan to attack as soon as the Nationalist troops relocate and that meant it would be tomorrow. I rushed out of the Union building, message scrunched in my pocket, determined to forewarn the triad.

Skidding past the alleyways I reached a restaurant, a triad front tucked in a small alley, panting as I knocked on the door. "I have here an important message to bring to you!" I shouted through the wooden door. The door opened quickly, allowing me to rush inside, handing the piece of paper that contained the plans of the communists.

"Soldiers! Get into formation, the Union has cleared the defenses of the Old City. Now's our time to seize the area!" The Communist General ordered. The ruffling of footsteps meant the soldiers were starting to line up, preparing for the battle that would allow them to take over the Old City. To their surprise, through the gates of the Old City hundreds of Nationalist troops rushed through, pushing back the soldiers. The soldiers from within the Old City started to flood through, turning the battle in favor of the Nationalists. The final three to arrive through the gates were all handcuffed, a scowl etched onto their faces. They were Lee Yu, Xin Jiao and Chen Hua. "Surrender while you can, your leaders are in our hands." The Nationalist General commanded. One by one weapons were dropped, hands were in the air as the Communist soldiers surrendered. The general turned to a young man, saying "You did well for delivering the communists' plans. How may I call you?"

"Yuesheng. Du Yuesheng." The young man replied, his eyes glowing intently as he gazed upon the communist soldiers.

His name became famous in the Old City as he rose up to the top ranks of the Green Gang. Later to be known as the city's Triad King.

Priceless

Sha Tin College, Chan, Yoki – 13

Gently fluttering in the wind, the imperial flag of Japan was hoisted up in the air as sailors and guards were busy loading goods onto the *Meakan*. The *Meakan* — named after Mount Meakan, was a red seal ship bound for China, on board was an important, precious gift. A token of gratitude from Emperor Ōgimachi to Emperor Wanli, destined to be put on display inside the Forbidden Palace. It appeared to be a regular, generic black stone, standing at meter high with various holes carved out of the body. However, under the rays of the celestial fireball, there were silver specks peppered throughout, making it shine like the brightest star against a dark night sky.

Among the sailors and guards was Akihito. A Japanese guard who was barely eighteen years old, granted with the most important job. He was liable for guarding the stone day and night for the entirety of the one week journey, until it was in the safe hands of the Forbidden palace. This responsibility landed in his lap, for his father was the captain of the ship. His father, Hiroshi, was a man of trust, as well as a man of his word. He had promised Akihito a chance to prove himself worthy of serving the Japanese royalty, and this was his make or break.

Inside a small wooden chamber on the lowest deck of the ship, the charcoal-black stone was stored with care. Akihito was stationed outside the locked chamber, with a sword carefully placed within hands reach if anyone or anything dared to intrude. Occasionally, he would unlock the door to inspect the stone, even if he knew nothing could happen to it in the impermeable room; it bought him a peace of mind. As days passed, Akihito grew tired of guarding the stone, and grew even more tired of the ever rumbling sea.

Deciding to rest inside the room, he plunked down onto the wooden floorboards which creaked under his weight. Not thinking twice, he leaned against the stone, closing his eyes drifting off into a deep sleep...

Akihito awoke to the discomfort of the loud rumbling sounds from his stomach, or what seemed like it, but soon he realised it was actually the murmuring sounds of thunder. Outside, a storm was stirring angrily. Instantly, he had a gut feeling of an unsettling disturbance, something was amiss. Despite his brain being in a blur, still clouded by his dreams, he recalled he was leaning against the stone. *Was*. Gradually turning back, the light in his chestnut-coloured eyes faded as they dilated at the sight of the precious invaluable stone toppled over flat on the floor with a small chunk chipped off from the side.

What was it doing there? How did it break? Akihito's frantic thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a series of desperate bangs on the door, followed by a cry of "MUSUKO!" It was his father. Hurling himself towards the door, he began fumbling at the lock. His father was standing there in relief as he embraced his son. However, he lost all emotion when he witnessed the state of the stone. Hiroshi approached the stone with small strides. His footsteps barely made a noise as they hit the floor. Standing with his eyes wide opened, he gaped at the stone.

"*Doushita no?*" which loosely translates to "What happened?" The only time his father ever spoke Japanese was if he was either angry or it was something important. His voice was quiet, but there was no trace of it trembling — his inexplicit way of showing anger. Akihito lowered his eyes to the floor, he didn't dare to speak. His father questioned again; this time even quieter.

"I...I just wanted to take a rest." Hiroshi squeezed his eyes shut as mumbled something.

"I swear...I didn't break it on purpose!" Akihito pleaded.

"I know."

A rush of relief ran through his body as he heard those words. His father looked at him dead in the eye and said “Let me tell you something.”

Akihito stared at his father in disbelief. The stone is magical and capable of causing natural disasters? No. The last thing he wanted to know was that he was responsible for the rapid approaching storm. What were they going to do? They could prepare for it, but there was a higher possibility that whatever they did would be futile.

The storm was getting worse by the minute. The waves were folding in, the *Meakan* was being tossed around in the great sea, the water engulfing them towards the middle of a maelstrom, the ship battered and hurled before finally settling on a foreign land.

Akihito’s eyes jolted open from his nightmare when the realisation that all of it wasn’t a dream hit him. He was sprawled out on a beach, decorated with pebbles of sea green and grey. The first thing he felt were waves gently tickling his ankles, and the sound of them crashing against the shore. Shivering, Akihito rose to his feet, only to find that he was alone. All alone on a strange land, with no one by his side except that damned stone which seemed strategically placed by his side upright. Feeling weak, he closed his eyes and sighed. Suddenly, darkness took him as he crumpled and deflated down back onto the sand.

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An old fisherman was passing by the never ending long stretch of sand on the east coast of Shanghai, when he stumbled upon the stone and a young boy who looked barely eighteen. Cautiously and curious, the old man walked over to the boy’s side and placed two fingers on his wrist. Dead he seemed. Shaking his head in grief, he nonchalantly strode over to the peculiar-looking stone standing next to the boy. It was breathtaking, fully black, except for the parts where light fell and flickered through the various holes embedded in the stone, making it appear smokey-grey. The longer the old man inspected and admired the stone, the more he was captivated and mesmerized by it.

The old fisherman was in desperate need of money, so he thought, *why not auction off the stone to the highest bidder?* Carefully, he lugged it onto the wagon, fastening it down with the rope. As he was about to leave, he looked once more at the young boy’s corpse and whispered gratefully, *thank you*.

:

Pan Yunduan was making his way to the port with his goods in his wagon, minding his own business until he laid eyes on an old fisherman tugging on his wagon. He could barely make out what it was, it just looked unusually big. Despite that, from afar it looked like a rustic geode as the sun’s rays refracted off the surface. *Interesting*.

Trying to seem less conspicuous, casually he approached the old fisherman while he was fending the stone, fastening it on a little tighter than before. Pan cleared his voice and commented, “That’s a nice stone you’ve got there.” The old man lifted his head with a small smile, politely humoring him.

“Where’s that beauty from?” Again, the old man just smiled. Realising the old man wasn’t going to answer, Pan prepared to walk away. Just as he turned his back, the old man called out, “Do you want to buy it?” Pan stopped in his tracks and turned to the old man once again.

“How much are you offering?”

“5,000 yuan.” The old man replied in a heartbeat. Pan stood there and thought, *for all I know this could just be a regular stone, but something feels off about it that I just can’t put my finger on. Or it could be a replica...Is it worth the gamble?* After careful consideration, Pan decided to fulfil his curiosity and purchase the stone. He handed over 5,000 yuan and proceeded to load the stone onto his wagon.

:

A figure was lurking through the shadows, swiftly approaching Pan Yunduan as he secured his new purchase. The figure knew exactly how to close in on the target. It was not a someone, but rather a *something*. Something priceless. Or so his client claims. Word had spread like wildfire through the city that there was a special stone, out of this world, washed up on the coast. His client was doing everything to claim it as his.

Ducking under constructions for the wall that surrounded the city, the figure moved as if he was one with the shadows. Twisting and twirling, seamlessly he blended into the city, but at the same time hiding in unknown corners, slipping his way through crowds. He inched his way closer and closer to the rock meticulously. Soon, he saw his chance when Pan turned away for a split second. A silhouette loomed over the prize, all in one quick motion it snatched the stone, slipping away with ease, snaking back through the crowds. As he was leaving, he counted. One. Two. Three.

“WHERE IS IT?”

Games of the Empire

Sha Tin College, Chu, Charlotte – 11

I set out through the hole in the wall and into the woods with my bow, arrows and snares. I was back at my usual hunting grounds and began to lay out my snares, before I returned through the hole and back home.

My name is Holly Leaf and I live with my sister Briar and our mother (our father died in a hunting accident), residing in Town Si. My father was not only my mentor in life but also hunting, it's our only best option for food and money.

The Empire was oblivious when it came to the sneaky passages in and out of the walls. It's actually illegal to hunt and whoever disobeys gets tortured but the worst thing that happens to everyone is the survival games. The survival games is exactly what it sounds like, to fight for survival. You only get a month to survive in the games or you'll be trapped forever, there can be many winners in the games, usually there's one winner each year and they're family will be rewarded a large sum of money.

Later that afternoon, I suddenly remembered; today is Ming day when the Empire's men (the Imperials) raffles for who is to participate in the survival games against their will, that goes for all the towns within the Empire's walls. There are ten towns in total; Yi, Ar, San, Si, Wu, Liu, Tsi, Ba, Jio and Shir. Our town is closest to the border also known as the wall.

My mother led us out the door towards the town centre and proceeded to sign in.

"How old?"

"Sixteen." I replied.

"And the little one?"

"Twelve." Mother replied.

The man checked a number list and wrote down our names, it was mandatory for eleven to twenty year olds to enroll in the games. The older you are the higher the chance of being chosen, the papers were lowered into a cage and spun as the crowd waited silently, anxiety filled the air. Soon, an Imperial entered the stage and dipping his hand into the cage, he grabbed a name "Holly Leaf," he announced. "NO!" I heard Briar's horrified scream as I looked back to see my mother grasping tightly onto Briar's arm, dragging her away from my sight.

The Empire's imperials took me aboard a train that transported us to the game's starting point. The train soon came to a stop some hours later when two Imperials dragged me out and took me to a group of other children, which I assumed were the other unfortunate chosen ones. We were instructed to introduce ourselves; a boy with blue eyes spoke "My name is Hawk." Then another boy spoke "I'm Lion." Then some girls " Dove."

"Maple ."

“My name is Ivy.”

“I’m Fern.”

“I’m Feather.” Then the rest “My name is Fox.”

“My name is Jay.” Then everyone waited for me to speak. “Holly.” I grumbled.

The next morning, four imperials barged in, blindfolding me and dragged me somewhere out in the middle of the forest, assuming it’s where I’ll be fighting for my life. I was dumped on the floor, the grass felt damp. Taking off my blindfold I saw stretches of vast tall trees towering over me. Weirdly, it gave me a familiar welcoming atmosphere, then it came to me. It’s my hunting forest.

Tagging me like a dog, they injected me with a small microchip on my arm, then they walked away and disappeared through the foliage. Suddenly there were piercing screams of pain and fear. I turned around horrified to find a grizzly in front of me, I ran as the bear scampered after me, I reached the tree where I had kept my bow and arrows yesterday. As the bear drew closer, I sent my arrow soaring towards its eye. The arrow struck the creature’s left eye and it roared in pain, fleeing away into the forest. I sighed in relief and began to scavenge for yesterday’s catch. I soon found my snares and prey; two rabbits and a squirrel. I proceeded to set up my camp under a tree and cook the snared rabbit over a warm fire. Exhaustion soon took over me and I drifted off to a deep sleep next to the comforting flames.

The morning birdsong awoke me, as I wondered where I was ... the games. Instantly, it struck me; How would mother and Briar feed themselves without me to hunt for them? I setup my snares, took my bow and arrows, then set off to find prey. I saw a pigeon resting on a tree and as I prepared my arrow, I heard a crunch of a twig as if a foot crushed it. Alerted, I turned around readying my arrow; it was Feather, another player in the games.

“What are you doing here?” I snapped.

“I’m sorry!” Feather responded, alarmed. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“You’re not going to know where everyone else is if you trample around like that.” I replied. Feather’s frightened blue eyes began to water and soon tears streamed down her face, “I’m really sorry, I just miss my family and my brother Storm.” She looked straight into my green eyes, I looked away from her gaze for I too started to get teary. “Allies?” She asked.

“Yes.” I replied.

I resumed my hunt whilst Feather collected various herbs and set up camp. We continued to assist each other until five days later. When I was out hunting, when suddenly there was a horrifying shriek behind me. I recognised Snow’s scream. I sprinted towards the noise, to find a large pack of wolves viciously snapping at her and seven other players; Maple, Fern, Ivy, Dove, Jay, Fox and Lion. Instantly, I started firing at the wolves and soon they redirected towards me, I scrambled up the nearest tree and continued to shoot from there. I sent a stream of arrows flying towards the wolves until the largest wolf leaped up at me, scratching my leg. Yelling in pain, I stabbed an arrow deep into the wolf’s throat. Its body became limp and I dropped it before it dragged me down too. The remaining wolves began to howl and fled as I continued my counter attack. I fumbled back down the tree and retrieved my arrows before sprinting to Feather’s side. Her body laid lifeless on the damp bloodsoaked grass along with the surviving players; Dove, Jay, Lion and Fern. “She saved us, but we couldn’t save her, there were too many.” Lion growled quietly, his amber eyes burning in anger. “And Maple abandoned us, we should join forces, Holly.”

“Very well,” I agreed reluctantly.

That night we buried the fallen players under a large oak beneath a clear night sky of stars, the milky way. “Why do people call it the milky way?” I asked, speaking aloud.

“Don’t know.” Jay answered.

“It looks more like a silver pelt of a cat.” I replied.

“Silverpelt sounds like a cool name.” Dove commented.

“It looks really peaceful up there compared to down here.” Fern said, “ Hopefully Snow and the others walk among the stars now, safe and sound.”

The next morning, our group went off at once, hunting and searching for the finishing point. There were only six of us remaining in the forest and still two weeks left to survive. As we patrolled, we suddenly came to a broad deep river. In the river a floating body drifted towards us. It was Hawk. “Looks like there’s only six now,” Lion said quietly and we carried on. We went on walking through the trees silently, drowning in the memories of our fallen friends.

Suddenly, a huge hawk came swooping down from the sky towards us, gathering our weapons, we were prepared to fight it. Unexpectedly, more animals appeared; a fox, and a owl, weirdly they didn’t seem hostile. Then they spoke, “We will not harm you. We are the fallen; Hawk, Fox and Feather. We have descended from the stars to help you.”

“We know where the finishing point is,” the Owl, Feather encouraged, “Follow us.”

We arrived at a large, magnificent banyan tree, “Climb the tree,” Hawk instructed, “There’s a gong at the top, ring it and you will be free from the forest.” With that they faded, “Farewell,” they’re voices echoed. I climbed up the banyan and rang the gong. Minutes later, troops of imperials appeared and escorted us back to the game’s original starting area.

We said our goodbyes to each other as we boarded our separate trains to the various towns. That night, I recalled the games and the time I’ve spent with my allies, no one knows what’s happened to Maple, we only know she’s a goner. Looking up to the starry night sky and I saw five stars shining exceptionally bright in sky, the fallen have returned to the stars and will continue to look down on us forever, watching us until we join them in Silverpelt.

The Attack on the Old City of Shanghai

Sha Tin College, Follick, Ryan – 13

1 937, Deep in the middle of Shanghai there was a special place, the old city. It was no ordinary city, it was used for the government's secret meetings as well as heavily guarded by reinforced walls. The only way to enter the old city was by the eight doors surrounding it. It was once a peaceful sanctuary until one day the invaders came. They slowly inched their way into conquering Shanghai, everyone tried to enter the old city as it was most protected and secure area. However, slowly the old city was overflowed with people, and they had no choice but to seal the city gates.

The head of defense and leader of the army for the Old City of Shanghai was Commander Sheng and his best General, Hong. Their duty was to keep the city and its citizens safe. Sheng had his best elite fighters by each door and in watchtowers. Sheng also had someone else he cared about more than anything else in the world, his son Chin who was soon to be seventeen. Chin was a strong fighter, training religiously everyday. His dream was to follow the steps of his father; a commander leading an army. He usually resides at the temple training his combat skills and sword fighting. Located in the middle of the city, the temple was where generals and commanders met for discussions.

Near the temple were houses, farms and livestock to keep the city sustained to survive another ten more years. The city did it's trading using mines; miners would dig out iron and gold to trade with the other areas of China. Unfortunately, that was no longer an option since the entire Shanghai was flooded with invading soldiers.

After the city started to adapt to it's overwhelming population, they found that the invaders had slowly relocated to the outskirts of the old city, the outer areas of Shanghai were torn down and transformed into farms, all made to provide food for the invaders. Medical centers were also built for their benefit. One of the watchman's on the towers came to report to Sheng. Instantly, Sheng knew the invaders were planning an attack and if the city wasn't prepared to repel the attack it will cripple to the ground. Immediately, he set up his men and army.

Whenever there were gunshots, someone in a watchtower was killed. The shots became more frequent, killing every visible figure in the towers. Sheng knew it was the beginning. He ordered his men into a defensive formation, also sending his generals in with Hong by his side. Hong being one of the main generals was next to be in command if anything ever happened to Sheng. Few moments after the shooting seemingly subsided they heard a loud "BOOM". One of the gates flew right off. It was the invaders, they battled through the soldiers guarding the gate and charged, streaming into the city. The rest of Sheng's army charged into battle desperately fending off the invaders. All of a sudden another door was blasted down, the invaders flooded the vicinity forcing the city soldiers to surrender.

Except for a few survivors, Sheng's son, Chin managed to hide from the invaders. They didn't notice him when they left the city, everyone cleared out except for Chin.. He knew the city depended on him, he had to save his city and the villagers. Around one week later Chin gathered all the materials he required, as well as weapons left behind after the attack. The invaders didn't begin construction yet, the city was still a blank slate, but they'll be back soon enough.

Chin prepared himself mentally and physically, advancing towards the outskirts of the city. Searching for any signs of the invader's return or any surviving villagers. In the distance he saw a man on the road. He ran towards him, it was Hong. Chin hopefully asked "Is there anyone else?". Hong weakly pointed towards the end of the gravel road to a small building. He wrapped a piece of cloth around Hong's injured arm. He was weak, struggling to move.

When Chin finally made it to the building he heard chains and screams for help pleading for mercy, he knew he was at the right place. He peaked through one of the windows and saw his father in the center of the building along with soldiers, and many others villagers chained up to the walls. Chin waited until dusk for the soldiers to leave, around midnight all the soldiers had left the building to go to their military bunkers to rest. Chin knew now was his chance. He sneaked into the building and whispered into his father's ear "Dad,". Sheng woke up and saw Chin he replied "How did you get out?".

"Talk later, we need to save everyone else!". He helped his Dad out of the chains, the other old city soldiers as well as the villagers. Once everyone was freed they attempted to flee the building. One of the guards came back from his break,

catching the attempted rescue in action. "Lead everyone to the forest, quick!" ordered by Sheng. Chin nodded and lead everyone out while Sheng and a small group of soldiers ran the opposite way. Chin and the remaining survivors manage to escape via the sewers, safely finding their new haven in the forests.

The guards and invaders were set on following Sheng and his men, Chin knew Sheng would be in dire need of his help, but the best thing he could do was plan an attack to save Shanghai. The next morning, the invaders scattered far and wide scouting for Chin and the villagers. On the other hand, Sheng and the rest were forced into slavery, working in farms and other manual labour. Chin gathered his men, "Wait for the invaders to leave their bunkers, upon their return we'll attack when they least expect it". Everyone complied in agreement, it was the make or break for winning back Shanghai.

The next morning everyone got up early in the morning, they knew the invaders were already gone to war leaving their bunkers empty and vulnerable. All villagers were equipped with a weapon in hand, hiding near the tents and bunkers where the invaders will soon return from a massive win or lose. Later around the afternoon, Chin spotted one of the invaders back from the war, he gave the signal to the others to be prepared to attack. Most of the invaders returned were injured, right when one of the first was about to enter his tent, Chin and the villages striked, attacking the weak and wounded. They were out numbering the invaders, they struggled to defend against Chin's surprise attack. Reluctantly, suffer the lose of chin and the villagers chases down the rest of the invaders taking them back from Shanghai and onto their boats, where they were originally from.

Once all the invading soldiers were back on their boats returning to their home country. Chin knew it had finally come to a victorious ending. They returned back to the old city destroying tents and rebuilding it back to its former glory. Chin told all the rest of the villagers to free everyone who is held in the buildings. With that being said he immediately rushed to the closest building. There was his father lying on the floor, badly beaten. Chin rushed to him, his faint pulse was still there. Sheng looked up and told Chin one more thing "You`re the new commander, protect Shanghai for me". Chin was in shock but he nodded with tears in his eyes, replying "Yes, thank you Father". Right as Chin replied his father's pulse faded.

Chin returned back to the city immediately with the news. That night they had a late feast to celebrate the victorious reclamation of the old city and to send off their fallen great commander, Sheng.

After months of rebuilding the old city of Shanghai it was finally finished. The whole city was remade, once again at peace, but the battle of the Old city of Shanghai will forever remain as a part of its legacy.

I Tread Carefully...

Sha Tin College, Kwok, Hayley – 11

I tread carefully on the creaking wooden bridge, merely suspended over the fast-flowing stream. In front of me stood a large, grand palace. I walked towards it, quickly glancing up at it. It was grand and beautifully decorated.

Knock-knock-KNOCK. I knocked on the door.

"Hello?" I called inside. My voice echoed around the walls, making my voice sound far away. Without warning, a man walked into the room. "Ni Hao," the man said. He was tall and thin, and with him was a short boy about the age of 14. He briefly nodded towards me.

"What are you here for?" the tall man said.

"I am here to speak to Zhang Wei, the emperor," I replied.

"What is it you want to talk with the Huangdi?", he asked me.

"I was going to discuss with him the building allotment of a new pagoda that is supposed to be overlooking the Huangpu river," I replied.

"Sorry, but Huangdi is out having lunch," the tall man named Li told me.

Just when I needed to talk to him about the proposal of building a beautiful pagoda overlooking the Huangpu River. I was about to sigh when Li spoke again.

"You can come back later if you like. I will try to contact the Huangdi now."

He looks at Yuan meaningfully, who whipped out a little walkie-talkie. He pressed some different buttons. "I sent the message to Huangdi and asked him to reply quickly because the client is here," he told Li.

Li turned to me. "Would you like to stay here and wait or come back later?", he asked me

"I'll stay, then," I told him. He nodded his head towards the open double doors. The hallways were exquisitely decorated with embossed mini Buddhas and temples made of jade. Talk about a royal palace!

A few minutes later, there came a loud knock on the door of the room we were in. The door promptly opened and a tall man, embellished in all sorts of finery, came striding in grandly.

"Why are you looking for me?", he asked Li. He merely glanced at me. "What is that person doing here?", he demanded.

"She is the designer of the proposed temple to be facing the Huangpu river," Li replied. The Emperor frowned.

"Come with me," the Emperor said.

I followed him into a large, elaborately decorated room with a long table. He took out a thick stack of papers and laid them out on the table. He waved a hand in front of the seats lined up neatly next to the table, indicating me to have a seat. I sat in one of the snowy—white, modern wheely chairs. The Huangdi then proceeded to sort out the papers he had laid out. Then, he sat down in the tall, black chair at the head of the table.

“Hao”, he said. “Just now I was trying to sort out these design elements of the temple. It is almost impossible to build it overlooking the Huangpu river. The area you wish to build it in contains a large piece of grassland. We need to keep this for fresh air around the river,” he told me swiftly with fluent Chinese. A man standing beside the Huangdi rapidly translated his words into English for me. As the translator, who later told me he was called Wang Wei, finished the last of his remarks, I was lost for words.

“Surely you could build it... somewhere?”, My voice trailed off as I began to think. Wang Wei quickly translated my comment into Chinese, and the Huangdi looked doubtful.

“Let me think about this,” the Emperor said. “Follow me,” he commanded. The translator and I accompanied him outside. The Emperor stopped in front of a shop. Architectural Delights, the shop plate read. Just like magic, Li and Yuan appeared behind us. “Architectural Delights,” Yuan read. “Why are you here?”, he asked. The Huangdi’s voice boomed loudly above my head. “We are trying to find some ideas. Any problem, Yuan?”, the Emperor asked coolly.

“Er, no, not at all, Huangdi,” stammered Yuan.

We proceeded into the shop. It was empty except for a few lone designers and architects. The woman at the desk looked up when she heard us come in. “Ah, Huangdi, you come at the right time! Are you looking for more ideas of the pagoda? I just invited Mr Wang Lin, he is THE architect and engineer of the year! Also, Mr Lin Ye is a wondrous designer!” The Huangdi was looking around the shop, at the mini prototypes sculpted out of clay. He had a velvet notebook with him and used a beautiful fountain pen to take some notes. “Ah, Huangdi, I recommend this pagoda! Mr Lin Ye designed this!” She describes vividly. “You can ask Mr Wang Lin to construct it!”

“Hao. Let’s do this one,” the Emperor nodded, taking some notes.

The model was beautiful, and it had traditional patterns done across the exterior. Huangdi looked around the prototype, feeling the embossed areas with his fingers. “Wang Lin!” he commanded. “Help me build this one, okay? I want it overlooking the Huangpu river, it has to be top condition and it must have a very traditional interior. I also want firecrackers all year long and embossed dragons in the doorways for good luck. There has got to be two dragon statues standing in front of the pagoda,” The demands flew out of his mouth like water.

“Yes, sir,” Wang Lin replied. He quickly took out a sketchpad, his pencil lightly moving across the paper. He wrote the dimensions on the sides of the pagoda.

A few days later, the pagoda was being built in the empty space next to the Huangpu. Cement and rock flew everywhere, but in two months the pagoda’s structure was finished. Now the exterior was being covered in cement, and the embossed bits were being sculpted. After a week, the cement had dried and the Emperor had invited some of the country’s top artists, including Zhang Zheyuan and Qi Yuan, to paint the outside of the pagoda. In the end, the finished pagoda was a vibrant candy red. There were bright canary yellow dragons embossed on the sides, and the trim was done in shamrock green. There were two gold dragon statues embellishing the entrance. Firecrackers hung above the door.

Wang Lin, Lin Ye, Li, Yuan and I were invited to the opening ceremony. Along with the Huangdi, of course. There was a rosy— red satin ribbon to cut. I was given a pair of scissors and on the count of three, I snipped away at the ribbon. The Jade Pagoda was open. I was the first to go in the new building, admiring all the embossed items and woodwork. There was an extravagant foyer, complete with chandelier, fountain and miniature potted plants. It was a work of art!

I went into the lounge. It took up half of the first floor. It had floor—to—ceiling windows, showing the view of the Huangpu, and large, plump sofas. A large 60—inch television was on the wall, showing the CCTV China News. There was a tea table, complete with teapot and teacups. There was another table filled with traditional Chinese snacks like fortune cookies; steamed rice rolls and various buns including custard buns, sesame buns, steamed buns with Yuzu jam and red bean paste buns. The spread looked delicious!

I moved on to the museum area of the pagoda. Inside, cabinets and cases showed off replicas of some of the finest jades and minerals in China. There was an exhibit about chops made of stone and wood. It was beautiful. “We have this plaque over here — in memory of you and your idea to build this pagoda,” the Huangdi pointed to the stone carving complete with my name and the date the Jade Pagoda was opened. I smiled. “Xie Xie,” I said in my vague Chinese.

Turns out I went to the Emperor’s Palace for a good thing after all!

Secret of the Shanghai Wall

Sha Tin College, Lai, Rachel – 13

I was born into a small city cut away from the outside world, my city was big but you can only ever get so far, eventually to be stopped by a towering thirty three feet brick wall. I lived with Mother, she would tell me to never venture beyond the wall, never peak at the outside world, never touch the wall for there are unknown dangers lurking in every corner.

As a ten year old, I obeyed. However, I was curious, I dream of leaving this confining city, and I did. Unfortunately, I was unaware of the life-changing mistake I had made.

The older I got the more I was consumed by my curiosity, until finally I couldn't resist the urge to ask Mother. She was sitting in the kitchen, I tapped her on the shoulder, she jerked her face at me, "Yes?" she asked. "Mother, what is it about this wall, why is it so..." but she didn't let me finish "Why are you asking about the wall?" She screamed, slamming her hands on the wooden table, causing it to tremble. I flinched in response, Mother continued to shriek at me, speechless I stood there, not knowing what to do. Eventually, she stopped, her chest heaving from all the words she had screamed.

I slumped onto my bed, sinking my head into the pillow and bawled like a baby. Out of nowhere, there was a knock on the door that made me jump, the door slowly creaked open, it was Mother. "Ming, I'm sorry, but I cannot let you leave the walls, they are here to keep us safe." she explained. She let out a deep distressed sigh "I should have told you this years ago, but your father did not leave for a job, he was kidnapped, I saw the pirates drag him away, this all happened because he ventured beyond the wall" Mother stuttered. I opened my mouth to protest but she cut me off "I am only trying to keep you safe, you just need to understand." and with that she stood up and walked out the door.

Trying to process everything Mother told me kept up all night. The lie my Mother had confessed to was too big for me to ignore; I didn't know how to react, but the one thing I knew for certain was tomorrow morning I am going to that wall.

The following day, I did exactly what I wanted to do from the very beginning, I leaped out of bed, got ready and was out the door in seconds, making sure I don't bump into Mother. I may have been to this location multiple times before but I have never came in contact with the wall simply because I was told not to. I raised my hand, without hesitation I touched the coarse brick surface. I couldn't help but let out a massive grin of satisfaction. Mother was wrong, it was a harmless wall. Just as I was about to get up and leave, something caught my eye, abruptly I turned around and saw a gaping hole just at the bottom of the wall. Intrigued, I inched towards it bending down, it was surprisingly big. If it was any bigger I may just be able to squeeze through. Then, I spotted a shovel.

I tumbled out dusting myself off, and looked up. I gasped in awe, the breathtaking view left me speechless. Staggering alongside the endless rows of buildings, my gaze fixated on my surroundings. Out of nowhere, I hit something hard and tripped to the ground with a thud. I looked up and realised I had bumped into a man. His complexion was pale with jet black eyes, his hair slicked back, beard messy and ungroomed. Behind him, five identical looking men loomed over me with intimidation. In an instant, I felt the urge to flee, but I couldn't help but notice how similar I looked to him. He smiled, oddly sending shivers down my spine. Nevertheless, I smiled back. "Why the long face little boy? My name is Captain Lin, but you can call me Lin." He paused for a second, frustrated with my silence he said "Well how rude, what is your name?"

“Ming” I muttered. Lin’s eyes seemed to slightly widen as soon as he heard my name. As I stared at him in confusion, he abruptly glanced away, but turned back to me, narrowing his eyes. “Ming, what brings you here?” he questioned. “I wanted to explore.” I answered. This sparked Lin’s curiosity, “Explore, well I take that you’ve been to many places.” Lin smirked. “No this is the first time I have ever left the wall...” my voice trailed off, realising I had given something away. Lin’s eyes widened, “Ming, tell me about this *wall*!”

“Actually, I must go.” Before I could turn around, Lin grabbed my arm and forcefully tugged me closer until I could feel his breathe on my face, I froze in fear. “I don’t mean to scare you, but you do want to venture in the outside world, am I right?”

“Yes” I squeaked.

“Yes, of course you do. I can show you great wonders, travel with me and my friends,” he spoke in a convincing voice, pointing to the intimidating group of men behind him. “You can have the experience of a lifetime, with no one to rip it away from you.” as he finished, Lin loosened his grip on my arm and looked at me with his piercing gaze. I stared at Lin with wonder in my eyes. “What do I have to do?” I said determined. “Prove yourself worthy of joining us, by doing one simple thing.” answered Lin.

“Which is?”

“Show us how you left this wall that you speak of, only a genius could figure it out.”

Flattered by Lin’s compliment, I hurried back to the wall, beckoning Lin to follow.

Once we had reached the opening of the wall, Lin shoved me aside and stuck his head through the gap. “Thank you Ming, you have proven yourself worthy, but you will have to wait here, I have business to settle in these walls.” In an instant, his friend was at my side, pinning me down. “Hey! What are you doing?!” Alarmed, I tried to wriggle out of his grasp but my attempts were futile. I watched helplessly as Lin and the rest of his group crawled through the gap and disappear into the wall.

It had been a few minutes since Lin left, his friend still kept a tight grasp on me causing my shoulders to ache. I glanced around, spotting a rock, jagged and pointed, about as far as arm’s reach. I mustered all my energy and pushed the guard, escaping his grip. I dived for the rock, and instantly pointed the sharp end at the man. As soon as he stood up I slashed the rock across his head. He fell into an unconscious heap. Stepping over his body, I crawled through the hole, back into my city.

I raced in to find the state of chaos in my city. All this time Lin has been gone, he was wrecking havoc in my home! People were fleeing from their burning houses. I stopped in my tracks as I witnessed Lin pull a dagger from my Mother’s body, heart lurching as I watched blood gush from the wound. I rushed up to him, “What have you done?!” my gaze flitted over the bodies around me, all drenched in blood. “I killed her.” he replied briskly. “why!?” I wailed. Lin’s eyes flashed with evil. “Because I hated you and your mother.” I stiffened with shock. But Lin pressed on, “When I lived with the both of you, I was miserable. But I was weak and decided to fake a kidnap, making sure your mother witnesses every part of it.” My mind whirled as I began to put the pieces together.

“You’re my father...”

My body was numb with shock, barely holding my weight. I staggered towards Mother and knelt down to hold her in my arms, her body still warm. Tears streamed down my face uncontrollably. I became blind with rage. I picked up the dagger

lying beside me and lunged at Lin, ready to plunge it deep into his beating heart. Despite my tiny size, the force sent Lin barrelling across the floor. Adrenaline fuelling my body, I tackled Lin to the ground ready for the final blow. Lin fought back, shoving me off his body, snatching the dagger out of my hand, and with a sneer, Lin penetrated the dagger deep into my abdomen, my eyes widened with shock as I screamed in agony. With my last dying breath, I mustered every last ounce of energy to crawl over to Mother whose body laid lifelessly cold on the hard floor. I gently lowered my head on her corpse, eyes slowly fluttered shut as my body went still.

Voyage

Sha Tin College, Madhu, Harsha – 11

Shanghai, 1946. Qing Dynasty.

One should think that I was very lucky, being placed in the imperial palace. But did they truly understand everything? I doubt it. For I am here merely because of my one extraordinary talent which still perplexes the most knowledgeable of them all, here in Shanghai.

Some say I am cursed, some appreciate it and say I am gifted. But does it truly matter how I got it? At the end of the day, all that counts is that Emperor Qing approved. Yes, that's right. Emperor Qing approved my talent to see into the future.

I can see into the future. But that does not mean that I can go around, showing what people's future beholds them; whether they will be rich. For even I have tried for months— years even, to make sense of my gift.

At first I could tell what would happen the next day. I could tell whether it was going to rain, shine or snow. All the villagers accepted it with joy and I soon became the most favorable one. But months later, I could see in the future for a span of a week at a time. At this moment, some got scared. You see, a simple weather girl was fine, but this? This was way too precise and at times, even frightening.

When I was younger I yearned for knowledge. I think I still do now. But, do I really want to find out that the very next day, something horrifying is going to happen? And who could I tell this to? Anyone would think I was lying. So I bottled it up inside.

The villagers feared me. Sometimes I scared myself. How would you feel like if you knew that something terrible was going to happen, yet could do nothing about it? When I looked into the mirror, I only saw a heartless monster. No more encouraging words from my parents could help me anymore.

So one day, I woke up earlier than everyone else. When they arose, I would be gone forever from their lives.

Shanghai, 1928.

I have no idea where I am, or how long it has been since I have left. I have been travelling across the whole of China to find a place where people would accept me for who I am, including my ability to tell the future. I think if I was feeling more positive I would have congratulated myself for the wondrous feat I have accomplished. Instead, I continue my schedule as if it was any other day.

Should I continue travelling? At least then I could talk to someone. I had grown tired of silence. I start preparing for leaving by packing up what little possessions I have taken from the village. A comb, which I had neglected and somehow just became a souvenir of my childhood. A bunch of arrows which my father had taught me to make if somehow we were forced to leave, which was likely considering the circumstances we were in before I had gone.

I collected some water from the stream and started my never-ending voyage once again.

After an hour or so later, I managed to get out of the woods, and I was greeted by a large plain. I walked and started to make my way. About seventy *li* later I finally reached a small town with people. I let out an exasperated sigh and checked my pouch. I still had lots of money, as I had been living alone for quite a while now.

I went to the local market and bought some fruit to last me for a while. I did not want to spend my money too much now, as I needed to get a job before I could spend all of it. It's quite hard to get one, since I am a girl and girls are not meant to have jobs.

I was very preoccupied in trying to find a job when I reached a meal store. I went inside, and inquired if they needed someone to work for them. The person I met was called Jin, and she was very kind. She allowed me to work there and she also gave me a place to stay until I found somewhere else.

I worked hard for the next few months and things started to look positive. Jin and I became good friends over time as well. One day, I told her about where I came from and my voyage. I also told her about my powers. I trusted her. Her reaction was better than I expected. She told me that I was a very lucky person.

Shanghai, 1930.

After wondering a couple of *bu* later, I found this village which made me slightly nostalgic since it was similar to where my parents lived. I had not given them much thought, and wondered now if they still lived there. Where they ever worried about me? The answer to these questions I could never find out, so there was no use pondering over them.

All the villagers here accepted me for who I am, even though I could see the future. Even when I brought misfortune to them by accident.

I woke up one day, and started my way to a local store where I found a place to work. I greeted everyone inside and started working.

Just a while after I had come, some imperial guards asked for me. When I told them that it was me, they brought me to the Imperial palace. I wondered what I had to do with anything that was going on, until the Emperor made everything clear.

“Do you possess any unnatural talent?” He had asked. The guards made it direct that I could not lie to the Emperor, otherwise I would face certain consequences. As if I did not know myself.

“Yes, Emperor Qing. I can foresee the future.” At this a few guards were obviously outraged. They thought I was lying to the Emperor even after their warning. Luckily for me, Emperor Qing was patient.

“Well, then. You will not have any problem proving yourself. Tell me what will happen tomorrow. I will make someone write down what you say.”

I closed my eyes and tried to see what would happen tomorrow. “Someone who you trust in is going to steal a precious gem in your palace. You have to assign most of your guards to your jewelry area, if you do not want it to be stolen.”

The Emperor was intrigued for the following day to come. When the next day arrived, all that I had said rose to life. The shocked expression on all the witnesses' faces were something you could not see every day. I felt satisfied that they did not believe me before, in a way.

“You may most certainly not leave this palace.” The Emperor had said when I requested to leave. Instead, he told me that I had to stay and tell him the exact days when all the misfortune will strike, or when attackers will try to start war with us. “You, of course, may leave after you have told us everything.”

“I am afraid that I cannot tell the future that far, I can only tell the future for a span of a week.” I had sheepishly said, somehow thinking it was my fault.

“Very well, then. You shall stay in the palace for the rest of your life, and warning us of any war or misfortune to arrive soon.

I couldn't help but wonder how they came to know about my powers. Then it all clicked. Jin! The betrayal stung. How could they have found out, when I had not told anyone of my powers except for Jin, and the villagers? The village I had been staying in was very far from any contact to here, so I did not doubt them. It had to be her.

Tears rolled off my cheeks as I sat on a bed which I could now call mine. But, now, there was nothing I could do about it. I surrendered to my fate, and promised myself to at least do a good job saving our country.

Shanghai, 1937.

I woke up from a horrible nightmare which I was too afraid to call a vision. I willed myself to think it wasn't true. All that blood, all that fighting, I told myself to stay calm. What should I do? I pulled myself back together, and immediately ran to the Emperor's court.

"The Sino-Japanese have arrived." I said gravely.

The Tale of Two Gangs

Sha Tin College, Watt, Georgiana – 11

Jian knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” A voice said.

“It’s your cousin from Beijing.” Jian replied.

“Enter, friend.”

The door opened and inside was Xiong and Zhu, playing a game of Mahjong. “You want to join?” Zhu asked, gesturing to the game.

“No thanks, I have to go back to work in an hour.” Jian stated “And I really want to go back to the police station alive.”

Xiong laughed, “Ah, don’t worry friend. Now let’s talk business.”

“Oh no, it’s bad news, isn’t it?”

“Well, it’s actually good news. You know that person we incriminated for that traitor?”

“Yes?”

“That person is in prison for life! Our plan worked!”

“Yes! That traitor is dead and our number 2 enemy is gone!”

“But, there is still the No. 1 enemy.”

“No!”

“No, knucklehead! You have to kill him too! That’s the bad news!”

“Yes, your right general.”

“What did you say?”

“I mean, um, you’re right, friend!”

Zhu was shaking his head behind Xiong’s shoulder, with a very disappointed look in his face.

“Anyways, I should be off.” Jian concluded.

“All right, but watch your back, friend.”

“Before I go, Zhu, What’s the date?”

“November 22nd, 1935.”

“Thanks, Bye!”

As Jian was cycling to the police station, he passed the other gang’s hideout. “No food from theirs. I don’t want to be eating an old friend of ours.” He muttered under his breath. Finally, he reached the police station, out of breath. “Phew! I think they should make the stall closer to the station, rather than the enemy. Well then, more exercise it is!” Jian was sweating by the time he reached the 3rd floor, panting on the 4th, and he thought “Ai Yah, I’m never going to reach the department!” 20 minutes later a wet, exhausted and crawling Jian arrived at the 10th floor. “Ahh! I still have to go to my office! I’d rather...” Then he realised he was in his office area. “Whoops, that was a close one.” and then he walked into his rather expensive office.

Jian sat down on the sofa by the window and relaxed for a while. He was the head of this police station anyways. An hour later, a new recruit, called Yin, came in and sat in front of Jian’s deluxe, bamboo desk.

“Uhh, Sir? I—I need to t—talk to you a—about s—something.” Yin stuttered

“Officer, spit it out!” Jian ordered

“Umm, t—the water tank is out of w—water, s—so the others are a—asking you f—for r—r—replacements.” Yin nervously asked

“THERE ARE SOME BEHIND THE TANK! Ai! Does anyone have eyeballs in this dump?” Jian shouted, blasting the eardrum of everyone in the department.

“Ohh—Kayy, umm, I’ll l—leave t—then.” Yin whimpered, about to cry from nervousness. Then he walked out the door shaking. A deathly silence followed, there wasn’t a single sound, other than Yin’s loud wailing.

“YIN! COULD YOU GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER, LIKE A MAN, AND STOP WAILING?” Jian screamed, making Yin wail louder. “Nobody in this stupid department will ever do as I command! Does it take 20 geniuses to guess what I want? All I want is common sense and perfection.” Jian shook his head for a while.

“Sir, maybe you are being a bit rough on your employees.” Ren, Jian’s Secretary, advised him, “Try being a tiny bit more sympathetic.”

“SYMPATHETIC? If I be sympathetic, it means I’m pathetic like you lot! And I’m NOT pathetic, so no.”

“But at least try.”

“No, or else you are...”

“Don’t fire me for doing the right thing.”

“But *I* am doing the right thing, and that is firing you! Ren, you are fired.”

Ren ran outside of Jian’s office crying and screaming, from being fired from her most favorite jobs she’s ever had. “How dare he? HOW DARE HE? He is not going to be organized and I still can’t get those documents with my name on it.” Ren’s voice suddenly went evil-sounding, with an evil grin to go with it. “Just like they incriminated Zhang, I’ll incriminate him.”

“Ah, It’s been a long day. I don’t want to go to...” Jian was cut-off by the telephone ringing. “Yes, Hello?”

“Revenge.”

“Who is this?”

“REVENGE!”

Jian hung up. “It will be those stupid kids on one of the public telephones saying who-knows-what. Finally! Seven o’clock. I’ll telephone the gang and tell them I’ll be an hour.”

Meanwhile, in the enemy gang’s HQ. “HE WHAT? He fired you, even though you did shout at him, well, you kind of deserved to be shouted back at, but still? Ai Yah, he actually has a brain? No wonder he’s our enemy.” Yah screamed while filing away her all-ready smooth, short nails.

“Yes, it happened. And we are going to get him. Let’s get to business. How are we going to kill him?” Ren said, still with an evil grin plastered on her face like cement.

“We could shoot him, or shoot his gang leader. Or you could confess and then shoot the gang leader, or poison him.” Yah said, reaching for the cabinet with the ammunition, still filing her nails.

“That’s genius, Yah! The last one! I think I know where his HQ is. It’s ten minutes away on bike.” Ren stated with the evil grin, “Tonight, midnight, I confess and shoot the leader.”

“Midnight? Ai Yah! So late, why not now?”

“Yah! you are so anti-climatic! You just ruined the atmosphere I just created! No wonder your parents called you “Yah”, you say Ai Yah all the time! But you are kind of right, he would be there now anyways.”

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Good job. I heard you fired a person today!” Xiong praised, with Jian smiling so much that his cheeks hurt.

“Thanks, but I need to talk to you about...”

BOOM!

“Why do I always get cut-off!”

The door was kicked down by Yah and Ren, holding guns in their hands. “Get the guns, Zhu!” Xiong shouted, and Zhu whizzed up the stairs and down again with three newly-bought guns.

“Jian, I used to just hate you, now I have a burning hatred in my soul wanting to kill you.” Ren said in a very sinister way.

“Well, if it is about being fired, you were back-chatting me, and nobody should be doing that in a workplace” Jian shouted back

“But...” Ren picked up her gun, pulled the trigger and shot all three of them , “Unlucky for you, unlucky for him and unlucky for your friend.” And Yah and Ren strutted out of the stall. In that time, the police had heard the gunshots, and surrounded the market stall.

“This is the police, put the gun down, or we use force!” The sieren called.

“NO! Never!” Ren shouted, and started shooting the police officers. Yin was in their patrol, and he nervously picked up his gun and shot Ren, then Yah. Their dead bodies fell to the ground with blood going everywhere. So, after that incident, Yin was promoted to the top rank. He made that day, November 22nd, World Gang Day, in memory of Jian, Ren, Yah, Xiong and Zhu. He also paid for their graves to be put where the market stall was, as the stall was demolished for being too old. When you are in the old market of Shanghai, and see a grave, make sure that you pay respect to them, specifically on November 22nd.

My Guardian Dragon

Sha Tin College, Wong, Charmaine – 13

Upon arriving at his destination, Jianyu spotted an old cottage sitting by itself in the corner. Jianyu trotted to the front door. “Excuse me?” He heard quick, heavy footsteps approaching the door. An old woman appeared. “I’m Rebeka, hello Jianyu,” she smiled. “How do you know my name?” Jianyu asked cautiously. Rebeka did not answer, she walked over the table and motioned for Jianyu to sit down. “I also know why you’re here,” she said. “You’re after the treasure aren’t you?”. Amazed and intimidated, Jianyu stuttered, “Yes.”

Meanwhile, it was getting dark and Jianyu still wasn’t getting much answers. “I don’t understand,” he muttered with annoyance. Rebeka cackled but said nothing. “It’s getting late and I don’t have much time to lose.”

Jianyu entered quietly, it was dark and cool inside. Jianyu suddenly felt an unnatural chill go down his spine as he took a couple more steps. “What is this place?” Jianyu muttered under his breath. He made his way down the dark, musty corridor and stopped to examine his surroundings. Jianyu took a few paces forward and found himself next to another gigantic door. When he prepared to enter, he noticed a sign beside the door. “Beware of what lies ahead of you.” He said outloud to himself. A bright glow started behind him, and as he turned around, Jianyu saw a beautiful purple lined with silver scaled dragon looking at him with intense eyes. Jianyu’s jaw dropped open as the creature said, “What are you doing here?”. Jianyu couldn’t speak. A few moments later, Jianyu managed to stutter, “Who are you?”.

The dragon slithered closer and came nose to nose with him. Jianyu couldn’t speak as the beautiful creature circled him. Jianyu’s jaw dropped lower as it spoke. “I’m Amara,” the dragon murmured. “I can’t believe you’re real,” Jianyu breathed suddenly, “My parents told me stories about you when I was younger.” Amara looked at him with wisdom in her eyes and smiled, showing rows of sharp gleaming pearl-white teeth. “Come, we don’t have much time,” she hushed. “Let me warn you first,” she started, “What lies ahead mustn’t be disturbed.”

As Amara trailed behind him, he heard a low growl beside him. Amara’s deep ombre eyes flicked around, her snake-like body curled up tensely and the smell of sulphur wafted into Jianyu’s nose. A huge dog like creature emerged from the shadows, eyes glowing a crimson red as it advanced on its victims. He and Amara looked on nervously and pressed themselves against the wall. Amara whispered, “We must find a way to distract it.” Jianyu stood there frozen with fear, his mind blank. While the hellhound tried to corner the pair, he came up with a quick plan. “You fly above and distract it.” Amara gave him a look of approval, and added, “While I’m distracting it, run to that door and lock it.”

“I’m not leaving you!” Jianyu exclaimed. “I can teleport.” Amara hissed.

Amara and Jianyu set their plan into action. However, when Amara flew over, the hellhound was not distracted but only continued to advance towards Jianyu. Amara looked backed helplessly and threw herself at the monster, just as it was about to clamp its jaws around Jianyu. She curled her body around it and squeezed tightly, suffocating the beast. Finally, the hellhound grew limp, Amara uncurled and left the body, the smell of sulphur fading away.

After the horrible experience, Jianyu and Amara raced away from the door and stopped at the next door ahead. Jianyu breathed slowly and hesitated. Amara stopped, and gave him a courageous look. The sign next to the door read, “If you managed to get through, don’t trust anyone but yourself in the next obstacle”. Amara slowly creaked open the door. At first, Jianyu couldn’t see anything, but he felt chills going down his spine. Amara looked nervous too, “It’s so silent.”

“Have you realized we’ve been walking around in circles for the past fifteen minutes?” Jianyu asked. Amara looked around, and suddenly stopped, “There.”

“What do you mean ‘there’?” Jianyu looked ahead with annoyance, then he saw it. There was another dragon, exactly like Amara, but bigger and with blueish-grey scales. The two stood in awe, gazing at the stranger. Amara gasped, “Silas?” Jianyu’s mouth was wide open as the mysterious dragon crept closer. Tears formed in her twinkling eyes as she glided toward him and put their heads together, twining their tails together. Silas glowed with happiness and hugged her tightly.

His eyes trailed towards Jianyu and he growled. “What is this human doing here?” Silas asked, speaking for the first time. Amara looked back and replied, “He is here for the treasure.” As Silas glared at Jianyu with icy eyes, he cowered back in the corner. Just then, Jianyu remembered the sign that was by the door, ‘Don’t trust anyone but yourself in the next obstacle.’ He started to get suspicious of Silas as he dared to ask Amara, “Who is this?”. Amara took no notice of him and she continued to gaze at Silas. Somehow, Jianyu felt uncomfortable around Silas, there was something suspicious about him. Just then, he remembered what Rebeka had told him, “During the second obstacle, you will meet someone you cannot trust.”

“Silas must be the one we cannot trust.” Jianyu thought.

As Jianyu thought of a way to convince Amara that Silas was not trustworthy, he sat in silence, watching the two talk. During observation, Jianyu struggled to remember what Rebeka had said about defeating a changeling. The only thing that he could recall was that changelings had the ability to transform into anyone their victims wanted to see, and in this case, Amara had wanted to see her long lost partner—Silas. Then, he remembered. He needed a mirror. Jianyu dug in his backpack for a small mirror that he always carried around with him. He then quickly pulled it out and walked up to Silas. He gave Jianyu a cold look as he approached and wrapped his tail protectively around Amara. Unaware that Jianyu had went behind him, Silas turned around and accidentally looked into the mirror that Jianyu had held up. Immediately, Silas’s eyes had gone a bloodshot red, and his breathtaking scales had gone into an ugly lime green. Amara pulled away with disgust. Within seconds, Silas had turned into a revolting creature with small berry-like eyes.

Amara snapped out of the trance and looked at Jianyu with confusion. “I had the most weirdest vision...”.

“Talk about it later okay?” Jianyu interrupted, “We’ve got company.” Amara hastily put on her warrior face and glared at the changeling. As if the changeling was mocking them, it sneered and vanished into thin air. Alert, the pair looked around, eyes carefully darting around the room. “Okay, we’re doomed.” Jianyu whispered. “I can do a tracking spell.” Amara thought quickly. “You can do that?” Jianyu looked at her with amazement. Without answering, Amara used her scales and cut a small gash on her palm, shook off a few drops of blood, focused her mind on the changeling and chanted a few ancient words. Jianyu watched as the drops of blood that was on the floor, formed into a line and started to move towards the next door ahead. “There!” Amara yelled, pointing toward the changeling. Without hesitation, Jianyu ran towards it and took out a small pocket knife. He then took a flying leap towards the creature, stabbing the demon right in the heart. The creature made an uncomfortable gurgling noise as black blood pulsed from the wound.

“This is it I think.” Amara sighed. At first, they couldn’t see anything, but they made out an outline of rows of old-fashioned pillars along the sides. Suddenly, they heard loud clanging noises as if someone was playing cymbals. The two jumped and hid behind the pillars, Jianyu squatted down and peeked around the pillar. Jianyu crept out from his hiding spot and crawled to the front of the room. In front of him was a large marble slate with different drawings of animals. “Wow, what’s this?” Amara cooed behind him. Immediately, steel arrows came shooting out of the walls. Jianyu’s eyes widened with shock, desperately trying to come up with a plan.

“Why not I carry you over?” Amara rolled her eyes. “Oh right.” He replied sheepishly. Amara wrapped her tail around Jianyu’s waist and pushed back, launching herself into the air. After a couple of seconds, they landed safely making their way up the staircase towards the treasure. Upon arriving, they saw an old cupboard with carvings on the front. Jianyu looked back at Amara who was waiting by the stairs. “I don’t understand.” muttered Jianyu. Suddenly, the box started to glow a blinding bright red, Jianyu felt himself melting, being sucked into the box. Amara wailed as she tried to slither away, but was drowned by the terrifying screams of agony from the box’s victims.

The Unfortunate Boy

Sha Tin College, Wong, Ivan – 12

Birds whistled, bees buzzed, crickets chirped. The orphanage was starting to wake up, but I was wide awake long ago; thinking of what I should do today. I looked around and saw a vast stretch of trees, which gave me an idea. I rushed out of bed and spoke loudly. “Today, I will pick up at least two hundred leaves. Anyone want to join?” The other kids got ready in a glimpse and we walked out of the hut. As we strolled out, the bully, Li came out too. He was always delinquent, picking on younger kids and beating them up. His face was full of anger and hatred and his entourage staunch by his side.

Li approached me with despise, he shouted and slapped me on the face. Forcefully, he picked me up with one hand and threw me into his hut, locking me in. I heard screams and cries, the others were being beaten up too and I knew that I must go help them. Unusually, I punched the hard paper window, struggling to get out, I failed. Feeling hopeless, I grabbed a vase next to the window and I threw it. The window sills broke off and I escaped successfully. I thought to myself “Should I help them or should I leave them?”. The guards were rushing towards us, “If I helped them, I will be whipped by the ruler and the stick because I broke one of the windows. I should hide and leave them to be.” As I backed away from the chaos, I said to myself “But if I do, they’ll say that I’m a horrible person.” I felt guilty. I slowly stepped towards Li, but he rushed to me first. I took a big stride forward, using all the adrenaline inside me I punched him right in the throat. He fell. I waited for Li to move, but he didn’t. Did I just kill someone? I just killed someone. My heart started beating out of my chest. My mind was completely blank. I couldn’t stay here in this orphanage anymore, I have to leave.

I saw the guards and teachers stampeding towards me like bulls. I had no choice. I needed to leave my friends and go. I am a criminal now and I couldn’t stay. My friends all froze in horror. Fleeing, I arrived to the back of the orphanage in an instance. I had only been outside for a few times, so I wasn’t familiar with the roads, but I did know if I ran for another twenty minutes, I would arrive at the Old City Of Shanghai. I guess that’s where I’m headed. Running down a long slope, I felt the teachers weren’t hunting me down anymore. However, it was the guards that I couldn’t shake off.

Ten minutes passed and the guards started slowing down, as did I, but I kept running. Many of my attempts to rid of them were futile. Finally, I thought of an idea. I used my last bit of energy and ran towards a narrow corner. Turning really fast, I hid under some stinky garbage. I was as still as a koala, scared to even blink my eyes. At last, the guards gave up and I laid down on the floor, exhausted desperately trying to catch my breath. Eventually I drifted off in a fatigued sleep.

I woke up. I was on a bed. A man walked passed me and sand drifted into my eyes. Irritated, I rubbed them and sat up. The man was brewing a cup of Pu Er tea. Ready to say thank you and head off to the Old City Of Shanghai, I hopped off the bed. The man said after he had a sip of tea “My boy, you have finally woken up. I saw you lying on the streets, so I took you in.” The man drank another sip of tea and was about to talk again when I interrupted, “I’m sorry for disturbing you. I will leave this instance, Mr...” I didn’t know his name, so I didn’t say anything. “Do you think you can actually leave? Stay with me and you will achieve great things in life. My name is Chow Yin Ho, but you can call me Chow.” Did I mishear something? Feeling intrigued, I walked towards him. He poured a cup of tea for me. I thanked him and finished the tea instantly, quenching my thirst. “Mr Chow, please tell me what you want. I would like to go to the Old City Of Shanghai, so if I may excuse myself...” he interrupted. “Oh, what a coincidence, I was planning to bring you to the Old City Of Shanghai for a trip too! So, are you ready?” wearily I nodded my head. My heart was pounding, beating fast like a drum. I thought this could turn out to be a great trip, but I may have been wrong.

When we arrived, we went to the most famous place of the Old City, the wall. The wall was a defensive mechanism, and it was used to secure the area. I was wondering would it ever be demolished. Chow told me it would be demolished one day, but certainly not now, because there was an upcoming war.

Time flew by and before we knew it the sun fell out of the sky. Chow and I proceeded to a hostel, which was going to serve as our temporary home. I was overwhelmed with excitement for the unknown. Life was great, we continued to live at the old city of Shanghai in content. He became a father to me, he taught me many things from cooking a fish to trading with merchants.

Five years passed. I still lived with Chow. Nothing had changed, except the birth of a brutal war. Chow despised the Russians, the slightest mention of them ticked him off. One day, Chow woke me up at midnight: "Next week, go to the Russian military base just outside the Old City Of Shanghai, you will plant a bomb inside." I nodded obediently.

I was shocked. Why would Chow ever tell me to do this? I followed him because he was a kind and thoughtful man. I thought he took me in out of the kindness of his heart. I don't want to be associated with this man. I will not commit an act of war for him. I must leave Chow.

The following morning I woke up. As usual, I went downstairs for breakfast. Upon arriving at the table, I saw Chow with six other muscular men. Chow then greeted me loudly, "Oh hello, did you sleep well last night? I hope you did. These men are from America. They will be helping us with the operation." I nodded nonchalantly. "It is finally your time to repay me boy for all these years," I gave him a weak smile.

A week after, I knew Chow was going to be here at midnight, so I hid a sharp knife from the kitchen, ready to escape. He coughed and said, "We are starting our plan now." I turned around and punched him right in the eye, then, proceeding to open the drawer I got the knife, stabbing him right in the stomach. Immediately, I ran downstairs and left. Before I opened the door, I heard Chow shout, "Go get him." Then, his voice fell silent.

Rushing out the hostel, I quickly navigated myself to the main gate of the Old City Of Shanghai. Not long after, I heard the six men shouting loudly, charging at me like bulls at a red flag. I had a knife in my hand, and I knew that the street would come to a dead end. So, with all my confidence, I ran towards the end of the lane, ready to fight.

The six men arrived in front of me and without hesitation I lunged forwards, stabbing one of them. Then, I grabbed his weapon, hitting the other two. After a long struggle, they finally fell to the ground in defeat as I desperately tried to catch my breath. I had cuts and scratches all over my body, but it was a small price to pay to bring an end to the bad man who betrayed me.

The day I left China, I had flashbacks of all the memories I had in Shanghai, everything was bittersweet in my head. It will always be a part of me, forever engraved in my brain. At last, I'm doing what I had always hoped to do; leave China. The day I finally had enough money to buy a ship ticket to Vietnam, I bursted into tears, filled with anticipation and excitement for my new life. It was rebirth.

Injustice

Sha Tin College, Ying, Zoe – 11

It was a dark, foggy day in Shanghai. A chill northerly wind blew, and it was hard to see. People hurried, heads bent, in the street, eager to get out of the cold. A tram rattled down the cobbled streets. An advert for *Casa Blanca* shone out. Without warning, somewhere in the distance, was a shrill, piercing, bloodcurdling scream. A few stopped, looked towards the sound. Others trudged briskly forward. The screaming now turned to hysterical sobs. Through the fog, one could see a silhouette: a woman, dressed in a Qipao. She leant over the still body of a child, shoulders rising and falling.

Many kilometres away, in another part of Shanghai altogether, in a small alleyway, dank houses on both sides, an old man, clutching a gnarled walking stick, collapsed. He twitched, taking slow, raspy breaths. He choked, unable to breathe properly. He tried to run, but without his walking stick he could only crawl. He drew one last, shuddering breath and stopped breathing altogether. His eyes rolled backwards into his head. He was dead.

Approximately an hour later, his body was discovered by his daughter, who had stepped off a rickshaw. One arm was stretched out, his walking stick lying forgotten on the ground. A tear had leaked from one eye.

Similar things happened all over Shanghai, leaving many – dozens – dead, mainly children and elderly. What was strangest about this, though, was that no property had been lost, and the dead had not had any visible wounds. People were puzzled by this, and concluded that it was a supernatural crime. New China News Agency claimed that it was the ‘crime of the century’ and said that the murderer was still at large. The municipal police set up a manhunt, with people all over Shanghai looking for him. Many were scared that the murderer would strike again.

Even after many months, the murderer could not be identified. The old man’s daughter, whose name was Ying, became distressed and often went to the temple to pray to God, for him to help her find the murderer. Numerous times, there were other people around, mainly for the same purpose.

One day, however, with yet another inconclusive repost in the news, she went to the temple to pray. For a second she stood, yet again, in awe of the temple. It was a traditional one, with beautiful pagodas and grinning gargoyles. The rich red paint, the black doors, the green of the garden. Its beauty always calmed her down. This time there was nobody around, only her and the temple god.

The statue was painted very lifelike, except in white marble. The eyes seemed to gleam and the clothes chiselled with such detail they seemed to flutter in the wind. She knelt beneath the statue, and repeated what she always said: *Help me find the murderer so I can have justice over my father’s death.* This time, however, when she stared into the statue’s stone eyes, the supernatural occurred. The statue blinked. Ying rubbed her eyes. *I must be dreaming,* she thought. *This is ludicrous; statues don’t blink!*

Whilst staring in wonder, trying to decide whether the statue had blinked or not, Ying saw the statue’s mouth move. “Fog is the murderer,” He said, in a serene voice.

“Who is Fog?” She suddenly felt daft. What would people say when they caught her talking to a statue?

To her surprise, He answered. “He is a nomad, drifting from one Chinese city to another. He is translucent, and he shifts so you can’t see his face.”

Unexpectedly, the window burst open and a whirlwind flew in. Ying turned, frightened. It was yellow–black in colour, and carried with it a sharp odour. When it stopped, she was able to distinguish it as Fog, a misshapen giant of a man, wearing dirty rags. *Speak of the devil!* she thought. “What did I hear?” Fog asked rhetorically, in a booming, resonating, tone.

"I have no idea why you blame me. I only come here sometimes, often in spring. When I first came to Shanghai, I was snowy—white in colour, smelled of fresh grass and did nobody any harm."

God said, "Then what happened? How come you are not white anymore, but yellow—black?"

"As I was *saying*, recently, I've been getting dirtier and dirtier, and started to smell pungent. Try as I might, I can't seem to do anything to get rid of the colour *or* the smell." After a brief pause, he added, "I didn't do anything", summarising what he had said before.

"Obviously not! You are clearly guilty. The dirt and the smell are pollutants and smoke, which you used to kill your victims."

Ying nodded her agreement. "This makes sense. There's no point denying it, Fog."

"That wasn't me. As I said, I used to be white. I didn't want to turn yellow, to smell appalling,"

God then proceeded to say all sorts of things, to 'prove' Fog's guilt, with Ying speaking in approval. Fog tried to voice his opinions from time to time, but God would always shout him down. Both were starting to get angry. You could tell by the redness of their cheeks. Fog was starting to get impatient, but he restrained himself.

Finally, he could take it no longer. "Look," he said. "I have already stated my innocence. So, you may ask, who is to blame? The companies who made the pollution and smoke, of course. The power plants, burning fossil fuels to generate electricity, and the factories too," He paused, twirling his finger, and God quickly said, "But—" but had no time to say any more, for Fog shot him a dirty look, eager to get on with his speech. He continued, "The entrepreneurs are partially to blame, for directly creating the pollution. But why did the power plants need to make electricity in the first place? Because of the ordinary people,"

Now he pointed at Ying. "Even though they – individuals like her – didn't directly cause the greenhouse gas, they are to be blamed too. What about the automobiles they use? Many people now have them, and they emit clouds of black, choking and foul gas. But what about the government and lawmakers? Did they make any laws regarding this matter? Probably not. If they did, then what about the enforcement? The carrying out of the law? Did they do anything?"

God fell silent. It seemed that Fog's words had truth in it. He seemed to sag (can statues sag?), knowing he was beaten. Fog, having made his point, flew out of the window. Ying stared into his wake. Whether she liked it or not, his words made sense. She strode home briskly, playing Fog's words in her mind again and again. And yet she was an ordinary citizen. What could she do?

I woke with a start, panting. I blinked, looking out the window. It was about six o'clock, and the sun had come up, but it was already foggy. *Fog*, I thought, suddenly remembering my dream. It was a strange dream. Smog is causing lots of damage in modern-day China. It seemed to fit so perfectly into my dream. I thought about what Fog had said. He had said that there was a lack of legislations or enforcements to address these issues and end user demand. I made up my mind. I was going to protect the generations to come – and do it well.

Eight Hundred and One Heroes

Shanghai American School, Jiang, Elena – 11

I stare out of the window of my bedroom, unable to fall asleep. The flashes streak orange across the dark Suzhou Creek. On the other side of the creek, dense columns of black smoke billow out of the battlefield, and deep growls of artillery echo in the distance. The Four Banks' Warehouse stands alone in the ruins like a fortress. The faint shadows of soldiers appear through empty windows, with glows of fire raging inside.

Is Kai one of these soldiers, I wonder?

Kai and I strolled along a tree-lined avenue in the Shanghai International Settlement. Soon Suzhou Creek came into view. The sixty-yard Lese Bridge arched over the flowing water. Rickshaws were rolling back and forth, while people were hustling and bustling around us.

It was a fine summer day, the last day of our middle school. Rays of sunshine bounced off the creek, making it sparkle like diamonds. Our faces reflected on the rippling waves of the water. Kai's dark hair contrasted with my blonde hair. My sky-blue eyes blended in with the color of the water, while his brown ones were blurred by a pair of thick glasses.

"I can sing the Chinese folk song you taught me!" I exclaimed to Kai.

"Poling, poling, up to Granny's Bridge.

Granny calls me a sweetie.

A bite of rice cake, a bite of candy."

We sang in unison.

"Come on, I'll take you to meet my granny." said Kai.

Soon we were in a narrow alleyway in the Old City of Shanghai. Strings of black wire hung between the dormers, and drying clothes lined along the grey brick walls. The wind carried a damp smell of cigarette and food.

We entered a semi-circled Shikumen, jogged up a flight of stairs, and stopped in front of a pavilion.

Kai turned to look at me as he scooted his glasses up his nose. With an anxious tone, he said, "I'm sorry that this place is a bit cramped. My granny likes to stay in the Old City, since it is where our ancestors lived."

I shook my head, "It's fine. I just want to see your granny."

Kai let out a sigh of relief and opened the door. Before I could even blink, an overwhelming smell of sweet rice rushed upon me.

"What is that?" I gasped.

"Oh, it's my granny's home-made fried rice cake! Do you want to try one?"

Unable to resist, I nodded my head excitedly.

We walked to a small kitchen, where an old lady was working. She was plump, her white hair in a bun. She turned around and saw us. Her face lit up into a wide smile revealing a mouthful of mismatched teeth.

"Hello, my dear grandson! Oh, and here is your best friend from school?" She asked in a raspy yet jolly voice.

Kai nodded and replied, "Yes, he's Charles. He wants to try a rice cake!"

Kai's granny picked up a bar of rice cake from a wok, as steams of hot aroma rose up her face. She gently blew on it, and then handed it to me. The outer layer of the rice cake was fried and yellow while the inside one was fluffy and white. My teeth sunk into the crisp layer, and then touched the sticky rice. Savoring the taste, I couldn't help but devour it in seconds.

"Wow, you practically inhaled that!" Kai joked, and we both burst out laughing.

Little did we know that the euphoric days would soon come to an end.

The Japanese invaded Shanghai in the summer of 1937.

Creak. The door opens. My dad is home now. As the British General, he is busy accepting refugees and protecting the International Settlement.

I run downstairs to him, and ask, "Are the Chinese Army still fighting in the warehouse? Is Kai in the warehouse?"

"I have yet to find Kai. But 800 soldiers are still fighting there. They are already surrounded by the Japanese, but they want to show the world that the Chinese Army have not surrendered." He says with admiration.

"Could you accept them to come on our side? The only place to retreat to is the International Settlement." I plead.

He looks at me for a while, considering my request. He finally replies, "Yes. It is my honor to let the Chinese in."

At dawn, I race to the Old City.

“I am going to the warehouse to find Kai.” I say to Kai’s granny.

“Good! I have been worried sick. Can you also bring some fried rice cakes to the soldiers? They must be starving.”

“That is a great idea!” Soon, the small kitchen is bustling with the preparation of the rice cakes. Once Kai’s granny bakes 800 cakes, I pack them on a large trolley and roll it towards the warehouse.

As I approach close to the Lese Bridge, I see British sentries guarding the International Settlement side. I sneak up towards the bunker. As the sentries look over to the battle side, I slip past them and onto the bridge. When the barrage dies down, I rush across to the warehouse.

I creep along the dark hall and find a roomful of soldiers. Some are boarding up empty windows, others are bolstering blockers, and more are lying wounded on the floor.

While I am scanning to find Kai, a middle-aged military officer comes up to me. In dirty but trimmed Chinese Army uniform, he stands as straight as a warehouse pillar.

“You are British General Telfer—Smollett’s son, if I am not mistaken. I am Commander Xie. What are you doing here?” he asks, straight-faced.

“I thought you’d be hungry. I brought rice cakes to you.” I reply cheerfully and open the trolley. Immediately the scent of sweet rice fills the warehouse.

The soldiers’ weary eyes travel to the rice cakes, and their eyes light with hope. I pass them the fried rice cakes. Not until every soldier has gobbled the cakes down does a young soldier around my age carefully wrap his rice cake up and put it into his pocket.

The young soldier totes a rifle as tall as him. Under his flopped helmet, layers of bloodstained bandages wrap his head and cover his eyes. He looks exhausted, but resolute.

He is Kai.

“Kai...” I gasp, lost for words.

He turns at the sound of his name, “Charles...” he realizes.

We engulf each other in a hug.

“You’re such a hero, Kai.” I say.

“You are one too. You are the 801st hero.” Kai replies.

“I have good news! My dad welcomes the Chinese Army into the International Settlement!”

A faint smile appears on Kai’s face, “We will fight for the good of our country, even if it means sacrificing our lives. We will not go across, unless we get an order from our general to do so.” Kai says decisively.

Moved, I remember his words and head back to the International Settlement.

Once I get to my house, I recount to my dad the Chinese Army’s response.

“I will contact their general and try to change his mind.” my dad says.

That night, I listen nervously as my dad talks with the Chinese general over the phone. After he puts it down, he tells me the news, “They’ve agreed to retreat into the International Settlement and then move to the next battlefield. We will be expecting them tonight.”

“Yes!” I yell in victory and run towards the bridge to await the soldiers’ arrival.

After midnight, amid the barrage, the first soldiers begin to dash across the bridge. On the other side, I start to count.

“One.”

“Two.”

It seems like a forever of running.

“355 and 356.” Commander Xie comes across carrying Kai by his limbs.

Early next morning, I go to the Old City. I want to tell Kai’s granny that I’ve found Kai and get more fried rice cakes for the soldiers. On the border, the barbed wires blockade me. On either side, the British soldiers and Japanese soldiers are at loggerheads, bayonets pointing to bayonets.

I go visit the soldiers.

“The Japanese occupied the Old City. I cannot meet your granny and bring fried rice cakes.” I say to Kai sadly.

Rage crosses over Kai’s face. He takes the whole bar of the fried rice cake out of his pocket. “I will keep this rice cake with me for the next battle. We will fight back to the Old City.”

To soothe him, I start to sing,

“Poling, poling, up to Granny’s Bridge.

Granny calls me a sweetie.

A bite of rice cake, a bite of candy.”

Kai chimes in, and then the soldiers join.

The nostalgic tune blends into the shimmering Suzhou Creek. It runs relentlessly past the International Settlement with the unyielding heroes, past the Four Banks’ Warehouse with the empty windows, past the Old City with Kai’s kind granny.

The Garden Hidden Between Heaven and Earth

Shanghai American School, Wang, April – 14

Although scraps of paper and cigarette butts dotted the ground, the street was homey and lived-in, comfortable even. Little shops filled with colorful goods packed the sides of the street, and their shopkeepers yelled out toward the crowd, trying to catch the attention of potential customers. But the most striking thing was the activity of the people. A swarm of them bustled about, admiring the objects on sale and bargaining with the shopkeepers. Streaks of red, blue, and green from people's coats and bags colored the scene. Some people were nicely dressed in thick, sturdy coats and wrapped in stylish scarves, while others had hastily thrown on a sweater and an awkward hat. However, their constant, swift pace made up for their differences in appearance. All the people moved with a destination in mind, a purpose to their bustling.

All but one girl. She had wide, green eyes that darted from shop to shop, dumbfounded by the strange characters printed on the buildings. To her, the noise was deafening, unintelligible, overwhelming—nothing like the quiet of her placid hometown. Incomprehensible words were exchanged between strangers. When the girl crossed the street, a motorcycle brushed passed her, honking as it sped by. It seemed to know that it had encountered a foreigner, an alien. The girl flinched and jumped up onto the sidewalk. It was then that she really noticed the garbage that littered the street, and she wrinkled her nose. The smell of cigarettes and car gas suffocated her as if she was surrounded by a bubble of pollution. It finally hit her that she had left her sweet, cozy home in the suburbs for an unknown city, an unknown world.

The girl started aimlessly walking with the sea of people, allowing herself to be guided by those behind her. She felt the people around her pushing and prodding her in different directions, though she was unsure of where to go. Her feet stumbled forward while she spun her head wildly, looking for a familiar face, a familiar place to go. She remembered that in her old home, she found her way easily. The words, the people, the streets—they all made sense to her. Trying to distance herself from her overbearing parents, she had moved to the exciting city of Shanghai. Her old town carried a sort of sorrow that she felt constantly weighing on her shoulders. The girl had gotten sick of the same pitying looks from neighbors who pretended to know her and the same lonely grass, rolling on and on over the horizon, trapping her in its endless monotony. Now, however, she would do anything to get away from the chaotic city and crawl back to the warm embrace of familiarity.

But alas, she couldn't undo the miles she had put between herself and her old home. So even though the girl wanted to seem composed, her eyes gave her away. They were full of alarm as she mulled over her regrets. Remaining inconspicuous felt impossible; she had never felt so out of place. Looking to find someone similar to her, she shifted her eyes left and right at the people beside her, but she was only met with dozens of strangers that blended perfectly into the crowd. Exasperated, the girl ran her fingers through her hair, trying desperately to calm her racing heart.

Suddenly, she spotted an alley, the one place where darkness seemed to swallow the colors of the street, and froze. The people behind her grumbled in irritation, and their shoulders nudged her to continue. The girl staggered forward, her green eyes fixed on her new discovery. Regaining her balance, she walked in the direction of the darkness. Slumped on a rickety stool next to a doorway was an old man with wrinkles lining his forehead. He watched the girl as she made her way through the crowd and came to a stop when she reached the alley. The crowd of people bumped into her, shoving her into the alley. Immediately, she felt the weight of an eerie silence, blanketing her in its wake. The girl glanced back at the entrance of the alley, eyeing the steady flow of people and wondering whether she should continue.

Soon, her eyes wandered away from the street and traveled up and down the walls enclosing her in the small space. They were peeling; hints of spray paint danced along the surfaces. Trying to make sense of the graffiti, the girl squinted in the dark but only saw markings haphazardly clumped together. As she walked along the alley, the unrecognizable shapes separated themselves into individual words and phrases. Her hands trailed the walls, and the layer of dust that coated the surfaces disappeared at the touch of her fingertips. The darkness reminded her of her brother's

funeral; there was a big storm, and only a few people bothered to show up in the rain. The rain and her tears had formed as one entity, consuming her. She had moved away to forget, to stop being the sole focus of her parents, her parents who refused to forget.

There was a light glowing near the end of the alley that caught the girl's eye, and she slowly approached a large moon gate. Written on the interior curve of the gate in small, delicate strokes was a character she understood—"家." Cocking her head, she traced the lines of the character and wondered why anyone would write 'home' in a dark, forgotten alley.

After a few moments, she realized she was standing in front of a garden. Her fingers slid off the gate as if she were in a trance. She blinked once, twice, gazing at the nature. Hesitantly, she stepped onto a stone path that led to a small pond. Rocks settled between the glistening water and the gentle trees. Noticing the leafy shadows on the ground, the girl looked up at the sky, caught sight of the sunlight that seeped in through the cracks of the trees, and was mesmerized by the sparkling rays.

The garden reminded her of her hometown, only it was in the heart of a city. Now, alone, she was no longer restless without her brother. She was content—almost happy—something she hadn't felt since her brother's death. Maybe he had passed away for a reason; perhaps it was so she could find the space between heaven and earth. She had wanted the move to Shanghai to be a fresh start, and she was starting to believe it.

The girl started to take slow steps toward a small stone bridge. Peering at the water, the girl saw dozens of golden fish in the pond. Their silk-like tails softly brushed the water, creating soft ripples. She sat down on the railing and dangled her legs over the water, her feet mere centimeters above the surface. A lazy smile stretched across her lips as she closed her eyes, breathing in the smell of the trees, of the fresh air. Here, there was no noise, no garble. There was only the sound of nature: the whistle of the wind as it playfully rustled the leaves and the gentle murmur of the water beneath her.

Thinking back to her hometown, she realized that she hadn't felt at home in the suburbs but with her brother. Her mind drifted back to the wisp of a word printed on the moon gate and understood that "home" was the only word that could describe such a place. She felt like she belonged, and there wasn't anyone to push her around or hover over her constantly. For her, being in the garden made everything feel natural and easy. The branches of the tree swayed in harmony, as did the clouds as they lazily drifted across the sky.

The girl didn't know why she eventually stood up and walked back toward the moon gate, why she left her hidden garden for the dark alley that enclosed her. There was something in her bones that guided her through the moon gate, into the darkness, and out of the alley. When she stepped out, she was unable to play off the smile that had sneaked onto her lips. Still slouched near a doorway, the old man regarded the girl curiously. He opened his mouth, but instead of speaking, he closed it again and watched the girl in front of the alley. Just as she was about to rejoin the other pedestrians, the old man tapped her leg. Surprised, the girl spun around to face him.

"Little girl," the old man croaked. The girl's eyes widened. The strange man spoke her language. "What were you doing in that alley?"

The girl smiled before replying, "I was admiring the garden." At the old man's silence, the girl turned her attention back to the crowd and became a part of the sea of people once again.

The old man furrowed his brow, wrinkles creasing his forehead. He murmured to himself, "What garden?"

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Chong, Calista – 13

Shanghai was a modern country now, but of course being this modern there's lots of work, it takes time also. Of course when people didn't know about it, they might just think that China is outdated or more in the old farm side. While a girl called Kam she was a girl who likes "adventurous places" which is like those farms that they don't really have in the country she used to lived, so she was bagging to go to china when she heard that China was a not so modern country from her classmates.

Kam, she had a dream of her giving up her studies and went to china to explore around. She told her classmates about bout it the next day and also her parents, "stop dreaming so much me and your dad is not going to allow you to give up your studies and bring you to China and let you explore China like how it will be in your dream." Said Kam's mum, of course Kam is very sad and also kind of mad at her mum for say that heart breaking things to her, but she is trying to be respectful to her mum for not exposing her anger out of how she feels.

The next day she went to school like how her normal life is like, she went to ask her best friend Jan for advice, what should she do "Just listen to your mum, stop thinking for your own, your mum could be right in a way, you'll never know" "But she if she don't tell me why then, how do you want me to accept the fact that I will not be able to go" "Why can't you listen to your parents" "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU, YOU USED TO BE ON MY SIDE BUT NOT ANY MORE." "I THINK YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAVE A PROBLEM NOT ME" They

didn't talk for the rest of the day, they just have a fight.

The next day was just a lonely girl on herself, she still went to school and suddenly a girl run to her "Hi, my name is Pertrisha, nice to meet you, I heard that you want to go to china, Right?" "How do you know that?" "I heard the conversation between you and your friend, and I'm on your side, cause I know how you feel." "Okay, so what are you trying to say?" "I'm going to help you and bring you to China" "REALLY" screamed Kam. She was so exited, just when the time she feel like giving up, there's someone is there to support her.

Pertrisha is from a rich family, and normally her parent listen to her. She went home and decided to ask her parent for money. "Hey mum and dad, can I have some money, I will need quite a lot of money, it's like the mount of money that two people will need if they are on a vacation for a year or two, I guess" "Oh yea sure, I will hand you a credit card with the money inside the password will be your birthday." Said both her parent together.

They were face timing through out the whole night, they had decided to start packing their bag tonight, and leave at 3am, so that no one in the family will find them traveling without telling them. Kam was excited but scared and worried at the same time, but for pertrisha she was mainly excited, because one reason that makes her want to move is because of her parent, she thinks that all they want is their money not life, so she was excited to leave the house. She also like the life with freedom.

They meet outside the school gate like a few meters away, they went to the airport together, they got the money they need and the things they need, the moment they got there, they went to buy the tickets. They went on the flight and arrived Shanghai.

They went to get a taxi.

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ng, Hui Lim – 13

1⁰th September 2016, 725 years after Shanghai was first became a city. Mei Mei and her family who followed their father to Shanghai 3 years ago to earn a living, decided to take a day off to visit a famous ancient garden in Shanghai, Yu Yuan Garden. After they bought the entrance ticket of RMB 30 each, the family walked and enjoyed the view. Mei Mei was stunned with the centerpiece arrow ancient stone, a porous 3.3m, 5 tone boulder as rumors indicated it was meant for the imperial palace in Beijing but was salvaged after the ship sank off in Shanghai. Mei Mei was attracted by this centerpiece and she can't stop looking at it. Without knowing, her family was walking further and further away leaving Mei Mei there admiring the centerpiece. Few minutes past, her stomach rumbles which indicated its time for her to have lunch but when she moved her attention from the centerpiece, she then found out that she lost her family!

“What should I do?”, Mei Mei was panic but still managed to brainstorm to figure out what to do next. The only way that she could think of was to wait at the same place where she was separated from her family so they would be able to find her. Slowly, she found herself a place to sit at the corner near a big stone and waited patiently for her family to find her. It was then she spotted a Green Flower Porcelain vase rowing left and right on the floor. Mei Mei was curious; how did this expensive vase ever row on the floor out of sudden? Then she took her steps and went forward to investigate the vase. When she touched the vase, a blur gust of smoke appeared and soon Mei Mei disappeared in the smoke.

It was too late for Mei Mei until she found out that she was trapped in a prison together with other kids of her age. The prison cell was worn and damp with rats running around. No fresh air, no water, no food and no family. Mei Mei was depressed; she will never see her mother again, she will never eat her mother's homemade dishes and she will never hear her mother's night time story anymore. She started to cry and shouted out loud for her mother. “Keep your mouth shut or else they will kill you!” the girl in braided hair and in shabby cloth sat next to her shouted. “Where am I?” Mei Mei asked. “oh gosh, are you nuts or you lost your memory or what, we are the slave for the mighty boss, Du Yuesheng. Our parents sold us to him”. “He will either put us in his gambling dens, opium divans or probably to his brothels!”. “Oh no... I want to go home, I don't want to be a child prostitute, I'm just 8 years old. Its wrong for you all to treat us like that under the law” cried Mei Mei. Du's follower heard what Mei Mei said and replied calmly, “My child, accept your faith, just follow me to our brothel in Shiliupu, you will be trained by *ganniang* (foster mother)”.

On the other side, her mother finally found out that Mei Mei was lost. As soon as possible, her parents and her siblings started to search for her in and around the garden. They've tried their very best to check every spot but there was no sign of Mei Mei. Her mother was depressed; she thought that she will not ever see Mei Mei again. She will never see Mei Mei playing with her siblings, she will never listen to Mei Mei guzhen practices and she will never see Mei Mei's smile anymore. Her mother sighed and started crying and her siblings were by her side calming her. Although the family sigh over the lost of Mei Mei, although her siblings tried their very best to think of ways to get Mei Mei back. “Wait a second.....” cried Mei Mei's eldest sister.

“I've read lots of articles of either children captured or sold by their parents those days to Du Yue Sheng, the tycoon of the place we are stepping now, the Shanghai International Continent, which means that Mei Mei can be also..... caapppp.....ttuuurrr...ed?” her eldest sister said in shiver. Mei Mei's mom shouted and cried, “Come on, its not time to joke, its year 2016 now!” “May Mei Mei be safe and sound, do not touch my daughter unless you have the right

from us.” Then her mom continued, “so you think that maybe Mei Mei is captured by this guy name Du Yue Sheng right?” “Yes you are right, but this can’t be the final answer because there are syndicates trying to sell children to the market or make them as beggars. Still, let’s just pray for our dear sister Mei Mei to be safe and sound” mumbled her eldest sister. Since after the sentence ends, the siblings started to pray and mumbled, “For our dear sister Mei Mei to be safe and sound and they should not touch her unless they have the permission from us” Then they waited in silence.

Together with her inmates, Mei Mei was under surveillance of Du’s followers. She sat in silence and then came an announcement, “All of you listen carefully, you will be one by one trained by the foster mothers, but if you resist it, then you will be killed or either you will end up in the gambling dens or in the opium divans.” Mei Mei still sat in silence although in her heart she really wants to cry out loud but she does not want to catch the attention from Du’s followers. It was then, the place started to shake. Is it earthquake? No, its Du’s followers came to random pick few girls for *ganniang*. Everyone was shocked and they hide themselves in corners of the jail. Mei Mei was in one corner squishing with the children with her heart palpitating. She can hear mouning sound of girls being pull out from the cell by Du’s followers. Soon, the shake was stop. Everyone sigh peacefully, “Thank God I wasn’t the “lucky” one who being dragged out just now” a girl said in relieve. “Yeah right, not me also” mumbled others. Then time passed, and slowly the children fell asleep, cramping together and lying on each other.

Soon it was early in the morning, where the sun rose and given out its most brightness and woke up all these children whom were still asleep in their sweet dreams like a morning call : “Wake up my children! It’s a new bright sunny morning!” Slowly, one by one, they started to move and some woke up already stretching their bodies lazily. Then out of a sudden, there came a loud siren. “What was that?” questioned by the girl with a braided hair. “It’s so noisy” called up a little girl. Apparently, the prison started to shake again. Now everyone quickly went ahead to their hiding spot, but the shake was too strong and everyone of them have to grab on something to stay still!

Finally, the movement ceased but the prison cell collapsed suddenly. “Run to take cover!” someone shouted. It was too late for Mei Mei because she fainted after being hit on her head by the fallen pieces of the wall. When she gained conscious and started to look around, it was the police! Then, crowds were gathering and some of them look worried. Mei Mei took no time and started to search for her family. “Mama, Papa, where are you?” cried Mei Mei out loud. “We are here! Mei Mei!” shouted another voice. There came a small group of people running towards Mei Mei and she recognized them, it was her parents! “Mama! Papa! I miss you!” Mei Mei ran towards her parents. They hugged each other tightly, “I will never get lost again, Mama. I am wrong, I am sorry” mumbled Mei Mei. “My dear Mei Mei, is nothing wrong about you.” Its all because of these people who captured you, they were the ones who did wrong.”

“Now tell me who capture you and what happen to you and please don’t tell me its Du Yuesheng who capture you”, mama smile while saying. “How do you know?” Mei Mei was surprised.

At the end of the day, Mei Mei and her family went home and had a big family feast, they had a yummy hot pot. Yummy! After this incident, Mei Mei learnt to be always alert as there are many bad people in and maybe outside this world trying to cheat you!

This tale took the background of old Shanghai days during the international Continental time. The moral of this story is do not ever go around places without your parent’s knowledge, its not safe to do that, you will end up something like what Mei Mei experienced. Shanghai is a relatively safe city but still, safety is your top priority when you are travelling out. Now that she learnt a lesson, did you?

The Jade Run

Shanghai Singapore International School, Senthilkumar, Janaki – 13

This story is about a boy who was in a modern city, but he had to come through a time machine travel which led him to an ancient city of Shanghai. As he faced a lot of problem during his lifetime, but as he goes around the city of old Shanghai and there he will face more troubles and goes through an adventure which was a memory of an adventure through out the history which was praised by all people in Shanghai. Read more to learn what happen to that boy and the adventure he came through.

It has been an unlucky day for Angus again and again each and everyday. All this unluckiness started with a big challenge with someone who is a big curser in the world and he is called Adrien and everyone knows that person and no one gets near him. Angus was a risk taker that he did not listen to anyone even his family and had a bet with Adrien about seeing who got the highest on the upcoming test. Angus bet that if he wins he will make Adrien run away from the city and Adrien bet that he will curse Angus for eternity.

Angus was preparing for the test so hard and Adrien was just sitting in his home, practicing black magic, so that he could use that at the test day for cheating. At the test day, Angus was so concentrated that he finished his test and was confident that he will win on the bet. But Adrien was so clever that he used the magic he used for practicing and copied the answers from the teacher's test scheme. At the result day, the result came and Adrien as expected got in the first rank while Angus was in the second rank. So that's why Angus was cursed for eternity. So everyday was an unlucky day for Angus.

One day as Angus went to an amusement park with his family and as usual Angus was unlucky and got lost in the crowd. Angus lost his family and was roaming around the amusement park happily as it is a usual thing for him. As he was roaming he saw a weird shaped machine with a big clock on front of the machine. Angus went there to check out that machine. As he went there, a creepy old man jumped out which startled Angus. The old man said, "Come my dear boy, why don't you try the first invented time machine? You can travel anywhere you want." Angus got excited, "Wow, can I travel to the city of old Shanghai? I learned that it is a beautiful place to go." The old man replied, "Oh sure my boy, just sit on this seat here and I will set the time and place. Enjoy your trip." Poof, Angus disappeared and appeared at the city of old Shanghai.

When Angus arrived to the city of old Shanghai, he totally felt like he was in an alien world with beautiful cultures performed, different language spoken, yummy treats along the street and finally the precious gems for the tradition where. There where people dancing traditional dance with peculiar costumes, Angus joined them and they helped him wear the costumes as they thought his costumes were weird also. Angus had fun with the people around the street. It was the first time he felt himself lucky.

Then a troop of foreigners soldiers were marching around the place. People stopped celebrating and went back to their workshops to work, the whole place was silent except the soldiers marching. Angus was in confusion what was happening. A person next to him said, "Come boy, you better hide or you will be in trouble. They hate newcomers especially other foreigners. They will capture them and throw them to the jail for more than 5 years." Angus hid behind the person. Then as the soldier made their way out after inspecting the street. Then the person turned to Angus and

told, "Hi, my name is Ming Ming (明明), you can stay here but there is going to be a lot of difficulties in this place, I think you better stay here for some while and I will help you escape from this place." So following days Angus was hiding whenever the soldiers came inspecting the area, then after the inspection Angus used to go around with people, eat lots of delectable meals and celebrating. Angus was a pet to everyone. This made him forget about his family and his eternal curse, which made Angus wonder when will his bad luck occur.

The next day, the soldiers came inspecting again, everyone that time was celebrating happily which made them get caught by the soldiers who were marching towards them to inspect what is happening and as the soldiers spotted Angus and people on the street celebrating with him. One of the soldier ran immediately to the general's office and informed, "General John, we have found a foreign boy and the people on the street are celebrating with him. I think the people have made him hide in this place." The General John indignantly shouted, "How dare they?! I sure would punish everyone!"

The soldier came back with General John to the street to meet the people on the street and Angus. But the General John looked happy when he met everyone including Angus, he said, "Oh how wonderful to have a newcomer in our city. I would like the boy with all these people on the street to help me go through this jade maze and help me find the precious jade statue in there and I shall let the boy and you people free." The people on the street got surprised and they agreed for the maze as they have been in trouble with these people and Angus also agreed to help his friend.

The soldiers were surprised about the actions of General John. As the general came back to his office and informed the soldiers to open the maze and create dangerous obstacles as they have 3 days to finish the work and let the Angus and the people enter them. The soldiers were amused by the general's action. General John said, "Ha! They hid the boy from us, we should punish them and there is no such thing as jade statue in the maze." The General John and the soldiers blasted out in laughter thinking horrible stuffs to kill them and the boy. Meanwhile Angus and the people were celebrating as they finally heard they were going to be in freedom.

For three days, the soldiers were working on the dangerous obstacles to trap Angus and the people. While the Angus and the people were preparing foods, small tool and clothes to wear for the task in the jade maze. At the night of the third day, the general and the soldiers had a grand dinner to celebrate.

Next day, the day to close the troubles in their life and Angus was feeling so good that he is going to help people to gain their freedom. General John and the soldiers came to receive Angus and the people. The general smirked and made the people and Angus enter the jade maze which was totally mesmerizing to their eyes. As the people and Angus entered the jade maze, the general smirked and closed the gate of the maze which brought a surprise to the people and Angus. The general laughed and said, "This is the end of you people and the newcomer, you will be facing deadly obstacles around the maze, face the pain! You will never find the end of this maze, if only you are alive." The general chuckled and left the place.

The people started to grieve as they heard they are going to die. Angus again felt unlucky again but suddenly he became sanguine and he said, "Guys, we created lots of tools, we can use that to unlock and survive the deadly obstacles." Finally, the grieving people got persuaded by Angus. They started to spilt to unlock the deadly obstacles. It was totally confusing that they took a day to unlock an obstacle. But they were not able to find the end of the maze.

After few days, the general John came back to check if they are dead, but he heard them all talking. The general got angry and instructed the soldiers, "Soldiers, get inside the maze, without informing the people inside and silently attack them!" The soldier took the orders of the general and came in the maze in a secret passageway. Angus and the people there noticed them and hid while the soldiers came in and run into the secret passageway and escaped the maze. But suddenly there were 4 more soldier out there, Angus and 3 people volunteered to trap the 4 soldiers and the general in the maze. They secretly came behind the soldiers and knocked them off and wore the soldiers' uniform and went in the general's office and told him, "Sir, we have found the people and the boy and we killed them. Now we have to use the dynamite to blast of that place." The general joined them and came to the maze. Then Angus and the 3 people made the general enter and the 4 soldiers they knocked off and said, "Sir, we have to go get the dynamite, please wait here." And the locked the maze and took the dynamite and laughed, "Ha! General John, you got cheated. We were not the soldiers, we were the people you locked in the maze and now you are locked in it! Wait till I bring the dynamite." Then Angus threw the dynamite in the maze and ran away with the people. Finally, the soldiers and the General was dead.

The people thanked Angus and they were celebrating and they became free from the foreigners. Later Angus disappeared in the venue and he arrived to the amusement park seeing his parents standing there worrying for him. Later as he came out, he felt that his curse was still unbroken, he went back the creepy old grandfather and told him to set the time machine for the day of the bet he had with Adrien and he fixed everything and came back to the amusement park. Finally, at last, Angus corrected his curse and helped the city of old Shanghai to gain freedom.

Next day when Angus went to school, his history teacher started to teach them about the jade run which happen at the city of old Shanghai. Angus smiled as it was a history created by him which made the city of Shanghai with freedom of no foreign concessions to trouble them anymore.

A Dream of Magic

Shanghai Singapore International School, Sharma, Paarth Kaustabh – 13

Hi, I am Mark Walker. I'm twelve and in 7th grade. This is my first year in middle school and, I find it *quite terrible*. I am not here to share a story. I am here to share a dream, a very magical dream that occurred 2 days ago, from where my story begins. Keep reading.

“HISTORIANS!” called Ms. Tessie Diggory, our spirited and ardent history teacher, referring to us students. “I am introducing a new assignment, an essay on the old city of Shanghai, also known as the Chinese city. Refer to the web for more details. Some more links for some *informative* websites will be posted on the grade 7 history page!”

Shortly, I was home on my Mac visiting the school website for some information. “Wow, this senseless assignment is due just after 2 days!” irritated, I whispered to myself.

The rest of my evening was occupied by homework, some household chores given by my mom and frolicking around with my elder brother Ryan.

Bed time had arrived, and I had not done any work on my Old Shanghai assignment.

Lazy as a Kula, I just decided to work on my assignment the proceeding day, and before any other thought sprouted in my brain, I heard myself snoring away.

While darkness surrounded me as I slept, a dull voice all around grasped my attention. It seemed to be a voice emerging from the dream itself, not human, just voice. It whispered

“THE OLD CITY OF SHANGHAI,

a legend of its time,

was a place of wonder that will make you sigh

The long extensive stories

of its wonders and glories,

are so vast,

they won't fit in a lorry! –

I listened very keenly!

Therefore, I will begin narrating the history,

to help you with the task

given by Ms. Diggory!”

Whoever this person was, how did he know my teacher, and my assignments and how was he such a good poet?!

Then I saw in the darkness of my dream, an emerging vision of a city, that was quite small, old and had an ancient type of look.

“This is the old city, sits in Shanghai under the rule of Ming Dynasty. In 1553 it was originally the old town of ‘Nanshi’, that was walled for protection against Japanese pirates named Wokou.”

My vision in the dream showed me the Japanese pirates attacking the old city, and the construction of the city wall around Nanshi. The voice continued...

“By 1664, the rule of Ming Dynasty collapsed and it was taken place by the unpopular Qing Dynasty. By that period Shanghai had become a major cotton and textile center with a population of 200, 000 citizens with the old city as the urban core.” I tried to digest all the facts at once with the vision in front of me.

“The next couple of centuries, Shanghai, and the old city grew better as a trading center and as a metropolis, but many events remained to happen” narrated the voice, encircling my ears. The voice continued to narrate, but now with more emotions and ferocity “*but the year of 1832 is very important in Shanghai’s history as the conflict begun there.*” – I was hooked – “In 1832, the British East India Company explored Shanghai as a potential trading center for tea, silk and opium. However, they were rejected by the Chinese local officials.”

I saw visions of the foreigners entering Shanghai and building their trading centers, followed by their disallowance by the local officials.

“The British are also well known for their aggression, so they forced the Shanghainese to import British opium by waging war from 1839 – 1842. Shanghai stood no where against the British and the war ended with the treaty of Nanjing. Shanghai had eventually become one of the 5 Chinese cities open to British consuls,” As the voice spoke, the vision displayed to me a very deadly war, the Opium War. Still fought with middle aged weapons, I saw men piercing each other with spears, puddles of blood just about everywhere. My vision then displayed to me the British consuls entering the Shanghai Parliament and the Chinese bowing unwillingly, accepting their defeat. Just as my magical vision froze, the voice somehow knew the time to start talking again, amazing alignment! I wonder if the vision and the voice had rehearsed this dream in their house, before coming to my dreams. Thankfully, my attention was pulled back by the voice.

“In brief, the British, Americans and French established their concessions in 1845, 1848 and 1849 respectively, all somewhere on Shanghai’s map.”

Following, I saw a magical map on which 3 pins dropped around Shanghai, labelling the concessions.

“Then came the year of 1863, when the Americans joined the British concessions TOGETHER to form the *Shanghai International Settlement*, important information, Mark!” a shiver plummeted down my spine. My name was not exactly the thing that sounded *sweet* from this anonymous guy’s mouth, yet he continued to talk along with my vision explained everything in sight. I was wondering if I could ask the voice and vision to come the following nights for some mathematics help!

“The following major events leading to the end of Old Shanghai occurred all after 70 years” the voice informed and my vision showed me a fast time lapse of a period of 70 years, I saw buildings growing higher, trams being built, highly increasing westerners and many more social improvements. It was a wonder to witness a time lapse of a period as long as *70 years*.

“Everything that I will be narrating from now onwards is not known for the exact date it happened, so I will be using time ranges.” – I heeded and allowed the voice to continue – “So, by the 1930s, the old city was divided between its western half, and traditional half. All the developments such as trams, and entertainment hubs, were in the western half, as the traditional half was the place for monks and people

interested in Chinese culture”, while the voice spoke, I saw an imaginary line draw itself in the middle of Shanghai. I saw in macro view both the halves of the city.

They were extremely different in looks. My vision zoomed into both the halves one by one. For the western half, I saw happening streets and hubs with the bustling of busy people, some westerners and some Chinese. In the other traditional half, I saw priests, monks and many more people walking silently through the streets. Many temples were built around the area. It seemed like two chunks, one of China and one of Britain had been pushed together.

“Now listen Mark. Soon came the big day, *January 28th, 1932*. The day which brought close the end of Old Shanghai and *all* the concessions.” My heart battered against my ribcage, I was already so hooked on the history.

“The Japanese Navy bombed Shanghai that day to finish some student protests. The Chinese fought back hard, and that brought in place the Second Sino –Japanese War.”

My vision once more displayed a very bloody battle scene but now from the Second Sino – Japanese war. This scene far more violent and pitiful than the previous battle scene.

“However, this is not the ultimate reason of Old Shanghai’s end. As more countries joined China and Japan, the Sino – Japanese War developed into the Pacific War.” Whilst the voice talked, the battle scene from the Sino – Japanese war grew bigger, bloodier, and further vicious. I was grossed out, seeing so much blood everywhere.

“Nevertheless, the Pacific War is not the end. *China and Japan*, 2 very strong countries, kept battling. *And in a couple of years*, the Pacific War *CONVERTED INTO THE HISTORICAL WORLD WAR 2*,” the voice roared. If I had been awake, I would have covered my ears, but that was not possible, as I could not feel my body. I was just dreaming.

“From the years 1939 – 1945, occurred the World War 2. Once it ended, all the concessions in Shanghai had ended due to the westerners returning to their countries.”

I was awestruck, I saw World War 2, every second, 10 000 people died, it was madness. My thoughts were hindered as I heard a loud noise. “AND THAT WAS THE END OF OLD SHANGHAI!” My vision suddenly vanished, I saw darkness. Panic swept through me as I started feeling my body.

And then I opened my eyes. My ribcage hurt from the hard hammering of my heart. Ryan stared at me from above “TIME FOR SCHOOL BROTHER!” he yelled at me like an annoying git. I couldn’t believe what I just experienced, *a magical dream!*

The next day in school, and I had handed in my Old Shanghai assignment, with confidence that I aced it. That wonderful dream had told me all my answers, and I hope I get another magical dream on some night to listen to some more “New Tales of Old Shanghai!”.

The Old Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Tan, Daniel – 13

“A new born baby just came to the world.” It came from a small fishing village near the muddy Huang Pu River..... The born baby is called Shanghai. Concession started by the British and say that it is okay to set territory in shanghai but the concession were occupying and were untouchable by Chinese. But the.... the.....French,Americans and Japanese ignore the Chinese and followed the British to set territories in Shanghai. And the Chinese cannot not do anything about it.

Shanghai had become the most important port in 1930s Asia and the world's largest, most amazing trading and banking firms had set up house along the bund. In 1840 there isn't much territory in the bund, it was the center of the external trade, it is a very important place because there is a trading center so that shanghai can have stuff export and import from the nearby country. Shanghai imported Europeans' and Americans' tea, silk, and porcelain and was paid for super cheap prices. Sadly some countries started the world War II. Many countries closed their doors but still lead up to the second World War. Over 20,000 Jewish refugees found in Shanghai and created a.... a.... huge settlement in the district.

As the “kid” still growing, the Japanese invaded and frantically bombed shanghai into a place like “bee hives”, which totally destroy shanghai. The foreigners who could evacuated are extremely lucky but that is only a very small portion of people that evacuated and all those people like young little kids or high aged people were not able to escape, they have to protect on their own because bomb don't have eyes to avoid them. The Jewish people were forbidden to leave their District area, so they have to suffer the bombing until its done, even though Japanese were allies of Germany but didn't harbor the same feelings towards to group. After the bombing, Japanese controlled shanghai and much of China's eastern coast until they are defeated. So shanghai ended up have German territory and Japan territory

During 1943 most of the allied governments abandoned Shanghai during the war which lead shanghai alone, fighting and sign their territorial concessions over to Chiang Kai – Shek. By 1949

Mao's communists had defeated Chiang Kai– Shek's the nationalist of KMT government which the government break out and flew to Taiwan. Most of the foreigner have left Shanghai and Mao's communist stay takes control of the city and all privately held businesses.

In the early ages shanghai is like the “rebellion kid”, fought for a long time but then starting to be “more mature”, in 1976 Deng Xiao ping open the door to allowed a commercial revival to take places in Shanghai .

Pudong was mainly for farming in the old ages, but as it is developing to a “more mature kid”, it become come up with warehouses and wharfs near the shore administered by the districts of Puxi on the west bank. There is another small city called Chuansha that is also in Pudong area, but later in the years Pudong and Chuansha was merged together and it came out with a new

name called the Pudong New area. In 1993, the Chinese government set up a Special economic zone in Chuansha, creating the Pudong New Area. Twenty years ago Pudong is still farmland, but as the area development going on and on, it now become more futuristic skyline lights up then New York City

Hundreds of years passed, the bund is still the signature of shanghai, it shows the culture of Shanghai and the creation of modern civilization to people. There are monstrous waves along the Huang-Pu river, and lovely restaurant, clubs along the streets, most of the people love to go over and spend their night time and have lots of fun. When you go to the bund as a tourist, you

probably will want to go to Garden Bridge of Shanghai. Garden Bridge of shanghai is one of the signature of old shanghai.

As the time flows by summer, winter, autumn, spring, every time period there is a different feeling and atmosphere are changing throughout the season, just like starting from the small fishing village near the muddy Huang-Pu river, slowly the fishing village become a totally different thing. There are night clubs, bars, restaurant, along the street.

Now the British, the Japanese, and other countries that was wresting shanghai has moved away after they are back to their own countries, shanghai start with farming, reorganize by Mao's communist. It start with Pudong area, and starting to build the oriental pearl TV tower, it attracts lots of tourism because of the extremely high height and the amazing view at the top floor, and besides looking at views, there are fantastic, wonderful restaurants up there, Pu dong are starting to have new shopping malls opened, luxury area of Pu Dong, so Pu xi can't lose too, so there are lots of great shopping mall but later, as more company open newer and more luxury shopping malls, all those old shopping mall are being replaced by those new ones and now it look like forbidden forest from harry potter, it's very creepy it's very dirty some bricks are off the walls, trashes everywhere.

Throughout the years, Shanghai had a great change, it been through world war 2, countries invading and all other sort of stuff. I bet shanghai will be a more luxury place for everyone, and it will be nice and clean.

A Short Shanghai Tale

Shanghai Singapore International School, Yeh, Charlene – 13

The story I am going to tell you started, a long time ago, in an unknown dynasty between the Dai and Song dynasty which is called the Bei dynasty. I am Yan li a young man from a high living class that once lived in the capital city called Chen. My childhood was one I will not want to remember but I'll still tell you.

My mother died when I was two, since then my father never cared or loved me. One thing I am glad about my father, he still allowed me to go to school. The cold he has with him has brought me up. As when I am four, my father married another woman. I knew that my father hated the exigent woman, but I don't know why did he marry her. A few months later I had two new siblings: Wan hua and Mei qi. That is one of the most misery history I have. The two siblings treated me as their slave not a brother. My education stopped as they reach three. My cold-blooded step mother used to taunt me about my late-mother about how low level is she. Never get to look at her poor son as a grown-up. These words cut through my weak broken heart. I knew that a bad man must have a good heart but where is hers and fathers? Finally when I am twelve my father died. This is when my life changed even, the thought about my father changed.

That night cold but somewhat felt warm in my heart. I've been called to his chamber. He laid there motionless but the sadness is the only thing that is left on that cold face. He told me to come closer to his bed. I went close but his first few words shocked me.

He said to me: "I loved your mother very much. The marriage I had with your step-mother is an extreme unpleasant one. She started to cheat on me after the few days of marriage. Wan hua and Mei qi is not your true step siblings."

It is the sudden cough that broke the silence in between us.

I asked "Then why did you marry her. If you knew that she is going to cheat on you?"

"The marriage in between me and her was already been planned. It is the marriage in between me and your mother that is out the law," replied father.

"If you loved my mother then why don't you love me? For all these years you've treated like air, ignoring me every time I meet you, never talked to me. Never even cared for me. The only thing that I saw you is a shiver. It is the coldness that have brought me up!"

"I know that you hated me for all these years, but please forgive me for all these years. I would care for you and show my kindness and trustworthy to you. I could not care for you or help you out because of your step-mother. She as you know comes from Chen biggest family and most powerful other than the empire. By marrying her in it could help us boom our business, but she also have a stronger power than me even at home. That is why she forced me not to love you."

"So you marry her because of business and not love, mother will disgrace you, for a man who had married to her for so many years and you will just marry a woman who is good for business."

"I told you to come here is not to have a fight. It is to inherit my property." "What?"

"You think that I called you to come here to have a fight." "As you know I am going to die soon and your step mother will want to have all the property and give it to Wan hua. I don't want that to happen so I am giving everything to you as a payoff and a show of love." He handed me a piece of paper saying all property of Mr. Yan's and Mrs. Yan's will be passed down to Xin Li with both signatures on it. He also handed me a stamp with the

word Yan on it on top there is a lion and it's made of pure jade. It look old but I know it is a family treasure. It has been passed down from one hand to another generation through generation. It has survived war and conflict between countries, fights between siblings for power.

“It is a property with no price. It is a stamp that has a strong history behind. Though it is old and it's not valuable it is powerful. With that stamp you can control China. But don't get greedy cause there is a price. Like other thing in here there is a price after you broke it, but this price is your life.” Said father with a strict ending.

He also handed me a jade pendent that shows the power and helped me to put it on. I only saw this once and never saw it again.

“This show that your the master of Yan family and same as the stamp the price is your life.” Said father

The happiness between me and my father broke when the servant said in a hurry: “Madam she is home and is coming here straight away.”

“I never knew she is coming here so quickly! Quick! Hide behind the cupboard and later on a door will slide open. Go through the tunnel and escape. Bare all feelings and move forward, it is the only way to survive.” cooked father

I did what my father told me quickly hide behind the cupboard.

The next second step mother came in saying: “It is time!” she came up to my father and said in the most hatred voice: “where is that piece of paper give it!”

“I already threw it away for me it is just a useless piece of paper!” “You must be lying! Give the paper or else I'll Kill you!”

“Kill me then, your knife look ready?” “As you wish”

“NO!” I tried to shout but nothing come out.

The next minute when the knife stabbed in to the body of father. The house began to rumble and shake intensely. A door opened I quickly ran in the deep endless tunnel that made me felt it contain lots of twist and turns. Trying to bear all feelings but I can't. The tunnel is dark deep and damp. In the tunnel the only sound you could hear is the sound of cries tearful, miserable cries.

As I got out the thump of collapsed building came to my ear. I quickly escape through the tunnel and in to the woods that I used to go whenever I felt lonely or needed comfort. The dark wood became more evil at night, killing unknown strangers as if it's his own country. The dark wood knew me as an old friend he guided me on the way out. As I arrived the exit, I closed my heavy eyelids and laid on the cold grass felling asleep.

The next morning I woke up in an unknown place. I kept my alert on cause I don't know what will happen next. “Don't be so frightened.” Said a girl in a charming voice “your in my brothers room. No one will dare to come in.”

“Where am I?” I asked

“Your in the royal place of Chen and your sleeping on the princes bed.” said a man with a deep voice. “Your finally awaked you've slept in for three days straight.” “here Yan li it is all the property of your family and now you can leave.”

“Yes off course your highness.” I said politely. As I about to reach the main gate the prince stoped me.

“You can't go that way people will think I'm gay. I'll show you the way to steak out of the castle with out the guards notice.” said the prince. He pulled my hand and guided me out of the castle.

“Thank you your highness.” I replied



“Don’t call me highness call me Bei Tāng and send a message to me if you need help.” said Bei Tāng

“Thx Bei Tāng!” and rang back in to the city.

I soon left Cheng and travel south east to Yang Tiz River and walked the whole way to an unclaimed land. On my journey I meet a lot of people old and young. Most of them traveled with me to the unclaimed land. On september the 30th we arrived and began to settled down with farming and fishing as your main economy

Now I live with my own family in the place where I found with it’s named Qinghai which is later changed to Shanghai. The happiness with my family did not last long as the night I was in my office the assassins from my step mothers family came and took me away back to their place and toucher me to my death bed and my body was never founded...

Tea is But a String of Fate

Singapore International School, Chang, Natalie – 13

A single stem standing upright in the midst of a steaming cup of cloudy tea.

The peculiar boy perched on a seat behind the small straw-and-wood table that served as a counter that the other patrons had been warily eying arched a thin brow at the phenomenon – the superstition said that this was the sign of a new arrival coming one’s way – a friend or a lover, perhaps? The boy let out a slight chuckle, sounding brittle and rough like they were being forced from his throat or scraping against rocks, as colourless lashes grazed the slight dip above where his cheekbones were. In all his nineteen years he’d walked this Earth, no one could bring themselves to love a vile being like him. Snow-white hair, dewy pale lashes, porcelain skin and pools of fiery amber pupils with yellow flecks like sparks of a raging flame for eyes was out of the ordinary. “*A monster*,” he’d heard the murmurs that seemed to surround him wherever he went, they pierced him with their words, but they didn’t care.

After all, a beast like him could take arrows to the heart and still survive, right?

~~(We may walk the same soil but behind my mask I can never be more than an unwelcome beast.)~~

“Guang Hong,” the madam of the quaint teahouse beckoned him over, a kind smile plastered on her face, making wrinkles of happiness and time more pronounced. His head shot up and he guessed his eyes must have been alight with bafflement because she elaborated in the same slow, sweet voice, “there’s a customer here, waiting to be seated.” He nodded in understanding, quietly standing up to full height, whilst internally screaming at himself for not catching her drift the first time. He surely looked like a fool now; of course it was a new client, he worked here, for goodness sake! It was his duty to earn his keep and work to be able to sleep under a roof and on a slightly rickety arhat bed that was better than nothing.

He made his way over to the client donning a *hanfu* resembling the midnight sky devoid of stars that looked woven with rich threads of heavy silk slowly, being careful not to disrupt the serenity of the teahouse and soft murmurs – maybe hushed whispers about him? – more than he already was. With his head bowed low, his gaze fixated on his shoes, Guang Hong murmured, “Welcome to the teahouse,” and let his pupils flicker to the client’s face. His heart stuttered as he took in silky locks of raven hair framing a slim pale face with a soft smile adorned on it, but most captivating were the stranger’s eyes. A whirlpool of crystalline blue rivaling that of the seas upon which junks sailed containing specks of golden flakes that seemed to change colour under a different light. Praying that his pallor did not give his bewilderment away, Guang Hong guided him to a low table of mahogany and gestured at the client to take a seat. As he proceeded to turn around and lean against a wall to wait for cues to assist a patron, the fascinating raven-haired person’s voice rang out, clear and resonating with the slight tinkle to it like a bell in the wind, “Excuse me, I would like to place my order.”

Slowly, cautiously, Guang Hong swivelled around and plastered on his signature lopsided grin. “Of course, what would you like to have?” He cursed himself for sounding slightly too enthusiastic.

“Hot oolong tea, please.” The patron’s steady voice announced.

“Alright,” Guang Hong noted it down mentally and headed to the station behind the counter to prepare the order. First, a pinch of leaves that lay snugly at the bottom of the cup and then the hot water. He took mind of the angle he lifted the teapot, he’d learned that spilling hot water onto one’s hand was not a pleasant experience from personal accounts. He set the ceramic teaware down gingerly and, gripping the rim of the cup to avoid scalding, set the drink down on the attractive client’s table. Guang Hong bowed and was about to take his leave when he felt a light but firm grip tighten on the sleeve of his robes. Amber clashed with blue as their eyes met, and the patron chuckled, “Would you allow me the pleasure of your company?”

After a dismissive wave from the madam of the teahouse, he finally settled across from the intriguing customer, stare lingering on the surface of the table on which impressive dragons with their predatory glares peered back at him until the client spoke up.

“Oh,” they gasped, “how careless of me to let my manners slip from my mind. Apologies. My name is Li Qin, and yours?”

“... Guang Hong, nice to meet you, sir,” said boy responded. He looked at the client’s – who now had a name, Li Qin – face again and thought, *Li Qin. Someone once said that it meant a beautiful lute. How fitting.*

“I’m not a ‘sir’, nor am I a ‘madam’. Simply think of me as a memory, or even better, a *friend*.” Li Qin’s smile, small but genuine, never left their face. Guang Hong’s cheeks burned with shame, and he didn’t understand how someone could be so kind.

Surely there must be an ulterior motive, right?

Because he was a monster, and monsters and humans were not of the same blood nor flesh.

~~(So stay away from him, don’t corrupt any more, you’re a wolf boy, get out of this town.)~~

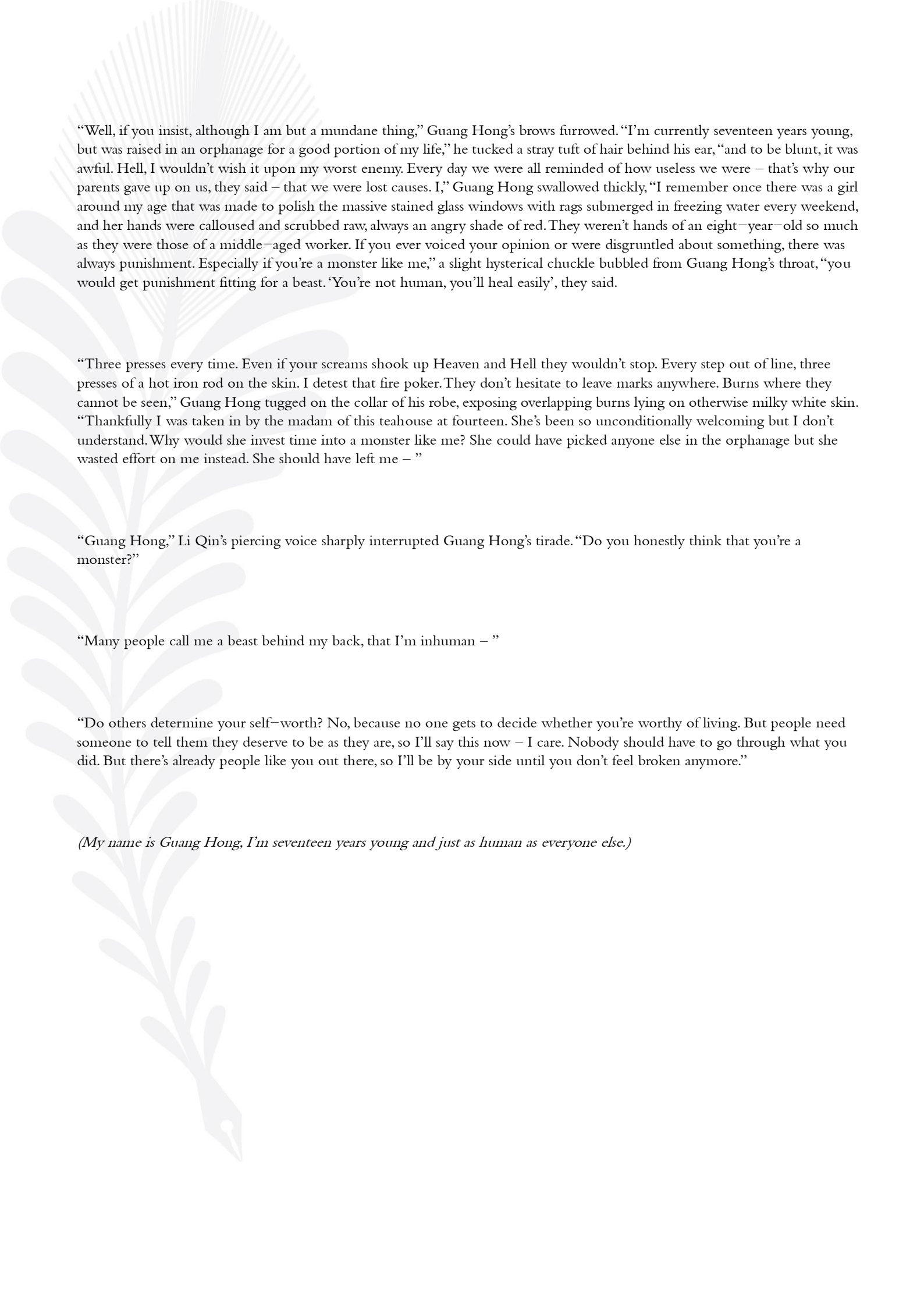
“Ah, Guang Hong, there is no need to beat yourself up over that trivial matter,” Li Qin’s eyes were filled with emotions he couldn’t quite comprehend. Concern? *No, it couldn’t be...* Care? *Of course not...* Worry reserved for a close acquaintance? *Definitely not.*

~~(Yes, it has to be haired dressed in the finest velvet and a blade that wishes to draw blood that lie in that gaze.)~~

“You see,” Li Qin picked up the conversation again, “you have piqued my interest. That is quite challenging to do, so well done. Even if you weren’t consciously trying to attract my attention. You see, I want to know more about you.”

“Me?” Guang Hong uttered in disbelief and bafflement.

“Yes, you,” Li Qin took an elegant sip from his piping hot beverage, eyes scanning the boy’s face for any perceivable reaction.



“Well, if you insist, although I am but a mundane thing,” Guang Hong’s brows furrowed. “I’m currently seventeen years young, but was raised in an orphanage for a good portion of my life,” he tucked a stray tuft of hair behind his ear, “and to be blunt, it was awful. Hell, I wouldn’t wish it upon my worst enemy. Every day we were all reminded of how useless we were – that’s why our parents gave up on us, they said – that we were lost causes. I,” Guang Hong swallowed thickly, “I remember once there was a girl around my age that was made to polish the massive stained glass windows with rags submerged in freezing water every weekend, and her hands were calloused and scrubbed raw, always an angry shade of red. They weren’t hands of an eight-year-old so much as they were those of a middle-aged worker. If you ever voiced your opinion or were disgruntled about something, there was always punishment. Especially if you’re a monster like me,” a slight hysterical chuckle bubbled from Guang Hong’s throat, “you would get punishment fitting for a beast. ‘You’re not human, you’ll heal easily’, they said.

“Three presses every time. Even if your screams shook up Heaven and Hell they wouldn’t stop. Every step out of line, three presses of a hot iron rod on the skin. I detest that fire poker. They don’t hesitate to leave marks anywhere. Burns where they cannot be seen,” Guang Hong tugged on the collar of his robe, exposing overlapping burns lying on otherwise milky white skin. “Thankfully I was taken in by the madam of this teahouse at fourteen. She’s been so unconditionally welcoming but I don’t understand. Why would she invest time into a monster like me? She could have picked anyone else in the orphanage but she wasted effort on me instead. She should have left me – ”

“Guang Hong,” Li Qin’s piercing voice sharply interrupted Guang Hong’s tirade. “Do you honestly think that you’re a monster?”

“Many people call me a beast behind my back, that I’m inhuman – ”

“Do others determine your self-worth? No, because no one gets to decide whether you’re worthy of living. But people need someone to tell them they deserve to be as they are, so I’ll say this now – I care. Nobody should have to go through what you did. But there’s already people like you out there, so I’ll be by your side until you don’t feel broken anymore.”

(My name is Guang Hong, I’m seventeen years young and just as human as everyone else.)

Dreams of Darkness

Singapore International School, Hui, Adrian Ming Hei – 13

There was a presence lurking behind me. Something ominous. Something sinister. It drew nearer, wrapping its snaky, wispy tendrils around me. Shrouded in darkness, the malevolent presence tightened its grip on me. It sucked away all sense of optimism and positivity. A tidal wave of despair crashed into me, and I felt horrible, wretched. I desperately tried to take back control of myself as I felt more and more desolate, but it was too much and there was an awful moment of total, complete dread. And then it stopped, and I knew. *It wasn't real.*

I was going through lucid dreaming – when you're mentally aware that you're in a dream. Where there's an entire realm for you to explore, to discover, to manipulate. Reality is defined by your own brain, endless possibilities restricted only by your imagination. No two lucid dreams are ever the same, and each one is a new adventure. Ever since I experienced my first lucid dream, I'd been fascinated and obsessed with how to control and harness them.

I willed the darkness to dissipate. It fought back, tenaciously clinging on to the outskirts of my semi-consciousness. This was strange – I could usually control all the aspects of my dream. I felt the dream starting to become unstable and tried to calm down to stop the adrenaline rush from waking me up. Once again, I used my mind to firmly push back the darkness, and this time, it instantly obeyed, dissolving into nothingness and disappearing past my peripheral vision. I dismissed its initial resistance as nothing, maybe I wasn't fully immersed yet. Only later would I realize the horrifying significance of it.

I took in my surroundings. Unremarkable stone houses faced me in all directions, packed relatively close to each other. There were a few better-off bungalows here or there, sometimes enclosing a small skywell within, most roofed with bright red ceramic tiles. Multistory buildings were few and far between – these were quite extravagant, with exquisite patterns carved on their façades, their eaves extending far outwards, some connected by verandas and walkways bordering a quaint courtyard. Beyond all of that, a colossal wall, stretching as far as the eye could see, a magnificent sight to comprehend. Along it were watchtowers, their soaring spires adorned with elaborate flags. It was a city, a...an old city. But where were its people? The city was completely empty, save for the gentle rustling of leaves brought about by a light breeze.

I closed my eyes and imagined people. I visualized children playing in the narrow alleyways, street hawkers bartering their goods, young couples twirling parasols, sauntering along the streets. I could almost hear the hustle and bustle. That's more like it. I opened my eyes.

Not a single living soul in sight.

I tried again.

Still, no one.

This was the second anomaly that had happened. First, not being able to dismiss the dark presence. And now this? It wasn't like lucid dreams were unpredictable, it...it wasn't like they were predictable, either, but as an experienced lucid dreamer, I kind of...well...just made them up as I went along. It was eerily quiet.

"Hey!" A sharp voice cut through the air. I was caught off guard and stumbled. I was surprised. I was never surprised! My dream, my rules! I didn't think of it, I didn't conjure it up, so it shouldn't have happened! I recovered quickly and turned around to see where the noise had come from anyway. Standing a couple of metres away from me was a girl. She was maybe a year, two years older than me. She had quite prominent, sharp features, coupled with piercing hazel eyes and wavy waist-length coppery-brown hair. There was a sort of enigmatic aura to her.

"Who are you?" I called out.

"I would ask you the same," she responded curtly. "You don't look like you're from these parts."

I scoffed. It was hard to take in. " 'These parts'? What do you mean, 'these parts'? This is all a figment of my imagination. *You* are a figment of my imagination!"

She looked slightly irritated. "Can a figment of your imagination do this?"

It happened all too quickly. She reached her hand inside the folds of her cloak and drew out a throwing knife, and in one smooth motion released it towards me with deadly momentum. I was too stunned to react, and it looked like that the knife was headed straight towards the dead centre of my heart, but at the last millisecond it swerved upwards and to the left and its edge just grazed the tip of my ear, drawing blood before embedding itself in the wall next to me.

I was lost for words. My jaw dropped as I clutched my stinging ear.

"You didn't imagine that, I suppose?" she smirked. "Thought so." She strode forward to retrieve her knife. "Now tell me. Who are you?"

I told her my name.

"And what are you doing here?"

"Where exactly is here?"

"Shanghai."

Shanghai?! I was a bit shocked to hear this. It just all didn't add up. Usually dreams started in places I was familiar with, or my mind just conjured up completely strange and fantastical realms as I went along. I'd never even been to Shanghai, let alone being able to visit it in a dream coming from *my own mind*!

“But...I’m dreaming.” I protested. “I’m in a dream right now, a dream that I should be able to control, a dream in which I shouldn’t have ended up here, a dream that shouldn’t have had *you* in it –” I sucked in a breath and looked her in the eyes.

For once, she looked unsettlingly spooked. “That was what the other said.” she whispered softly.

“I’m sorry, who?”

“The other.” she brushed back a strand of hair. “I found her, just like I found you, seemingly from out of nowhere. She said she was doing this thing. Dreaming. She too, said I shouldn’t have been here, that she didn’t make me up.”

Another experienced dreamer, I guessed. But what were we doing in the same dream? Why did this girl have a memory of her? How does she even remember things? I was lost in thought. “What...happened to the other?” I asked the girl. No response. I looked up at her. On her face was an expression of unadulterated terror. All the color had drained from her face, her complexion paler than a ghost. Her gaze was looking past me, and she slowly raised an arm to point. “That.”

I didn’t need to turn around to know what she was pointing to. I could already feel the chills sending shivers down my spine. The presence. The darkness. It was back. I took the throwing knife from her, feeling I might need it. There was only one thing I could do. I turned around.

Immediately I felt like I was stabbed in the heart. As if an icy stake had suddenly sprung from the ground and impaled me. I was writhing in absolute torture. Melancholy descended upon me, I felt completely devoid of hope, I was howling and crying. I didn’t want to live anymore. I wanted to die. But there was some part of me still in there. Some part that wasn’t completely deranged. With pure grit and determination, I fought back. I screamed as I used the dwindling part in me that was still human to push back the darkness. It shifted – by an insignificant amount, but that slight shift was all I needed. A glimmer of hope. I used that glimmer, turned it into a spark, I used that spark, turned it into a flame, I used that flame, turned it into a blazing fire. Straining for control, I stood my ground against the presence, willed it to perish, begged it to be gone. I fought fire with fire. But it wasn’t enough. My fire was stronger than its, but it was quickly losing fuel. So I took away its fuel. Mustering up all the strength I had left, I whipped around and released the knife at the girl. It lodged squarely in her skull and she collapsed.

The presence disappeared. Vanished.

While I fought against the presence, it had revealed what it really was. Old Shanghai had been demolished, reduced to rubble, and as it was razed to the ground, gone too were those who had lived there. Their memories, their lifestyle, their traditions...it was tantamount to the wiping out of an entire people, really. That explained the empty city. But their souls remained – souls of hatred, souls of longing, souls of vengeance, taking up the form of the dark amalgamation, the presence, radiating dread and hopelessness. Its very existence fed on one thing – the very few remaining parts of Old Shanghai, where a infinitesimal amount of them remained. And that’s when I realized who, or rather what, the girl was.

Gone

Singapore International School, Ng, Xiuyu Jamie – 13

“Please don’t take my baby girl!”

“Gemma! No! Come back!”

“Mei mei!”

I wake in cold sweat. The nightmares, once faded to the background, have now resurfaced, frequently haunting my dreams the closer I get to the Northern Gate. Rays of orange and yellow bathe the room in a strange glow, telling me the time is dawn. Perfect to start moving.

I grab my small rucksack before leaving the last handful of silver coins on the table, and I am out of the door. The gate is only a miles walk from where I am, and soon, I will be reunited with my family, and away from the horrible Japanese men that captured me so long ago.

When I was only 12, the Japanese broke through the Southern Walls, and raided the entire city. They took our food, clothes, silverware, money and a hostage of ten girl. I was one of them, ripped from my parents arms, the guards ignored my cries for mercy, choosing instead to knock me out. When I woke, we were in a small carriage, being taken to another part of China where the Japanese ruled. Us ten girls were unceremoniously dumped into individual cells at the basement of a worn down manor, our food being bland soup and stale bread. My family’s cries of helplessness rang in my ears each passing night.

We were all finally released ten years later, when it became apparent no one was looking for us. We were thrown out onto the streets, left to fend for ourselves and find our way back. By pure miracle, I had made it, surviving on the meagre amount of coins I had.

Suddenly, a faint buzzing and rumbling sound snaps me out of my thoughts. My head lifts up, and I quicken my pace, getting closer and closer to my destination. As I do so, the incessant noise increases in volume, that I have to draw up my hood to try and block it out in vain. Shouts in Shanghainese can be heard, something about...demolishing? I hurriedly round the last bend—and stumble back, startled.

There is a large, gaping hole in the protective walls surrounding my hometown, and it is getting larger by the minute, workers breaking down the stone. Bewildered, I cross the bridge, and slowly walk along the familiar road to home. Except, my surroundings are not familiar at all. The grand pavilions are gone, replaced by sturdy, drab cottages. The bright street lights damaged, being torn down by unknown faces of a construction group. I do not recognize anyone. Guang He, Shi Min, Jie Lun, the kind lady at the tea shop. They are nowhere to be found, vanished from the ghost of this town.

“Gemma!” I hear a voice.

The familiar brown eyes of Liu Xia, my classmate from long ago, greet me.

“Liu Xia? Thank god you are here, what is going on?” I whisper in confusion.

“Come inside Gemma, you have missed much. I am so glad to see you.” She is smiling but her eyes are drowning in pity...pity for...me?

She leads me into one of the new cottages and sits me down on the couch.

“Wait here, I will pour you some tea.” And she bustles off into the kitchen.

I nod numbly, looking around at the living space. As if in a trance, I get up from the couch, and slowly walk towards the window. Long ago, the scenery would have been amazing, but now, all I see is destruction. The old walls are almost all demolished, pavilions and temples destroyed. My home is unrecognizable, changed, built anew and it makes me sick.

“There is a new governor,” Liu Xia walks up from behind me, “Chen Qimei. He ordered our town to be built afresh, the city walls to be dismantled.”

“And you all allowed this?” I turn towards her, the anger clear in my eyes.

She sighs, and looks at me apologetically, “Most of us were unhappy, but none dared to defy General Chen. He has big plans, dreams to form something called the ‘Republic of China’, a new society.”

“But where is everybody? You’re the one person I’ve recognized out of my walk through this new...place.” I say.

“About that Gemma...” She leads me to the couch again, “Your family left a day after you were taken, on a desperate search to find you.”

“No” I look at her in dread.

“They never came back. I’m so sorry.” She pats my hand and holds it tightly, looking at me in concern, probably wondering how I would take the news.

My parents were dead. That was what she was trying to tell me. Even worse, it is my fault. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, blinking away tears.

“...And...and everybody else?” I ask.

“Most left in search of new places to live.” She tells me, “Do you need a place to stay for the night? I have an extra room in here and I would love for you to—”

“No.” I rip my hand away from her and stalk towards the door, “Thank you for the information, I must be on my way now.”

I leave her behind gaping, and I don’t look back. My feet carry me to the old garden I played in when I was a child. I still remember my mother’s warning.

“Now Gemma, remember not to get too close to the river, it is deep.”

The place is deserted, the distant shouts drowned out by the bubbly stream. I have nothing left. My family is dead, almost all my friends have left, my house has been destroyed and I have no ways to go for a job. This is all pointless, riding around an empty fairground. My old life is a framed photograph, a distant memory, buried under collapsed rubble. The dam breaks and the tears start to flow I collapse on the ground and sob for a forgotten past.

“Now Gemma, remember not to get too close to the river, it is deep.”

My mother’s voice echoes around me. I sneak closer to the edge, and look down at my blurred reflection in the waters. This will be the first time I disobey my parents orders, but they’re not here now, are they? Maybe I will see them soon. I slowly lower myself and sink down, welcoming the pain in my lungs. In another world, I hear shouts of panic and alarm, then Liu Xia’s voice. I can feel hands start to drag me out, but they are too late.

I am already gone.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Joseph's College, Chan, Rafael – 12

Parco was a student majoring in History at university. A few weeks ago, he was on vacation to the city of Shanghai. In fact, he had been assigned by his professor to do a special research project on the history of this ancient Chinese city. He had two months to finish his work, and a week had already passed, but he still hadn't started anything yet.

Parco stepped inside a sacred temple in the city of Shanghai. He hoped that he would be joined by a guided tour. However, the temple looked unexpectedly quiet with no one at all. It was decorated with jade and crystals, with a statue of Buddha in the centre of the main hall. There was a scepter with a blue orb in the Buddha's hand, which made it look solemn and mythical. He didn't know that this temple contained mystic magic, according to a legend.

Out of curiosity, Parco cautiously touched the glittering blue orb. It was a big mistake. A flash sparkled out and temporarily blinded him. When he resumed his eyesight, he was in the middle of a crowded street. Hawkers were selling food and local stuff, carriages and rickshaws were running busily down the streets. Then, he walked up to a passer-by and asked him what date it was. The man gave him a strange stare, and told him to flip through the newspaper. When Parco saw the date on the newspaper, he gasped in disbelief. He was in the Old City of Shanghai of the 19th century!

But what startled him wasn't just the date. It was the year itself, because that was the exact year when his grandfather was born. And most importantly, perhaps it was a coincidence, his great grand-parents and grandfather lived in the Old City of Shanghai.

Now all he wanted to do was to find the house where his great grand-parents lived. His father had once told him that his great grand-parents were kind-hearted and very caring. They were always loved and respected by their neighbours. They lived in a shabby little house with a small pine tree near the Great Eastern Gate. But Parco didn't know where it was. So he decided to try his luck by walking down the main street, hoping that he would find the right place.

During his long walk from the south-side to the far eastern side, Parco noticed that most local Shanghainese spoke Shanghai dialect instead of Mandarin, girls wore Cheongsams or western dresses rather than modern tees and jeans, gentlemen put on their hats as formal dressing, and there was also a bunch of foreigners hanging around the streets. The traditional Shanghai buildings with a touch of the style of the western architecture also caught the eyes of many visitors, not to mention that Parco was a first-time visitor to Shanghai. All these fascinated Parco very much and he couldn't afford to blink for a second. He also chattered with some locals to get a better understanding of the local culture, the origin and the surrounding of this ancient city. He couldn't resist to write down as much as he saw and as much as he heard. After all, he still remembered that he needed to finish his special project on the history of Old Shanghai in a couple of weeks.

Tired and weary, he slowly made his way to the old street market nearby to get some food. Suddenly, he heard a loud voice from his back. "Hello!" He turned to see an old man. When their eyes met, both just stared at each other in silence. There was something familiar in the old man's face, but Parco couldn't figure it out at once. Finally, the old man spoke, "I could see that you are quite worn out, so ... are you new here?" Parco nodded. "Well then, where are you heading?" Parco told him his destination, and all of a sudden, the old man seemed very surprised. He told Parco that he lived there, and asked him why he

would like to go to his house. Parco replied that he was looking for an old man named Xiahan. The old man seemed shocked for a moment, then tried to calm himself down before whispering softly to Parco, "I am Xiahan."

Things happened like a dream for Parco that night. Parco couldn't believe that the old man standing in front of him was his great grandfather. He kept chatting with him for hours. He just made up a lie by telling him that he was a traveler from Southern China and was his distant cousin. Surprisingly, the old man believed him and kindly invited him to his house. There Parco also met his great grandmother who looked rather skinny and pale, although she was pregnant. Now, everything made sense. He had seen that the date was July 4, 1920, and his grandfather would be born three weeks later. And then five weeks later, his great grandmother would pass away silently because of pneumonia.

11p.m. passed. Parco still couldn't sleep. He was fiddling with his smart phone which he had kept safe in his pocket all the way. He dared not make a sound, being afraid that his great grand-parents would be awoken. He was writing a blog entry about his great grandparents, his feelings and finally, his worries of how to get back to the 21st century.

Early next morning, Parco rushed to the door. He figured that he needed to find the temple that brought him here in order to return to the 21st century. So, without telling anyone, he disappeared in the blink of an eye.

After a while, Parco's great grandmother came to Parco's room to wake him up. She was puzzled when she found the room was empty. When she removed Parco's blanket from the bed, it uncovered a small gadget. She didn't know that it was Parco's smart phone. She curiously touched the buttons on the gadget, and then suddenly light came out of it and Parco's blog entry popped up on the screen of the phone. Silently, she read it.

The blog entry was translated into English below:

"I am Parco from the 21st century. I was brought here by accident, and I don't know how to go back. I have met my great grand-parents, and they are now going to give birth to my grandfather three weeks later. But my great grandmother will sadly pass away five weeks later. I am so depressed now. How can I stay here and see my great grandmother die? I want to go home."

Upon reading it, tears strolled down the cheeks of Parco's great grandmother.

That night, Parco found something odd about his great grandmother's behavior. She kept silent during dinner. After dinner, she cuddled him tightly in her arms. Instead of feeling warm, Parco felt a chill down his spine. He wished his terrible thought was just out of his imagination. He rushed to his room, and searched under his blanket for his smart phone. He discovered that what was left under his blanket was a phone which was powered on. Obviously, someone had turned it on and opened Parco's blog entry. With a heavily-laden heart, Parco didn't know how to face his grand-parents. He fell asleep in uneasy thoughts.

Three weeks later, Parco's great grandmother rushed to hospital. She was going to deliver her baby, Parco's grandfather. Parco's eyes were filled with excitement when he saw his baby grandfather. But Parco's joy didn't last long. Another two weeks passed. Parco's great grandmother caught pneumonia, which made her suffer from serious coughing and chest pain. Deep in her heart, she knew that her end was near. So, every day, she tried to cook traditional dishes which Parco used to avoid, but now all looked exceptionally scrumptious to Parco. She told Parco the local folklore and some family tales. She shared her feelings and thoughts with them, for she surely didn't want to waste any time before God's calling. Parco treasured the love, tenderness and care she showed him, as he knew that he would never see her anymore.



Four weeks had passed. As determined by history, Parco's great grandmother finally lost consciousness most of the time due to her sickness. As there was no cure at that time, there was no help at all. As Parco sat beside his great grandmother, she said softly, "One day when you were out, I saw..." Parco replied, "I know." She simply smiled and then asked for the date, for she knew her own fate, that she would die five days later.

It was August 27, 1920. Parco's great grandmother was gone. It was also the time for Parco to go home. He had found the exact temple that brought him here. He bid the last farewell to his great grandfather and grandfather, and then went inside the temple. He walked straight to the statue of Buddha and touched the orb.

From that unbelievable encounter, Parco wrote a brief conclusion in his research project: "There are a lot of precious relics and memoirs in the Old City of Shanghai that are worth our attention. But the most important of all is the affection that bonds family members together in the city."

The Rainbow Crystal: X-files Shanghai

St. Joseph's College, Leung, Caleb – 12

My name was Zack and I was a private detective from America. The year was 1935. My mission was to help Billionaire Hu, a renowned private collector of the world's treasures who resided in Los Angeles to trace his lost "Rainbow Crystal". Billionaire Hu suspected this priceless piece of crystal was craftily switched with a fake piece by a visitor to his grand residence, Chen Xin, who was his business partner living in Shanghai. It was the only piece of its kind on earth, and according to old Chinese legend, the crystal had miraculous healing power. I had just got off the ocean liner from New York, and I was making my way towards Peace Hotel along Nanjing East Road in my trusty Ford model A.

As I was driving, I suddenly heard a loud bang, and the whole car swerved involuntarily off lane. I gripped on the steering wheel tightly to prevent it from crashing. Before I had time to take the next breath, it did a barrel roll, then I blacked out completely.

I had no idea how long I was in an unconscious state, but eventually I came around, only to find myself being strapped to a chair and taped in the mouth. I looked around the room, and realized that my colleague Joe and the Triad men were standing by the door. It was then that I knew what happened to me was not an accident – my car was shot in the tyre by them! I gritted my teeth. Then Joe started to talk, "Well, my other client is also interested in the Crystal. Tell us where the Rainbow Crystal is and we will let you go unscathed."

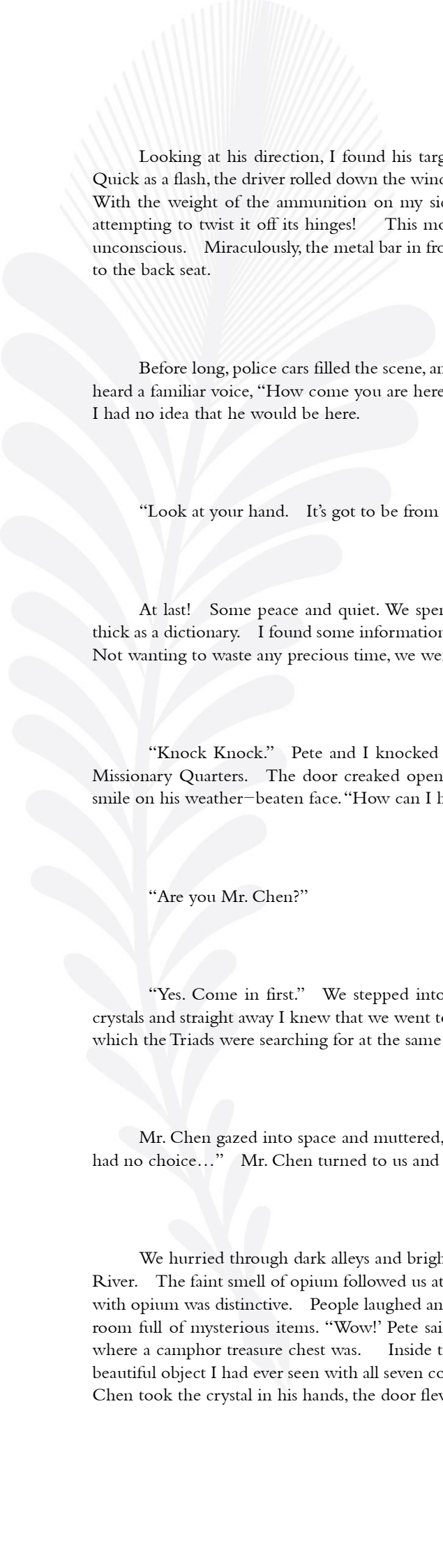
"Arrgghh!" I cried out, frustrated. After a 'nice little talk' with the evil gang, they decided to transfer me to the rich man's mansion – the mansion of "the other client". I was strapped to the back seat in a run down van, while the driver was seated in front.

"Listen to me, you thug. I still have a mission to do. I want you not to ruin my plans, or else you will pay!"

I looked out at the Bund as the little diesel van sputtered along. I looked at the crowds of men in smart coats and women in furs and *cheongsams* hurrying on their ways, and wondered if they knew that evil plans were lurking around at that very moment.

The little van stopped abruptly, and the driver got off and opened the boot. Two coolies from Pier Number Nine pushed a cargo of boxes each towards the van and stored the boxes in the boot. Before continuing the ride, I saw the driver ripping open a box and putting a small piece of metal in his pistol. Ammunition. Boxes of them. 'Oh no! I wonder how many people will be killed! I must stop them!' I thought.

The van continued its journey and stopped again. The Shanghai Bank came to view. 'Aha, there he is! Just in time!' the driver muttered to himself.



Looking at his direction, I found his target – a wealthy-looking white man heading toward the entrance of the Bank. Quick as a flash, the driver rolled down the window and aimed. I had no choice but to throw my weight to one side of the van. With the weight of the ammunition on my side, the whole van did a spin and the driver turned the wheel vigorously as if attempting to twist it off its hinges! This move ended up with the front part of the car hitting a tree trunk, and the driver unconscious. Miraculously, the metal bar in front of me bent at an angle that could be used to cut away the ropes strapping me to the back seat.

Before long, police cars filled the scene, and I saw another car following the police. The driver of that car came out and I heard a familiar voice, “How come you are here?” It was Pete. He was my old colleague when I was still in CIA in America. I had no idea that he would be here.

“Look at your hand. It’s got to be from the crash! Come on, I’ll bring you to my place.”

At last! Some peace and quiet. We spent the night looking up information about the Rainbow Crystal in the files as thick as a dictionary. I found some information that mentioned Chen Xin, the mysterious collector who lived on Peking Road. Not wanting to waste any precious time, we went to Peking Road in search of Chen Xin the next morning.

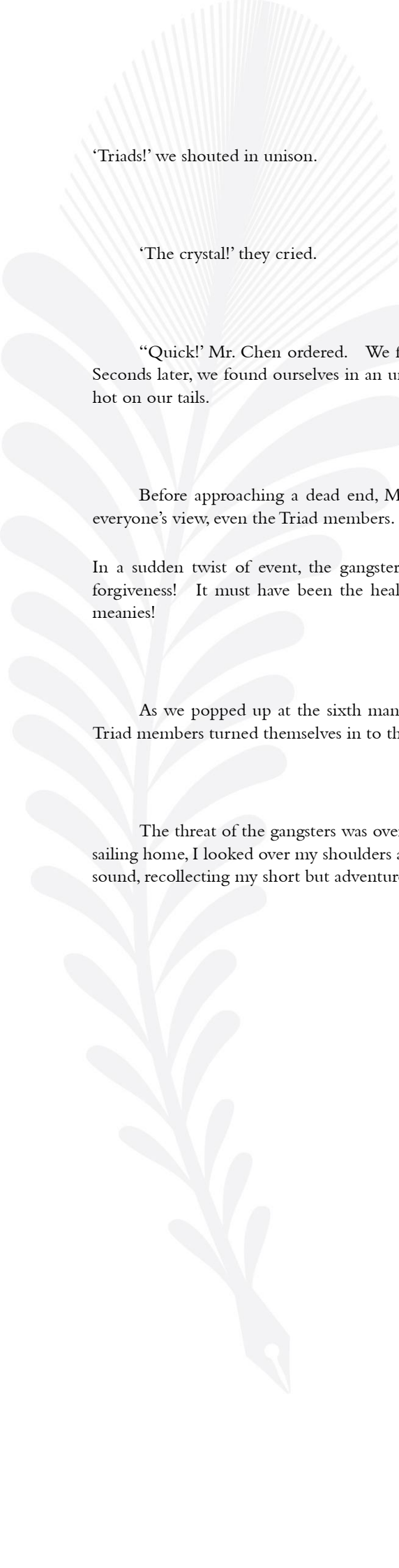
“Knock Knock.” Pete and I knocked on the wind-battered door of a cottage at one end of Peking Road near the Missionary Quarters. The door creaked open slowly, and an old man clad in thick woolen coat greeted us with a wide smile on his weather-beaten face. “How can I help you, young fellas from afar?”

“Are you Mr. Chen?”

“Yes. Come in first.” We stepped into the old but spacious cottage. I was greeted by the decoration of gems and crystals and straight away I knew that we went to the right place. We told him that our mission was to find the Rainbow Crystal, which the Triads were searching for at the same time.

Mr. Chen gazed into space and muttered, “I just wanted to borrow it to heal my dying wife, but he was such a miser. I had no choice...” Mr. Chen turned to us and whispered, “Follow me.”

We hurried through dark alleys and brightly-lit main streets, straight paths and winding roads not far from the Huangpu River. The faint smell of opium followed us at every turn. We stopped at an inn and went inside. The smell of alcohol mixed with opium was distinctive. People laughed and shouted and didn’t even notice us. We walked past them and went upstairs to a room full of mysterious items. “Wow!” Pete said, astounded. The old man pointed his finger to the other end of the room, where a camphor treasure chest was. Inside the treasure chest was none other than the Rainbow Crystal! It was the most beautiful object I had ever seen with all seven colours of the rainbow shining brilliantly, lighting up the whole room. Just as Mr. Chen took the crystal in his hands, the door flew open.



‘Triads!’ we shouted in unison.

‘The crystal!’ they cried.

“Quick!” Mr. Chen ordered. We flung open the window closest to us and hopped down what must have been a slide. Seconds later, we found ourselves in an underground tunnel. But no matter how hard we tried, the Triad members were still hot on our tails.

Before approaching a dead end, Mr. Chen calmly took out the Rainbow Crystal and brought it up high so it was in everyone’s view, even the Triad members.

In a sudden twist of event, the gangsters stopped chasing us and even went down on their knees and begged us for our forgiveness! It must have been the healing powers of the crystal! Mr. Chen used the crystal to out wit a whole gang of meanies!

As we popped up at the sixth manhole, we found ourselves at the police station of the Bund. Without resistance, the Triad members turned themselves in to the police.

The threat of the gangsters was over and Mr. Chen voluntarily returned the Rainbow Crystal. While on board the ship sailing home, I looked over my shoulders and admired the lights of the hustle and bustle of Shanghai, taking in the smell and the sound, recollecting my short but adventurous trip. Goodbye Shanghai, the city of incessant excitement.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Joseph's College, Li, Chitt Jerry – 13

It is the 22nd century. I am a supercentenarian now. Over the past 300 years, I have encountered a diverse range of people but there has never been a place as rich and cosmopolitan as Old Shanghai. I have experienced the growth and decadence; the rogues and adventurers and the poverty and richness.

In 1843, I was the secretary of General Sir George Balfour, the first Consul for the British in Shanghai. At that time, the Taiping Rebellion had started in the southwestern province at Guangxi when local officials launched a campaign of persecution against a millenarian sect known as the God Worshipping Society led by a mad man who believed that he himself was the young brother of Jesus. George and I asked the Qing Green Standard Army to launch an attack against the God Worshipping Society and they were defeated miserably. It was really a great slaughter. But then the strangest thing happened. It became a frenzied, multilayered, ever-accelerating nightmare. The God Worshipping Society was too obsessed and they became power hungry. They turned into orcs riding taoties – ferocious Chinese mythological animals!

One day, I saw a poster stuck on the wall of a Victorian building. It was a message from the Ancient Society. My eyes shone their brightest at that time. It said to help anyone if they are in trouble. Driven by curiosity, I decided to find out about it myself using the written address. It was a totally different world once I turned the metal door knob. It was true to its name, being ancient, fantastic and full of mystery. Some fellow apprentices came to train in the mystic arts under the watchful eyes of a dragon called Azazel. It was unbelievable at first, but after our introduction, the Old and Magnificent Azazel decided to help us. With its bright and piercing eyes, it seemed threatening at first but I later found out that he was a benevolent creature and that he had decided help me fight the orcs and toaties.

“God Worshipping Society! God Worshipping Society!” chanted the army. I told George about Azazel’s fight with the orcs and taoties. He was dumbfounded at first but he believed me. Suddenly the warning trumpets were sounded and they echoed through the land.

Azazel’s speed was so great that the God Worshipping Society had no time to react. The army could only see him as a spark of fire rushing towards them growing bigger and brighter. A hail of sharp arrows leaped up and rattled on his scales but none of the shafts pierced his skin. Before Azazel’s apprentice joined and fought the orcs and taoties, they were already jumping into the water on every side. Some were huddled, mourning and weeping which filled our eardrums as one last swipe of Azazel’s serpentine tail caused their whole army to collapse. His apprentices released magical orbs at their enemies. Either drowning or buried in the inferno, none of them survived. This was the end of the orcs, taoties and the God Worshipping Society, whose rebellion finally perished.

My family and I still lived in Shanghai as I thought we would have a stable life, but I was utterly wrong. In 1932, the Sino-Japanese hostilities first happened in Shanghai.

The Japanese war reached Shanghai. Bombs were dropped on the International Settlement and Shanghai was subsequently occupied by the Japanese. Debris fell everywhere and the buildings collapsed even though they were made from powerful metals. I took my family and my parents to a safe place. Not long after, the battle of Shanghai began. We were trying to flee when we saw Prince Yasuhiko Asaka amongst the civilians. The wise Azazel was swooping down towards the armies when suddenly a

cannon sounded and he was shot out of the air, he turned over and crashed down among the ruins. Many of his apprentices were also killed under their guns but some survived luckily. The people shrieked and ran.

“Who dares to flee shall be beheaded,” Prince Asaka snarled.

Suddenly a risky idea came to mind. I shared my idea with my friend, Charles, as he was good at swordfighting. We went into the office of the Japanese where Charles and I hid behind the door. When we saw two soldiers approaching, we knocked them out. After that we put on their suits. Later we saw some confidential information about their attacks around the world. They planned to plant bombs in different places. Just as we were flipping through the pages, someone shouted, “Intruders!”

We sheathed our swords and quickly outran them. After that we assembled the remaining members of the Ancient Society. We called ourselves the Rebellion. Together we struck back at the Japanese soldiers. When the soldiers rushed at us, we unsheathed our swords swiftly. As we lacked people and were using swords against guns and bombs, we were soon overpowered. The sinister Prince Asaka deployed more soldiers. One day, he sent a muscular soldier against me. He lunged forwards, attacking me with a rapid flurry of stabs, trying to drive me backwards, I dodged aside.

Our weapons clanged and clashed. Then he jabbed and I stumbled backwards and blocked clumsily. He advanced once more, pushing my blade aside, then I tripped over and I cried out. There were gasps from the Rebellion fighters. Fear swelled inside me. He let out a mocking laugh and drew back his sword to lash it down over my throat. But before he could strike, a gun sounded. The bullet was embedded in the soldier’s forehead. I followed the direction to where the bullet came from and looked wide-eyed at the soldier who saved me. He was breathing hard. Shortly after introducing himself as Morse, he said that he had some loyal friends who pitied the people of Shanghai and decided to help us.

So they joined us and we captured the soldiers. We even destroyed the bombs they had planned to detonate and put the pesky Prince Asaka into jail. Though we did not defeat all of them, Japan eventually surrendered in 1945. But then, because the United States wanted to destroy all the Japanese soldiers, it dropped a nuclear bomb on the Japanese cities. They even wanted to drop bombs on Shanghai as they realized that there were a lot of soldiers there as well. Before that, many innocent casualties were found.

Little did I know that Morse was not just a mere Japanese soldier, he was an extraordinary man. He had incredible powers and he healed the people one by one. We were fascinated. Then when we knew Shanghai would soon perish, he made a swiveling portal of fire which we went through to a European country. We went through the portal. His fellow companions began to commit suicide before the nuclear bomb blew up.

I asked him to come with us but he said, “it is only a matter of time. The people of the United States would soon discover me. I am willing to do this for the forgiveness of Japan’s sins.”

From the moment he said this phrase, the atomic bomb sounded in the distance and the bomb cloud was approaching.

“Farewell, my friend.”

Then Morse pushed me through the fading portal and it was the last time I ever saw him. The people and I were touched.

After that I never returned to Shanghai even after the city had been rebuilt. Today, I am 305 years old. I am living in the United States in the year 2117, where technologies have developed increasingly fast due to an economic boom. I have at least



one old man's illness: I suffer from insomnia. Sometimes I lie in my bed, thinking about my special friend Morse who was willing to sacrifice himself after saving his enemies, saying, "I am willing to do this for the forgiveness of Japan's sins."

All these years, he helped me too. The force of his push gave me motion to survive for two hundred more years and I am still as tough as old boots. I think about Charles, who fought back the Japanese valiantly. I think of the orcs and taoties, chanting, "God Worshipping Society!" I think of Old Azazel who was benevolent. I think of Boss George, who was very kind to me. I think of the soldier who nearly took my life. I think about my family members who supported me as the secretary of the Consul in Shanghai. And I think about Old Shanghai, how cosmopolitan this fantastic little city is, how it brings back memories for me. I have learnt how to cherish, treasure and value my deceased friends and family members and even my children now. Like the former member of the Canadian House of Commons Jack Layton said, "Cherish every moment with those you love at every stage of your journey." Though I had lost all my past friends and family members, I still cherish my old friends now.

~ End ~

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Joseph's College, Siu, Chung Yin – 12

Last year, my parents brought me to the Old City of Shanghai on vacation. During our stay, I learnt a lot about the history of the city.

To my surprise when we first arrived, there actually weren't many tall buildings in the old city, though there were definitely plenty of skyscrapers surrounding it. Instead, what we found were a lot of traditional Chinese buildings made from bricks or rocks, with tile roofs. We immediately checked in at a hotel and so began our tour in the Old City of Shanghai.

We visited most of the tourist attractions over the next few days, such as the City God Temple at the center of the old city, and the Yu Garden, which was nearby. We also went to the Confucian Temple of Shanghai in the Huangpu District, and saw the ruins of the ancient city walls. We had a great time in the Old City of Shanghai during this time.

My mother told me that the Confucian Temple was originally a combination of temple and school, and also the construction of the City God Temple was to commemorate three people or "city gods" (Huo Guang, Quin Yobo and Chen Huacheng), who had all served Shanghai well. Moreover, I found that the Yu Garden was first built in the Ming Dynasty by an emperor to comfort his father and the Huxinting Teahouse was once used by the British as base of operations for a few days during the first Opium War. The city walls were built in the 16th century to protect the city from the Japanese pirate raids and dismantled by General Chen Qimei in 1912.

On the eve of our departure, I silently thought about all the places that we'd gone to during the past few days. Eventually, I fell asleep. That night, I had an amazing dream.

Somehow I knew that the dream happened in the Qing Dynasty, during the first Opium War. It started with me in the Yu Garden. I had no idea it was a dream at the time, of course. I wandered in the garden and came across the Huxinting Teahouse. I foolishly went inside, completely forgetting about what my mother had told me about the British. I got a nasty surprise as I came to the main entrance and immediately knew my mistake. There were two British guards standing outside. It was too late to turn back as they had already seen me. "Halt! What is your business here?" One of the guards shouted. "O—officer, this is all a mistake!" I stammered. "The Yu Garden is a strict pedestrian-free area! How did you get in?" He demanded. "I—I don't know, sir." I replied. "You will now follow me to see the general." He ordered, and dragged me inside despite my protests.

The British general was barrel-chested. He looked really intimidating in his blue and gold uniform. "I am general George Gordon. Explain yourself, stranger." He ordered. "What are you doing sneaking around our base of operations? And what are those strange clothes you wear? A t-shirt, you say? Well, I've never heard of it. Are you perhaps a spy from the Japanese?" His questions came like they were being fired by a machine gun, which made me feel quite mad. After all, I hadn't asked to be put down in the Yu Garden in the middle of the night in a completely different age, and I definitely had not asked to be interrogated by some general who accuses people of being Japanese spies! I was about to speak when suddenly, there was a massive explosion outside that shook the whole building!

When the dust and debris settled, I heard the general yell orders to his men to go to defend the city. "What happened?" I asked. "It's the Japanese Pirates," grumbled the general. By now, I was really frightened as more explosions rocked the building. "We have to evacuate now!"

Once we got outside, I saw that the British and Chinese forces were actually winning. However, the Japanese weren't giving up either. I could see why the people were always dreading raids. They fought as fiercely as ever, lobbing explosives over the walls whenever they could, meanwhile barely fending off the British in a swordfight at the same time, trying to cause maximum destruction. In fact, they were so fierce that I soon found myself fighting side by side with the British and the Chinese, though all I could do was whack enemies on the head with this wooden stick I had picked up earlier. To be honest, it was really dangerous and I had a few close calls. Suddenly, a bomb from the Japanese rolled next to the general, who was engaged in combat that he didn't notice. Before I knew what I was doing, I put on a burst of speed, hurtled forward and rugby-tackled the general to the floor. Fortunately it was a miniature bomb, and the explosive radius was not wide. Instead, the bomb blew up a squad of enemy soldiers. Talk about having a taste of your own medicine! And from there, the tide of the battle tilted in our favor and we were able to beat them easily.



After the battle, there were a lot of casualties, but general George Gordon was grateful to me for saving his life and we became friends quickly. We even ended up taking a memorable photo together! But we soon bid each other farewell. As I walked onto the half-destroyed street though, I realized that I had no idea on how to go back to the hotel. For all I knew, there wasn't even a hotel at all at this time! Suddenly, an old woman came towards me and gripped my arm tightly, but when she spoke it was in my mother's voice. "Wake up!"

A couple of months later, I had to write a report on the history of Shanghai for my history homework. As my mother and I were looking for material in the library, my mother suddenly showed me a picture on a book." This is the British General Charles George Gordon. "She told me." He was once a general for the British troops in Shanghai." Say, dear. Doesn't this person standing next to him look a lot like you? "I froze. The caption down below the picture read "General Charles George Gordon and a good friend who saved his life." But the person in the picture did not look similar to me, he looked exactly like me! And yet, the dream that night couldn't possibly have been real, could it?

Cultural Revolution

St. Joseph's College, Wong, Sean – 14

“Yulan. I’ll be waiting for you,” came a fatherly voice, worn and old with the passage of time. Yulan felt a tear run down her face as the father she hadn’t seen for 17 years clasped her hand and continued, “I know you don’t want to come, but here’s the ticket for the last ship to leave Shanghai.” Yulan swore she saw a tear in the old man’s eyes, but she didn’t get the chance as he faded away, his footsteps growing softer as he went. That bitterness quickly turned to resentment—resentment for father’s selfishness; resentment for father’s cowardice; resentment for resentment’s sake.

“Stand up, all victims of oppression,
For the tyrants fear your might...”

Yulan jolted awake to the deafening song blaring in her ears. Outside the window, Red Guards threw antique furniture down from marble mansions onto the puddle-ridden, hard, stone paved Shanghai street. It was a symbol of the bourgeoisie and the decadent past, and it would be smashed.

“Don't cling so hard to your possessions,
For you have nothing if you have no rights...”

Yulan started moving more furniture to barricade her doors. It was folly to hold the door against the tidal wave of Red Guards, but that was all she knew to do. She could hear each word of the song as the chanting Guardsmen stormed across the street. There was the low thump of wooden doors falling; the crisp clang of pottery being hurled across rooms; the cheers as road signs were torn down and new revolutionary names were scribbled on.

“Let racist ignorance be ended,
For respect makes the empires fall...”

They’d broken through the front door. It didn’t take long for fists to bang on Yulan’s fortified door. But Yulan wasn’t opening up, so down fell the axes and batons. Yulan mustered all the strength she could, but it was to no avail as the door collapsed.

“Freedom is merely privilege extended,
Unless enjoyed by one and all!”

Gone were the flowery Qipaos and the smart western suits. They were traded in for uniforms carrying a monotone brand of green and a bright red armband. Revolutionary, every Red Guard said; dull, Yulan would reply. With unmatched spite, the angry mob dragged her out the room, down the stairs with every single bump being registered with painful clarity, until she was finally thrown onto the back of the brand new Liberation brand truck.

Yulan felt a searing pain as the guards forcefully made her kneel. She felt her arms being yanked backwards. All the while, bigger raindrops fell in lieu of whacks. There was a strange wetness on her forehead. It was only when she tasted the salty tinge of blood that she found the massive open wound. The truck started moving as the beating stopped. Yulan jerked upwards to see what was happening only for the leader of the mob to shove her head right back down. The leader seized something from Yulan’s pocket—her lipstick! Several hands immediately held Yulan in place despite her struggling.

“Comrades!” the leader screeched over the rumbling engine, “The old world is ending, yet there are deluded fools who cling to it!” There was a howl of agreement and joy. “We of the Mao Zedong Thought Revolution Group are the judge, jury and executioner of the proletariat! No mercy for the wicked!”

With that, the exquisite lipstick was snapped in half and stamped beneath the soles of the guardsman while what remained was smothered across Yulan’s face, the original glamor and softness molding into a slimy mud that stubbornly stuck despite the

rhythmic pattering of the raindrops. Yulan realized her crime now—the crime of not leaving Shanghai while she had a chance. A chance she had missed 17 years ago...

Father's gloved hand gripped Yulan's own as they sped through the factory. Yulan watched as her father bit his lip, steeled his composure and tidied his suit as he headed towards the thumping noise from the door that only grew in strength and intensity as a seconds ticked by.

Yulan took the chance to scan the factory. Father never liked her walking around this area, it was filthy of grease and wax, inhabited by the scum of the earth. But Yulan didn't care much for her father's words. Yes, she knew being a worker was tough, but she was fascinated by the steaming pots of wax, pigment and perfume being mixed for the thousands of lipsticks that were to adorn the lips of ladies across the breadth of the nation. Yulan adored the red gleam of these seemingly divine sticks that made even the most down woman's face glow in ethereal tones in a matter of seconds.

The thumping on the door grew louder and quicker—the patience of whoever was outside was quite obviously wearing thin. Father swung open the door as a stern officer barged in, complete with the blue sky and the white sun on his cap.

"Oh...Commissar Chiu! How nice to meet you again!"

The commissar, not flattered looked at Yulan and nodded as he spoke, "Mr. Jiang, would you mind talking in a more...secluded place?"

Yulan watched them talk by the rumbling machinery. Father started seemingly steady and confident at first, yet he returned visibly sweating and pale.

"Thank you Mr. Jiang. I hope you understand."

"Yes...yes. Of course. For party and state!"

Father turned towards Yulan. Yulan knew from the swelling drops of sweat on father's forehead that something was terribly wrong. Father took out a handkerchief to wipe away his sweat, "Yulan, the Reds. They're coming. We'll have to leave for Hong Kong tonight."

"Tonight? Why?"

Nervous yet adamant, father continued, "Yulan, you're young and won't be able to see the big picture, but father can. And the big picture tells us that we cannot stay. Those landlords and entrepreneurs the Reds are always rambling about? That's us, Yulan."

But father, don't you see those revolutionaries? They're not here to destroy—they're here to save us and save this country! They're saving us from ourselves!"

"Sweetie, don't be mistaken, when the reds—or "revolutionaries"—as you'd say scream for equality, it means taking from us..."

Yulan realized the futility of continuing the argument, as she threw the very lipsticks that she used to treasure on the floor. It was the product of vile capitalism—the very same feudalistic capitalism that had been plaguing China for centuries.

"Yulan! I know you don't want to leave. But listen to me, take this."

Father placed a ticket for a ship to Hong Kong in her palm, as he continued, "The ship leaves at midnight. Think carefully about the choices you make."

Yulan felt a single tear trickle down her face—how far was too far for the revolution?

“Yulan. I’ll be waiting for you.”

The truck rumbled on, the creak of the wheels synchronized with the chanting of the guardsmen. It went on and on, oblivious to what Yulan was experiencing. A plaque showing a crudely painted “YULAN” was hung on her neck as a badge of shame—the shame of a pretend-westerner, of a capitalist. But that was not her crime. Yulan had been too naïve, too young, too seized by the illogical fervor of revolution.

Customs House over at the Bund tolled the bells of Westminster Quarters. It was midnight and the revolutionaries lined Waibaidu Bridge. Yulan was there, waiting. She had never thought that she would live to see China liberated from the specter of capitalism, yet here she was. Finally, all would enjoy equality; finally, the corruption that had seized China would be beaten back; finally, Shanghai would be free from its decadent past.

In the distance, she heard screams of adorations accompanied by the quick, agile march. The revolution had come! A recently commandeered tank—formerly a counter-revolutionary tool of oppression came rumbling forth, filled to the brim with soldiers. An alien yet irresistible urge grew within Yulan. She wanted to throw herself into the revolution; she had to drag out every single capitalist in the city; she longed to ransack Shanghai for all that it was worth.

Yulan couldn’t help but to start humming a tune—a tune of the revolution. She listened as the hum grew into a murmur, and that murmur transform into a chorus. “Stand up, all victims of oppression,
For the tyrants fear your might...”

The truck finally reached the Bund. Once again she heard Customs House toll its bells, but what she heard wasn’t Westminster Quarters. Instead, out came “The East is Red”. The guardsmen began singing.

“The east is red, the sun rises

From China comes Mao Zedong.”

She had expected them to sing of the victims of oppression, of tyrants ages past. Yet that was all gone. The east was red, and nothing was standing in its path.

Withering Flowers

St. Mary's Canossian College, Cheung, Heron – 14

“He isn’t my Father,”
“He isn’t the Father I used to know.”

Yan, the young boy, couldn’t help but toss and turn in his bed. Because of the horrible, depressing thoughts swirling in his head, he didn’t have a good night’s sleep. Oh, what’s sleep anyway?

“That blasted drug?” a flashback with his friend, Yanzhu, popped into his head, disturbing his sleep again, *“It’s called Opium. Opium’s made from some flowers...I’m not really sure...wait a minute...”* The sympathetic look from his friend stabbed him so hard in the chest, he froze, *“Good grief...”*

Don’t. Please, don’t say it.

“So your father...is a drug addict as well?” Yan choked back the tears that were flowing out and tried to shove the flashback deep down where he could never find it again, but that look of disbelief from Yanzhu haunted him so much as if it were clinging to his brain and not letting go.

“Now, Yan,” a friendly voice echoed in his mind, *“put your hands around the plant like this...yes, just like that. And...pull! There you go! Yan, you’ve plucked your first plant. I’m proud to have you as my son...”* He smiled, only to feel even worse when the realization of not experiencing happy moments like that again struck him.

Not long later, the sudden hit of tobacco made him jolt up. His father had awoken, and the first, absolute thing that he had to do was to inhale the “sweet, freshening” smoke. “His condition is getting worse...” Yan whispered to himself.

He had never been so frightened of the grunts and loudening footsteps heading towards his room, and standing in front of him, was his Father. The whites of his eyes were gleaming pink and dried up slobber stuck to the bottom of his mouth. Yan backed away and curled up into a little ball, hoping to disappear when he saw a whip hanging around his father’s grip.

“Mind your own business, you fool!”

.....

Qing, the younger sister of Yan, placed their handmade ointment on his fresh wounds, which were spreading a tinted red across his limbs. “I think Father’s too harsh on you, Yan,” Qing said, trying her best to avoid the awkward tension in the atmosphere. “I mean,” she stuttered a lot, which made Yan think if he had a terrifying expression on his face, “look at your wounds...they look like they’re popping out.”

Why do people have to pity me so often?

He decided to ignore his sister’s comment, even if he knew that he was being rather impolite. “If you want to help out, go out and do my share of work first. I’ll catch up with yours later.” His younger brother Yijun jolted back, as if he had hidden very well while he eavesdropped. But he obeyed anyway. As Qing led him out to their farmland, they started their work hurriedly.

“Would you abandon me, Father?”

“I would never do that, I promise.”

“Father’s such a liar, and he really is merciless now, isn’t he?” He dared not speak out loud. Father seemed to be everywhere, watching every action of his, and his presence made Yan uncomfortable. Unlike before, when he was the most ideal father you could ask for.

While he walked towards the nearest shades, a chirp rang above him. He was glad at least there was a true friend to back him up. It was Ju, a “talking dove”.

“Any news?” Ju landed on his shoulder. The dove stretched, slapping its feathers into his face, “I heard that a person called Lin Zexu had been sent to abolish trades. He’s likely to solve the opium problem.” Instantly, Yan felt awfully gleeful that his Father may finally be returning. The cheerful one, of course, the one he knew. The one he loved dearly.

A few weeks later, there were angry mobs scattered across the town like messy constellations in the night sky. They were all cursing about a certain incident in Hunan. After listening to Yanzhu’s huge rant, Yan learnt that Lin Zexu had cut the supply of opium; although feeling delighted, his Father seemed to be very calm about the whole situation. He definitely had something up his sleeve.

“Ju, I think you can take a little break now.” Yan said one day as Ju chewed on freshly picked peanuts.

The dove almost choked, “Whagh? Why?”

“The news I heard from Yanzhu are all terrible, war...things like that. I don't want to hear anymore of it.”

After the brief calm before the storm, Father called all of them to the living room one evening, looking as proud as ever. “Take a look inside the crates. Tell me what you see!”

Father had hidden his leftover opium in the crates. As soon as mother peeked in, her eyes were full of sorrow and disappointment. Yan didn’t know which made him feel even more shocked – the hidden drugs or the fact that Father looked even prouder when looking at them instead of him.

But the worst is yet to come.

.....

“You peasants, pack your stuff, and SCRAM! This place belongs to us now.”

As he stacked on another crate of peanuts in another “normal” afternoon, his Mother walked in, and whispered, “Your friend’s here.”

Yanzhu stood at their doorway with an impatient look on his face, “What took you so long?” Yan could only reply with a slight head tilt. His friend grunted and grabbed his hand out of the blue, and without reason, Yan was dragged out to the ports.

The scene didn’t satisfy nor please anyone present. English politicians and soldiers stepped off their ships that had just arrived at the ports. The loud thuds of their shoes stormed louder and louder as they strode, conversations between confused crowds and their footsteps echoed in Yan’s empty, blank mind.

“Shanghai’s a treaty port now.” was another thing Yan had learnt about that day. “But I don’t want them to be here!” Qing groaned. Tears rolled down her cheeks after Yan told her about the whole situation they were in. “What are they going to do to us? I’ve seen an English boy before, and he’s so rude!” Yan’s mind remained blank as Qing continued her pouting. Their mother was silent, as always, as she cuddled a confused Yijun.

“Yan! Yan!” Ju’s panicked chirps startled the young boy. He whipped towards the frantic dove. “The English...they have their eyes on your land.”

“Did you just call me a peasant?” The voices of Yan’s father and an English soldier could be heard. Qing couldn’t help but cross her fingers. “Unfortunately, you are. I’m stating a FACT. And that isn’t a request. It is an ORDER. Pack up your things and leave!”

“Who do you think you are,” their father shouted out crossly, “telling me to leave my paradise? You all, are just stinky old brats who need to learn something called respect!” The irony was harsh in this one. They argued for what seemed like decades, and everything came to a crashing halt when the soldier grabbed hold of his gun and pointed the edge to the man’s chest.

“Are you going to follow our orders or not?”

“Never.”

“Would you abandon me, Father?”

“I would never do that, I promise.”

And the next thing they knew, a deafening gun shot rang out, and drops of blood splattered across the marble floor as their once beloved father collapsed.

“You really are a liar, Father.” His thoughts were buried by the horrified screams of his family, which echoed what seemed to be endlessly.

.....

Yan stayed silent, lying against the corner of the living room, full of despair. He had never experienced what had happened. It was really hard to accept the truth. Qing kept convincing herself that this was all just a terrible nightmare; however, she looked like she's at the edge of her sanity. Yijun just wept with his mom.

“Enough mopin' around!” A passing soldier yelled into their house, “We aren't nice if we're impatient, you know!” The sentence was followed by others' laughter. If this can't anger anyone, what will? But what can they do? Yan wearily got up to his feet and dragged his bag, mostly stuffed with anything he considered precious. Well, he couldn't fit his father in there, not that he could anymore.

Ju was still shocked about, ah, literally everything. Even the dove was all limp, lying on a cabinet and trying to put all the confusing puzzle pieces together. The boy swiftly grasped the dove and placed him into his largest pocket. He proceeded to urge his remaining family members to leave, in case those scandalous soldiers chose to shoot them as well.

They all managed to drag themselves off the marble tiles of their dear home, their weeps leaving off how it all began as a sweet lullaby, gradually ending as the sorrowful requiem. And yet, their destination was still unknown.

Duet

St. Mary's Canossian College, Chu, Nichole – 14

The crisp notes of my pipa and Yue's voice, light as a dancer's feet, wove together in a rich tapestry of sounds. I plucked at the strings, and saw Yue sitting on her ebony chair near me, pose straight; never swaying to the song, not even a bit, unlike me. My music and her sweet, clear voice floated around in her chamber, filling the airy space. She sang – I played – like how we always had done.

Suddenly, Yue stopped. I stopped playing my pipa too, and looked at her beautiful yet expressionless face.

'What's gotten into you?' I asked.

'Nothing,' she replied.

'Silly, when people stop doing things, there's *always* something wrong.'

'No, I – I really am fine, Lin.'

'Come on, you can tell me anything. I've laughed at all your embarrassing things for the past eight years, so there's nothing to worry about! Ha!'

Yue raised a perfectly-arched eyebrow.

'I mean, vice versa. But still – '

'I'm *fine*.'

Seeing that I couldn't sway her, I gave up.

'Should we continue the music?'

'No, I'm tired.'

I placed my pipa on the polished table, slightly alarmed when it made a loud '*thunk*' when my hands slipped a little. Yue raised an eyebrow, again.

'This is not the expected behaviour from a fourteen-year-old girl raised in a high-born family, Lin. I dare say you are the clumsiest girl in the whole city of Shanghai.'

Immediately, I fired back, 'How would you know if I'm the clumsiest? You've never been outside your own house!'

Yue sighed. 'Neither have you.'

'I wish we could explore the city someday. It'll be fun.'

Yue averted my gaze. 'We are noble young ladies, so we are expected to act the part, and stay at home, *indoors*.'

'I know, Yue. But don't you want to see the streets outside? I think I'd like to see the wall that surrounds the city. It sounds beautiful.'

Just then, one of Yue's servants entered the chamber.

'Mistress, your parents asked for you.'

‘I’ll wait here,’ I said.

Yue got up to leave. I caught a glimpse of her face, and was shocked to find her eyes glistening with tears.

When I looked again, however, her face retained her usual expression — stony and not a trace of emotion.

One week later, I stood in front of the gates of Yue’s house with a few of my servants. An older woman and a man, decked out in tasteful finery that only nobles wore, came out from the main hall. They were escorted by a group of servants, and looked pleased.

I was puzzled. They looked to be a visiting party, most probably Yue’s relatives, even though they rarely visited at this time of the year.

I headed for Yue’s room, going through the courtyards, and past the numerous, elaborately built halls. ‘You look terrible,’ I said to Yue, upon entering the luxurious chamber.

‘I’m just a little sick,’ she said, her dark-circled eyes not looking up from her intricate yet flawless embroidery.

‘That’s horrible! What was the cause? Was it something in your dinner last night?’

‘Y—yes.’

‘Well, tell your servants to fetch for some medicine then!’

Yue didn’t meet my eyes, and kept sewing. I noticed a red piece of paper on her table and started to reach for it, but she snatched it away and put it in a drawer.

‘It’s none of your business,’ she said quietly.

‘Is one of your relatives getting married? I saw them just now.’

‘I said it’s none of *your* business!’ she snapped, and hesitated. ‘I apologize for my harsh outburst.’

‘It doesn’t matter.’ I sighed and looked out of the tiny window to the streets of Shanghai in the distance, watching people come and go. Yue wasn’t always this irritable, I thought bewilderedly. An idea suddenly flitted into my mind.

‘Yue, let’s get some servants’ clothes! We will tell the servants that we don’t want to be disturbed for three hours, and then sneak out to the streets. You really need some fresh air.’

To my astonishment, Yue said, after a pause, ‘You’re right. Let’s go out.’

We stepped out onto the streets. I plucked at the rough fabric of my servant’s garb, taking in all the sights and sounds.

People were everywhere, a steady stream from both ends on the streets, or filtered into nooks and crannies at the sides. Some were wheeling their wooden carts full with various goods on the road, rumbling past Yue and I. Hawkers laid food, handmade grass shoes, and other items, out on their mats on the ground, with shouts of ‘Handsome shoes for sale!’ or ‘Only the cheapest and prettiest here!’ . Shops of all kinds rimmed the sides of the streets, selling jars of wine, rolls of fabrics, tea leaves, medicines, and rice, while customers bartered loudly with shop owners. There was hearty laughter and the sound of glasses clinking from the restaurants. The patter of footsteps, the eager babble of talk, and the hubbub of mundane activity merged into a pleasant

symphony, not particularly sophisticated, but something more friendly. I looked up to the sky, which was a brilliant, light blue, occasionally dotted with white puffs of cloud. Birds swooped near the streets, twittering just as excitedly as the passersby.

All of this I pointed out to Yue, who looked entranced by the scene. Her eyes were widened, and she had a hint of a smile.

‘It’s – it’s noisy,’ she said, ‘and it’s quite crowded.’

‘Yes, but don’t you like it?’ I asked.

‘Of course. I’ve never seen anything like this.’ She paused. ‘Thank you... for this. I’m feeling better now.’

‘You’re welcome,’ I exclaimed cheerfully, a warmth seeping into my heart.

‘Now let’s go to the city wall that you wanted to see.’ She started walking, and I followed her.

.....

The wall that surrounded the city towered over Yue and I, an unsmiling, defensive presence. I tried to pick out each individual stone that made it up with my eyes, my task often disrupted by the several soldiers patrolling near the wall.

‘Do you think the pattern of the wall looks like a basket weave?’ I wondered aloud to Yue.

Yue was silent for a few moments, and then she buried her face in her hands.

‘What’s wrong?’ I asked, alarmed.

She uncovered her face, and was struggling to keep her expression blank. ‘I’m alright.’

‘You’re *not* alright, Yue. Please, *tell me* what’s going on.’

‘I’m fine.’ she said, but I could see the tears pooling at the corner of her eyes.

‘I thought this trip made you feel better.’

‘It did. Thank you.’

I felt anger surge through me. ‘Stop being so *mean*! Are you that emotionless? Do you even *try* to feel emotions?’ I yelled.

‘So this is what *you* think I really am?’ Yue said in her deathly cold voice.

We stood in silence, fuming at each other.

I spoke first. ‘Yue, I’m worried about you, and your attitude isn’t helping.’

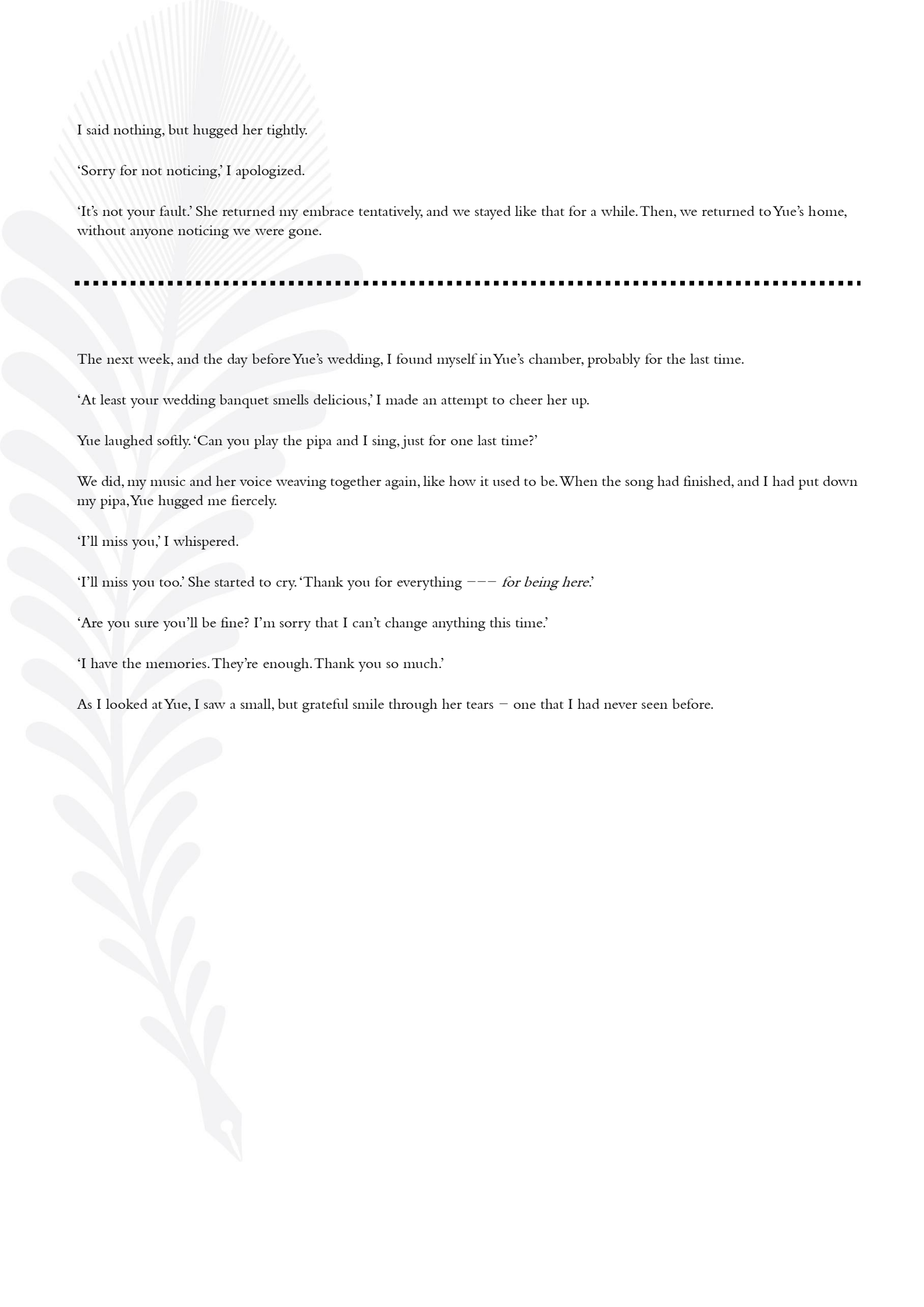
‘Telling you my problems wouldn’t change anything either.’

‘It *would*. Do you remember all those times when we were younger? Once you told me that your mother was sick. You were so afraid that she would die. But then I told my family, and they got some medicine, didn’t they? Your mother got better.’

‘I remember.’ Yue squeezed her eyes shut. ‘Lin, I’m... I’m going to get married off. In a week or so.’

Suddenly, the noble-looking couple, the red wedding invitation, and Yue’s recent attitude all made sense.

‘And I don’t know what it’ll be like... and I won’t be able to see my family... or you...’ A tear slid down her face. ‘I’m scared, I’m sad, and I’m angry because I hate feeling all of these emotions so strongly... it *hurts*...’



I said nothing, but hugged her tightly.

‘Sorry for not noticing,’ I apologized.

‘It’s not your fault.’ She returned my embrace tentatively, and we stayed like that for a while. Then, we returned to Yue’s home, without anyone noticing we were gone.

The next week, and the day before Yue’s wedding, I found myself in Yue’s chamber, probably for the last time.

‘At least your wedding banquet smells delicious,’ I made an attempt to cheer her up.

Yue laughed softly. ‘Can you play the pipa and I sing, just for one last time?’

We did, my music and her voice weaving together again, like how it used to be. When the song had finished, and I had put down my pipa, Yue hugged me fiercely.

‘I’ll miss you,’ I whispered.

‘I’ll miss you too.’ She started to cry. ‘Thank you for everything --- *for being here.*’

‘Are you sure you’ll be fine? I’m sorry that I can’t change anything this time.’

‘I have the memories. They’re enough. Thank you so much.’

As I looked at Yue, I saw a small, but grateful smile through her tears — one that I had never seen before.

The Price and Responsibility of one's Mistakes

St. Mary's Canossian College, Or, Cynthia – 13

As soon as Winsor entered her home, she wished that she had never left. Blood was everywhere as soon as she swung open the unanswered door. She saw the red liquid dripping from the neck of her next of kin. The stench of blood filled her nose and pierced deep into her heart. In a fit of emptiness, she lost strength and the sweet potatoes she'd spared so much time digging out from the ground slipped out of her hand one by one. She peered into lifeless eyes of her parents – they were already milky. The clock couldn't be turned back. Winsor fell to her knees as she let out a groan over the outpouring of guilt and grief.

There was dead silence for a while before Winsor let out a laugh. How foolish she was! If only she hadn't gone out to get food. She should have been on the alert; she should have realized the risk her parents had put themselves in by insulting the British merchants and officials in public with many other Shanghai citizens; she should have known that an unscrupulous merchant as he was would do anything revengeful, even it means taking lives;. After all, the lives of Chinese were nothing to the "honorable Lord Francis", who was among the plenty money-oriented foreigners who occupied Shanghai for a lone reason – making a fortune by means of exploitation and unequal treaties. If only she had stayed ...

But what could she do except from killing and lying? Winsor slowly got back onto her feet. If she killed the people who barged into the house, she would get the whole neighborhood in trouble. Those British officials would accuse them of killing their men and demand compensation which the Chinese authority could barely afford. But then, her parents had paid the cost!

A grin slowly crept onto her face as she wiped away her tears, heading to the streets. Soon Winsor was perfectly armed for battle; all that was left was to tie up her long hair. She cleaned up the house and buried the bodies in the backyard. She waited for the night, while sharpening all of her weapons until the slightest touch could make blood spill. After rethinking her plan once more and hiding all the weapons inside her clothes, she stepped out of the door.

The painful cries for the loss of families flooded the streets. Winsor was definitely not alone. How many innocent lives had they claimed? Winsor didn't waste any time to find out, for nothing could bring them back to the mourning flocks.

The tiled roofs were a very uneven running surface but Winsor somehow enjoyed it. The boat the merchant had boarded was huge but the attempt to admire it dissipated in a minute – at least it did when Winsor saw the girls....

Why were so many girls there? And why were they in clothes Winsor had never seen before? And there were chains binding their hands as they were dragged and shoved to board a ship one by one. Why did those soldiers look so devilish?! Winsor was hit by a pang of a bad omen as she increased speed. When she got close enough, she hid behind a piece of large cargo to eavesdrop on the soldiers' conversation.

'Hey! Do you have any idea where Winsor Huang is? Lucky her! She wasn't there when the troop raided. Well, that's a painful lesson for her to learn about offending Lord Francis, you know!? So where's the girl now?' said the man standing guard.

‘G...General, no one has reported seeing Winsor. But the bodies and blood have already been cleaned up, s...so she might have run away...’

Now Winsor understood everything. The girls captured in the raid at the Chinese settlement were the “compensation” to claim from those who’d refused to surrender to Lord Francis. They would be “sold” to countries as labour. Suddenly, the whole world looked monochrome to Winsor. Those girls were never cargo, and how could they be ‘traded’ like an object? Winsor told herself she had lots to do as she ran back to the village to find help.

Winsor covered her face with a piece of cloth and sprang into action when it was time for the boat to set sail. Winsor quickly bolted onto the boat through the small gaps when the soldiers almost finished reeling in the door. She clutched onto the wooden ceiling as tightly as she could without making a noise. The martial arts lessons she’d taken hadn’t been wasted.

‘Did someone just come in?’

‘Well, do you see anyone?’

‘N...no sir.’

There were six soldiers nearby. It didn’t take Winsor much time to pick her target – the most naïve-looking one. Those who got hit on the head didn’t even have a single moment to react before falling flat on all fours. They were all dead. But Winsor spared the naïve-looking one. What a good bait he would make. His eyes were burning with anger as Winsor got him and flashed a cold grin at him.

‘Boy, what’s your name?’

‘Not telling a killer.’

‘Say, how much pain do you think your parents would feel when you were recruited into the army?’ Winsor was expecting an answer while cleaning the blood on her daggers.

‘What pain? They are PROUD that their son has the honor of serving the Kingdom of Great Britain.’

‘Proud? No one would be proud to see their loved ones losing their lives for the selfish purpose of a very few.’

The innocent-looking guy, obviously speechless upon Winsor’s words, looked back at her for a second.

‘Is this about the girls?’

‘Well, what do you think?’

‘This is their punishment. Their families spoil the plans of Lord Francis. What do they expect to get, huh?’

The grin of Winsor’s face was wiped off in an instance as she grabbed the soldier by his collar. ‘They’re going to be sold off as prostitutes or slaves, you idiot!’

'It's all for our country! We'll need extra labour in our colonies,' he retorted.

'What a *perfect* excuse! Do you really think "serving your country" is enough to relieve you from your guilty conscience? You and your comrades slaughtered people in our city, boy! You took lives! What's more, you sell innocent girls off to unknown territories just for money! Smell your dirty bloody hands!'

Shock, laden with guilt, was imprinted on the soldier's face. How impetuous had he been?

The soldier's loss in contemplation suddenly brought Winsor back to her mission. She had to sink the whole vessel along with all the people in it after rescuing the girls. She realized she'd wasted too much time on him. Before releasing the soldier's collar from her grip, Winsor snatched his pistol. When she was about to turn and head towards the end of the passage ...

'It's Fein...'

'What...?' Winsor asked while looking back, slowing down her pace.

'The name's Fein, not "boy".' He smiled sadly at Winsor, and she felt a pang of mercy for the poor guy.

'I'm sinking the ship, so you'd better escape fast. Where are the girls?' Winsor asked when she caught up to him.

'Go downstairs and turn left. It's at the end and here's the key,' Fein said as he tossed her the key. 'I'll go with you.'

That was a good boy; he was going to tell his friends the truth. Winsor hoped that at least there wouldn't be so many guards to handle, or there'd be a bloodbath.

Luckily it was Fein's friends that guarded the room where they kept the girls. That spot was guard-free then. There was only one staircase leading down there, so anyone that entered or exited will be clearly visible to Winsor. She took down a bunch of other soldiers on the way, some even before they could utter a single word.

'I am here to save you girls. Your families are outside on the boats. Jump off and swim to them as fast as you can, alright?' The girls nodded their heads obediently. Winsor returned a reassuring nod before taking them all outside to the deck.

Winsor was the first to reach there, clearing a handful more guards. She checked if the boats waiting were ready and then herded the girls overboard quickly. Upon reaching the cabin where Lord Francis was, she splashed oil at the doorway, lit a match and watched the room burn. The autumn wind helped the fire to spread. In water not far away, Winsor watched the huge boat engulfed in flames and sink underwater.

'A storm struck and sank the boat,' the British officers were told when they came to investigate the mysterious accident that kept Lord Francis and his people forever in the realm of China. Of course, it would remain an unfortunate accident ...

Betrayal

St. Mary's Canossian College, Tam, Ashlyn – 13

The desire tore at my body like a hunting beast. I craved for more and more until the sense of relaxation enveloped me in its tender arms. As I breathed in the sweet mist permeating the tiny room, calmness took over gradually. When my vision started to clear, a succession of images from the past flashed in my mind ...

The tangy smell of salt, mixed with the loud shouts of coolies, filled the air at the port of Shanghai, where I worked as a military officer in the navy. Seagulls cawed in the crystal sky above but there wasn't any time for anyone to admire the scenery. Those lazy scoundrels would ditch their work any time they got the chance.

A gruff voice was bawling nearby, "You Chinese would be better off opening more treaty ports and leasing more territory to our Majesty! Look, Shanghai is a perfect place for trading tea, silk and OPIUM for sure! How silly of you to have wasted all this glorious potential!" I glanced around, searching for the source of commotion, when my eyes caught sight of a stout man, in British navy uniform, glaring at one of our local officers. He was red with fury. With a great humph, he turned and marched towards a huge monster-like vehicle waiting on the side of the road, with clouds of black smoke puffed out from its pipe, tainting the blue sky with streaks of gray. Peace resumed; so it seemed.

In a pitch black alley, a silhouette of a short man was addressing a band of tall, muscular men. They stood at attention with ramrod straight backs.

"We were unsuccessful in convincing the Chinese to hand over the port. We have to use any means necessary. Operation Commence! Now we have a navy officer in a position high enough – take him!"

Later that night, I was woken when rough hands grabbed me at the collar. Darkness engulfed everything; a natural instinct took over me and I began kicking and yelling but deep down, I knew no one would help me, for fear of offending someone they didn't dare to mess with.

"Ha, my comrades'll get you! You won't get away with this!" I choked out.

"SHUT UP, you Chinese swine." The words hissed in my ears.

“Knock him out!” I felt a flash of pain at the back of my head before falling into oblivion.

A feeling of euphoria seemed to have relieved the aching of my skull but still, I couldn’t remember who I was. I felt like I was drifting outside my body and had detached from all feelings. I opened my eyes to a brown mist in a cold room surrounded by granite. The mist was blown in through a vent barely seen in the ceiling corner. That was all I could perceive in my confused mind.

An iron door I hadn’t seen squeaked open on its rusty hinges and a short and stout man stomped in. I recognized him as the same one who had been arguing with the local officer at the port. There was a cruel glint in his eyes in his otherwise impassive face when he stared down at me. For some reason, the sight of him caused a cackle to bubble up from my throat.

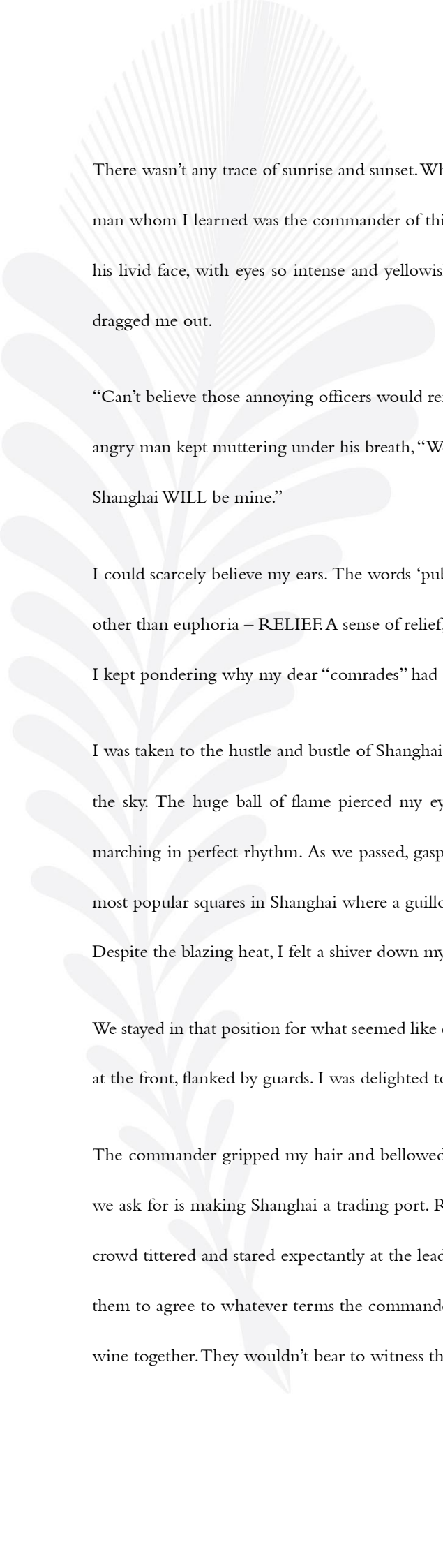
“Well, well. It looks like the drug’s taking effect quite swiftly. That’s expected, given your prolonged exposure to it. You’ve been in here, breathing in this *amazing* essence for three days. The other people in Shanghai would have been enjoying it too, had it not been for the stubborn Chinese authority.”

The room was swimming.

The man just giggled, kicked me with his boots and continued, “Very soon, they WILL! We’ll make *you* tell them how much you adore opium and everyone’ll be flocking to buy some. I’ll get promoted for accomplishing what countless others have failed. We British will be rich after the treaty’s signed – right here in Shanghai – the seat of Chinese authority!” He slapped me in the face and sneered, “You look like an idiot, grinning like that. Cut it out or I’ll give you a smack on the jaw!”

The door slammed shut and his footsteps faded in the distance.

I lost count of how long I stayed in that dreadful place where I was tortured, to the delight of the British colonels. They frequently withheld the opium that I so badly craved and mocked me until I latched onto them, begging for more. I felt bile reaching my throat and puked all over the floor. There were puddles of vomit, both wet and dry, littering the floor. I didn’t have any strength left to do much except crawling around like a disgusting worm. The need, the desperate need for the drug, was so severe that I thought all life was meaningless without it.



There wasn't any trace of sunrise and sunset. When I was counting down on my days, I was shaken from my restless sleep by the man whom I learned was the commander of this whole operation. With my deteriorating eyesight, I could just barely make out his livid face, with eyes so intense and yellowish shark-like teeth glinting in the dim light. He grabbed me by the collar and dragged me out.

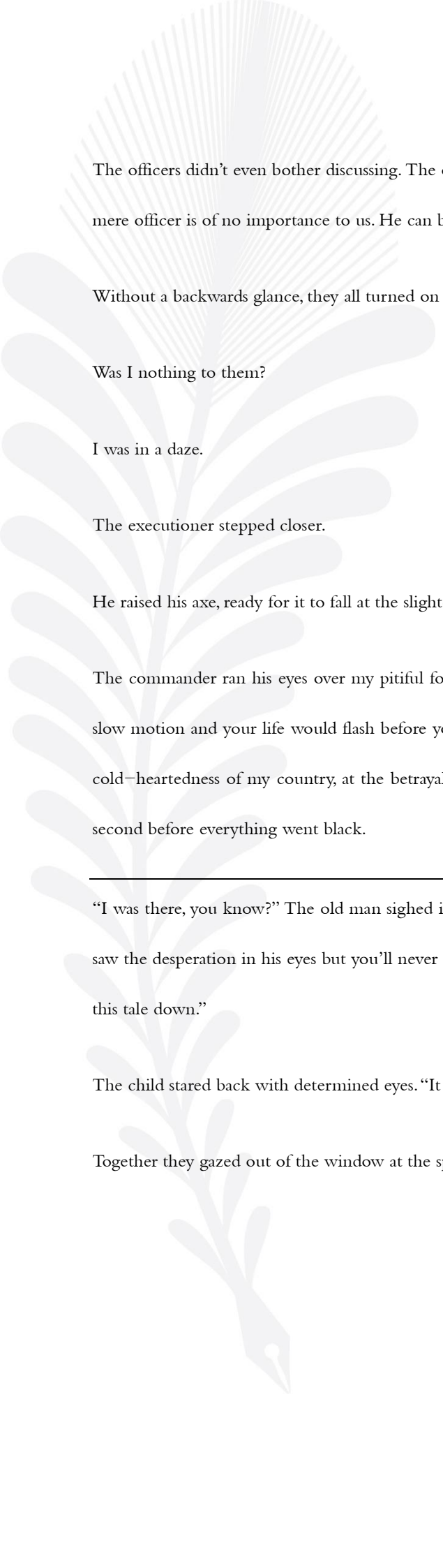
"Can't believe those annoying officers would refuse to exchange your life for a trading port! They're as stubborn as a mule," the angry man kept muttering under his breath, "We need to use our trump card now. A public execution will definitely do the job. Shanghai WILL be mine."

I could scarcely believe my ears. The words 'public execution' was spinning around my head. For the first time, I felt something other than euphoria – RELIEF. A sense of relief, finally after all this torment, for being "free" from this hellhole. In my giddiness, I kept pondering why my dear "comrades" had turned their back on me.

I was taken to the hustle and bustle of Shanghai where you could see the defensive wall faintly outlined against the backdrop of the sky. The huge ball of flame pierced my eyes. I was the odd one out among a troop of smartly-dressed British soldiers marching in perfect rhythm. As we passed, gasps floated up around us but no one dared to interfere. We arrived at one of the most popular squares in Shanghai where a guillotine was erected. The sunlight hit the edge of the sharp blade, making it sparkle. Despite the blazing heat, I felt a shiver down my spine.

We stayed in that position for what seemed like eternity. Suddenly, the crowd parted like the Red Sea and the officers fanned out at the front, flanked by guards. I was delighted to see my comrades; surely they would bring an end to my suffering.

The commander gripped my hair and bellowed, "Officers of Shanghai, we've got one of your officers. To ensure his return, all we ask for is making Shanghai a trading port. Refuse us, and this man loses his head. You have to give your answer now." The crowd tittered and stared expectantly at the leaders of the city. Hearing the words, I looked eagerly at them, silently beseeching them to agree to whatever terms the commander had set. There stood my comrades, with whom I had shared many a drink of wine together. They wouldn't bear to witness the execution of their dear friend, would they?



The officers didn't even bother discussing. The oldest stepped forward and told the commander," Do what you will with him. A mere officer is of no importance to us. He can be replaced." I was stunned, by the sheer impassiveness of his face.

Without a backwards glance, they all turned on their heels and strode away.

Was I nothing to them?

I was in a daze.

The executioner stepped closer.

He raised his axe, ready for it to fall at the slightest signal.

The commander ran his eyes over my pitiful form and ordered," Finish him." As I had often heard, everything would fall into slow motion and your life would flash before your eyes. That was a lie. You wouldn't have the time. All I felt was anger, at the cold-heartedness of my country, at the betrayal of my friends, and relief, at the sweet and long-awaited release for a split second before everything went black.

"I was there, you know?" The old man sighed in his rocking chair. He smiled down at the child at his feet. "I swung the axe. I saw the desperation in his eyes but you'll never read that story in any history book ever. I guess it'll have to live as a tale, to pass this tale down."

The child stared back with determined eyes. "It will, Grandpa. I promise!"

Together they gazed out of the window at the sparkles of the stars.

When East Meets West

St. Mary's Canossian College, Tam, Celine – 14

It was a bright autumn afternoon in 1910. Mackerel clouds were drifting under the gleaming disk of sun, and the rays of sunlight shone on the Shanghainese terrace, at which sat two sophisticated Chinese ladies in their seventies. Looking first at each other, the older lady, with her hair in a Victorian updo, sipped from her cup of Earl Grey tea, while the younger lady, with a curled fringe, tasted her cup of oolong tea. With the same expression of enlightenment, they smiled at each other as their memories flew back sixty years ago.

As the precious daughters of Master Liu, Dingxiang and Dinglan, who were born a year apart, had been the apples of his eyes. Ever since the death of his wife shortly after giving birth to Dinglan, people wondered how unusual it was for a wealthy man like Master Liu to insist on remaining single, especially when he was one of the wealthiest men in the Old City of Shanghai. This legendary Old City has been in its current location since the ancient times. After the Opium War in 1842, a number of foreign concessions had been set up outside the Old City. Despite this foreign influence, the Old City was still under Chinese control within the 10m high, 5km long walls. The wall served as a border between the East and the West, as a result, the Old City of Shanghai was also known as 'The Chinese City'.

Despite the loss of their mother, Dingxiang and Dinglan, who were born with a silver spoon in their mouths, had a wonderful childhood, one that would make people envious. However nothing lasts forever, the turmoil in life revealed itself when the sisters reached the age of marriageability. Dinglan could never forget the day when the matchmaker, Aunt Lien, walked into the Liu's mansion.

"As the best matchmaker in the Old City, I can definitely find the perfect match for the daughters of the prestigious Liu family." Aunt Lien looked passionate and enthusiastic when she first met Master Liu. Her bright smile fell when her glance moved from Dingxiang towards Dinglan. Subconsciously, Dinglan believed Aunt Lien was looking at her feet, and she found it uncomfortable. As early as the 10th century, foot-binding was considered as attractive. It has long been thought to be able to increase the marriageability of women. A small foot in China, no difference from a tiny waist in Victorian England, represented the height of female refinement.

"Can I gather more information from the two precious Ms. Liu's?" Aunt Lien asked for permission from Master Liu and tried hard to cover her disappointment from her facial expression upon seeing Dinglan's feet. Dinglan was born premature, and since then, she had been weak throughout her childhood, therefore Master Liu did not have her go through the process of foot-binding. As per Dingxiang, she had a pair of feet with only three inches' in length, of which Aunt Lien instantly directed her attention. She turned to Mr. Liu assertively, "With this pair of perfect lotus feet, I can guarantee Dingxian a highly compatible husband." Yet, Dinglan had been ignored from the scene. Not only did the world judge a woman by her feet, so did Dinglan look down on herself due to this social norm. No one at that moment could have understood the humiliation that she was experiencing.

In less than a year, Dingxiang married the eldest son of a ministry president, and they had the most glamorous wedding of their time; whilst Dinglan had been rejected for several families and eventually left the Old City of Shanghai with a heavy heart, and instead chose to live at a foreign concession just outside of the city walls.



Another five years passed by, and Dinglan had never stepped foot inside of the city walls, only until when she was informed that Mr. Liu had been seriously ill and was on the brink of death. Wearing her best domed skirts, made fuller by deep ruffles, Dinglan, with her preferred name Daisy, took her first steps into the city. With the influence of Western culture, Daisy was surprised how faded her sense of humiliation had been of that unforgettable incident. To some extent, Daisy even found it disgusting when she came across a woman with lotus feet passing by in her sedan.

Driven by the sense of responsibility, Daisy decided to move back to take care of her deathly-ill father. As she arrived at the mansion, she met her nieces, the daughters of Dingxiang, for the first time.

“Chunmei and Daidi, greet your Aunt Dinglan.” Dingxiang, who wore a silky dress with sophisticated details, elegantly ordered her four—and three—year—old daughters. The twin girls bowed immediately. Daisy had no intention to correct Dingxiang or the girls; moreover, she had thought that Dingxiang had been leading a joyous life for the past five years. On the other hand, Dingxiang was impressed with Daisy’s Westernized outfit.

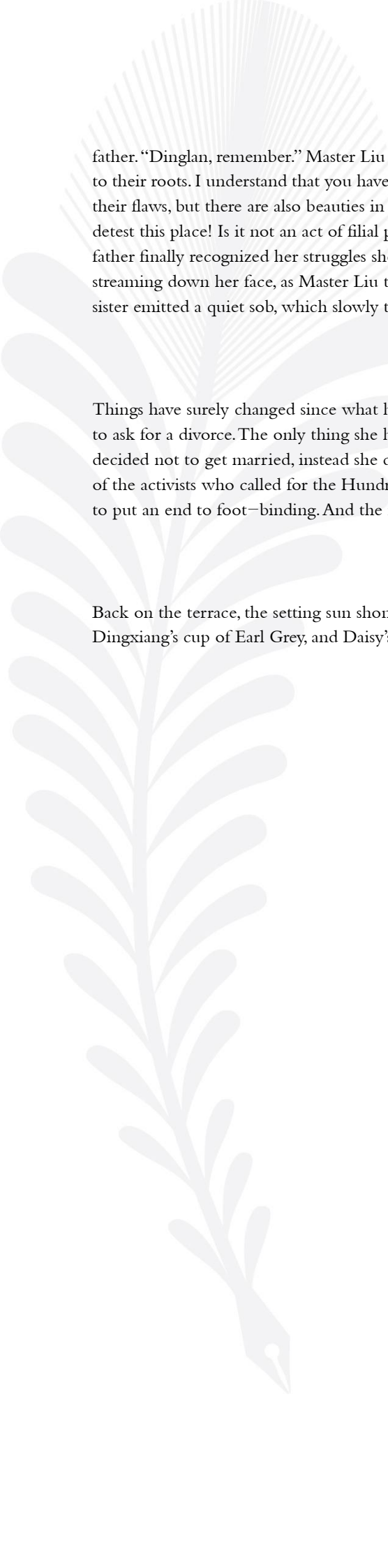
“How have you been?” The two sisters asked each other simultaneously. When they looked at each other as memories were brought to mind, tears welled up in their eyes.

“Having a rough time” was an understatement to describe what Dingxiang had been gone through in the past few years. As the eldest son of the patriarchal family, Dingxiang’s husband blamed Dingxiang for being sonless after giving birth to two daughters and took this as an excuse to marry a mistress two years ago. The status of Dingxiang in the family was at stake. The situation got even worse when the mistress gave birth to a son a year ago. These all had been too overwhelming, in which Dingxiang did not know where to start. Daisy noticed the sorrow in the eyes of Dingxiang and instantly realized her sister was not living as well as she thought.

“Why don’t you leave?” Daisy questioned Dingxiang sympathetically after hearing her story, “You are the daughter of Liu’s, and you can live an extraordinary life without him.” Dingxiang was puzzled with what her sister was suggesting. It was a disgrace or even a humiliation to the family for a traditional Chinese woman to get divorced. Daisy understood her worries and said, “No one can diminish your sense of worthiness without your permission. And we, Liu’s daughters, deserve to determine our own sense of ourselves, instead of being influenced by others. This is your own journey of life, and you should declare your right to the pursuit of happiness. The world is your oyster, and it is up to you to find the pearls. Come with me, and let us explore the world outside these walls.”

These trips to the foreign concession were journeys of rediscovery of the sense of self for Dingxiang. Within a month, she had talked to an Italian Catholic pastor, shook hands with a British sailor, and met a French businessman. Her world has been changed. Not only did she reformulate her narrowed view of women’s life and understand her unresolved trauma from her marriage, she also regained her confidence in facing her damaged marriage.

One day, when the two sisters were just about to leave for another visit to the foreign concessions, a servant rushed in and told the sisters that Master Liu’s health was deteriorating rapidly. Dingxiang and Daisy felt so helpless in front of the deathbed of their



father. “Dinglan, remember.” Master Liu turned to Daisy, just as she began to turn her head away to weep. “Falling leaves return to their roots. I understand that you have gone through deep humiliation, but in the end, this is still your origin. All cultures have their flaws, but there are also beauties in it. Just like how you are willing to come back to care for me, despite how much you detest this place! Is it not an act of filial piety? Look around, and discover the beauty of your roots.” Daisy felt relieved when her father finally recognized her struggles she encountered all these years. She slowly turned back to look at her father, tears silently streaming down her face, as Master Liu took his last breath. Dingxiang stepped forward and embraced Daisy, while the younger sister emitted a quiet sob, which slowly turned into a wail.

Things have surely changed since what had happened years ago. With Daisy’s encouragement, Dingxiang mustered her courage to ask for a divorce. The only thing she hoped for her daughters was to be brought up with confidence. Meanwhile, Daisy had decided not to get married, instead she devoted her years to push for gender equality in China, her homeland. She became one of the activists who called for the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898, which advocated education for women and were dedicated to put an end to foot-binding. And the rest is history.

Back on the terrace, the setting sun shone onto two cups of cooled tea as the two sisters, hand in hand, left the balcony. Dingxiang’s cup of Earl Grey, and Daisy’s cup of oolong.

Battle Hymn of the Magistrate

St. Mary's Canossian College, Yu, Serena – 13

“The governor is here, and he would like to meet you.”

“Thank you, Qiao. I will be there in a moment.” I said.

I combed my hair, tidied my suit and looked into the mirror. I saw the confident and smart-looking magistrate of Shanghai city.

Qiao handed me the stack of paper, the development plan I drafted. One last glance in the mirror, and I was ready to go. The governor would be pleased with my ideas, I was sure.

From the window, I saw the modern Shanghai. How I loved its hustle-and-bustle.

Time flies, and everything has changed.

I was three years old when I lost my parents. I didn't know how or why they died, in fact, nobody knew.

It was a bitter winter morning, and brisk wind was slashing the windows. It was never warm enough in our little hut, and I was shivering from the cold, so mum and dad left for the forest, intended to cut wood for a fire.

“Stay still, honey. Don't cry. We'll be back soon.” My mother said to me. I chewed my finger and waited for them to return. But they never did.

It was my aunt, Yan, who looked after me. Her husband died long time ago, in the civil war. Her four daughters had also died, either because of illness, or hunger. Aunt Yan earned money by doing laundry for the rich. At first, the money was enough for both of us to buy some basic food, and once in a year I would have some pocket money. However, one by one the rich chased Aunt Yan away.

“Do not touch my clothes, filthy woman.” The noble woman in silk dresses living in the Chen's palace said to my aunt one day.

“Look at yourself, the dirt on your face, your ragged clothes. You will dirty my silk dresses. Poor people like you have a very tricky mind, and you have probably stolen numerous diamonds on my clothes or you have damaged them on purpose! Go away!”

The woman looked nice, with white teeth and glossy red lips, but her heart did not share any of the beauty of her appearance.

Other rich people had said similar things to my aunt, and eventually no one paid her to do laundry. I did not receive pocket money from then on, and I had only two sweet potatoes to eat in a day. Aunt Yan had one.

Aunt Yan found a job as a waitress in a high-ranking restaurant, the ‘Grand Shanghai Restaurant’. The wealthy always dined there, with their pretty wives and dozens of servants following.

Aunt Yan wore skirts to work. I had never seen her in a dress before. She used to wear overalls. Occasionally she would bring home some goodies, sometimes a piece of candy or a box of heart-shaped chocolate. I didn't know how she got them, but I could see the labels on the wrapping paper. The logo of Oriental Department Store. I screamed when I saw the brand name. It was the most expensive shop in the whole Shanghai city! The cheapest goods in there, which was a piece of sticker, cost seven dollars, which was more than enough for me to buy 30 buns!

Why did Aunt Yan suddenly have so much money? I didn't know. Maybe the restaurant gave it to her, maybe the customers. I noticed that Aunt Yan wore shorter and shorter skirts to work, and she wore sleeveless tank tops.

I received pocket money again, every month.

One day Aunt Yan went home with low spirits. She was fired. She did not tell me the reason, and I could tell she was not happy about that. She asked me to return my pocket money, and I did, of course.

The hawkers were on the streets, peddling.

"Soup dumplings! Soup dumplings! Juicy and delicious!" they were shouting. I looked at Aunt Yan longingly, and my mouth watered.

She patted my shoulder, and said, "Not now, dear, we don't have enough money. Sooner or later, I will earn a lot, and you will be taken care of like a princess."

.....

Some weeks later my aunt told me that she had found a job. I was really happy, and Aunt Yan looked brighter than ever, the color returning to her pale face.

She earned quite a high income. I had meat in every meal, and the lunch boxes that Aunt Yan prepared for me were always packed with tasty food.

"What kind of work are you doing actually?" I asked one day.

Aunt Yan was suddenly very angry and she became red in the face. I did not know what happened, and I thought my aunt was mad. I wailed, and wailed, hoping that Aunt Yan would comfort me, as she always did. Yet she didn't, not this time, she stomped towards me and slapped me. I stopped crying immediately, and I froze in fright.

My aunt had never slapped me before. She went into her room and slammed the door loudly.

I sat in the living room, still shocked at what happened. Then I heard Aunt Yan crying bitterly, and I was worried. I felt as if I had been stabbed with a knife.

My aunt went to work as usual, and started bringing strangers into our house. They were often old but wealthy men. I was puzzled. Did Aunt Yan have new boyfriends? Did she fell in love with these men?

I remembered the magistrate of Shanghai had been to our house, hand in hand with my aunt. I asked him naively, "What were you two doing in Aunt Yan's bedroom? Were you in love?"

He laughed, pointed a finger towards me, and laughed some more until tears rolled down. "Me? In love with such a woman? Your aunt is a courtesan, kid." He sneered.

I dropped my jaw, and was too shocked to say anything.

My aunt was a courtesan.

Two lines of hot tears streamed along my cheek, and I felt very bad.

“You knew,” my aunt said, “But you must know that I do not enjoy this work. I only do this for the high income. With the money, I can buy food, good food, and you can have an enjoyable life. You can have as much soup dumplings as you want.”

“But I don’t want soup dumplings! I would rather have sweet potatoes, if I can have my aunt back!”

“Dear, I am your aunt. I still love you very much, more than ever, more than anyone. It doesn’t matter what I do, whether you live a good life is all that matters.”

“Those men who pay you, your customers, they don’t respect you, they humiliate you, isn’t that right? I won’t be happy if you are not, Aunt Yan.”

“Whether I am happy is not important. There is no other thing I can do, dear. I have tried other jobs, but I failed. Our fate is not in our hands, when you are born poor, you are deemed to suffer. I care about the income I can earn, and with the money, you will not need to suffer anymore.”

“Study hard, walk step by step on the rough road of life and eventually you will reach the stars. All that I have done will be worth it, and I believe that you will achieve great things. Be hardworking.” Aunt Yan patted my head, and went into her room.

I had never forgotten what Aunt Yan said to me. She used the money she earned to apply me into a well-known school. I dared not idle or waste any money, and I pursue my dream with perseverance. I strived to succeed, and all the hard work paid off, I became the magistrate of Shanghai.

I worked on eliminating the disparity between the rich and poor, and people in Shanghai would not suffer like my aunt did anymore.

I believed that our fate is in our hands, and the future is ours to shape.

Sorry, Aunt Yan, that I do not agree with you. Yet you had taught me a lot, and you helped me transform to who I am now. I am no longer a sparrow that cannot fly high, but a phoenix that rises from the ashes, and soars.

Rest in peace, my dear aunt, and see the city of Shanghai sprout in my nurture.

Hui Jia

St. Paul's Convent School, Au, Andrea – 14

The sane part of me made a final attempt to surpass my seemingly illogical and irrational thoughts – to stay afloat, to stay on top, to be the upper hand; upon failing miserably, it accepted its failure with considerable reluctance, perishing into a pit of dark nothingness. I was left without rules, without guidelines and without logical thoughts. I was still myself, yet I wasn't.

They were so close, so close, and I was there teeter–tottering on the edge, holding on onto the railing with numb and loose fingers alongside a thread of unreasonable adamanance that was left behind by the shards of my sane self, on the verge of letting go.

“Take the plunge, Ellie.”

Upon her slight scowl, I knew I had bought the wrong kind of wood pulp paper. The artist's deft fingers immediately reached for her art book and skimmed through it in search of paper with better quality. Pleased with what she had came up with, the artist dipped her trusty old paintbrush into the ironically new wooden art palette; colours transferring itself from the tip of it to the surface of the newly acquired paper, given the artist's guileful maneuvering of the worn paintbrush. Swirls of green appeared on the paper: viridian befriending myrtle green; dartmouth green siding with fern green; mantis clashing with brunswick green, encased in a fierce battle of disagreement.

Mama was painting again.

Jeanne seemed to have an arguably weird relationship with art– a love–hate relationship. It was her pastime, her labour of love and her solace from Father's occasional absence– those were the times when she loved art; yet she treated it with slight animosity when it came between Father and her; or when it was done under pressure. Yet despite their peculiar relationship, she never parted with it– at least that was what I presumed.

It was a typical sweltering summer day in Shanghai when a supposed business partner of Father's brought about the news of his unanticipated assassination along with a rather preposterous *peace* treaty for Mama to discuss with. Having been treated as an equal for her whole life, her disconcerted attitude at the loss of control was much expected by *Jiejie* and I. As much as Mama tried to gain the upper hand by raising her voice and refusing to concede to the treaty, she soon realized she was treading on thin ice; her dogged demeanour proved useless in alleviating the situation. Much to Mama's constant harrumph of disapproval, the treaty was dealt with and signed in less than an hour– we were to pay 50,000Yuan as a compensation fee, 20,000Yuan as suppression fee and *Jiejie* was to marry the businessman's crippled son. There was no turning back, let alone room for discussion. *Jiejie* took up a job as a dancer at the prestigious *ye dian* around the corner of Astor House to ameliorate Mama's financial burden– making fast money yet slowly dancing away her dignity, until all that she had left was a lackluster soul in an empty shell. I buried myself in academics, soughting comfort and cocoon from fraying edges of my books. My family was scattered between the dead and the living. We were all engrossed in our own universe, our own ludicrous fantasies and memories. We were still living under the same roof, we still shared the same blood, we still had a communal relationship as mother and daughter– we were so close, yet so far, so far apart.

Mama stopped painting after Father's funeral.

1934 spring. An imported white canvas was balanced on a starkly new wooden easel. Newly bought paint brushes were adroitly arranged on the mahogany tea table.

A stroke. A shade of dark red splattered onto the white canvas. He came barging into her life, bought her broken soul with money, wooed her with fashionable western dresses and pearls, demanded her to leave everything behind and start over with him. He turned her into *his* canvas, one that he can effortlessly tarnish at his own will. Just like paint, he seeped into her soul, leaving a dark red stain in place of her perished innocence.

A stroke. A shade of dark orange lined with dingy yellow splattered onto the white canvas. He convinced her it was love between them. Ironically, he gained her trust through blatant lies and broken promises of love. He manipulated her, her innocence and her broken soul— beguiling her to concede to his every will and request. They married on a rainy Sunday in Cathay Hotel.

A stroke. A shade of black splattered onto the white canvas. He still coveted more from her already besmirched soul — and unlike what she would do in the olden days, she voluntarily gave everything to him. William was born by the onset of winter.

Mama bought a new canvas for herself. She painted it with new memories, new personalities, new attitudes of life, new rules to go by, new people— a new family. She so casually painted a family of three— a one that I *wasn't* in it.

I was her past, and would forever be absent in her future.

Each step was a testimony to my dignity. A validation of my rebellion. In my clammy and damp palms gripped Father's old leather travel bag, which was filled to the brim with my possessions. I left home due to an impulsive autoschediastic decision: to leave and find a place where I would be cherished and loved. To think of it, it was an irrational decision. Having lived in the southern city for my whole life, I assumed I would know my way round here like the back of my hand but I was lost. In the city of '*New York of the West*', torn between reality and memories; I didn't know where I was heading to, nor did I know what I was doing. I was physically present, I could be seen walking down the never-ending Edward VII Avenue— yet my soul flitted between reality and the deepest memories of my childhood, that were left locked in the four-storey building that I once called home.

"*Xiao jie!*" A pair of strong arms gripped me by the shoulder, dragging me from honking automobiles that dominated the road. Caught by surprise, I stumbled into, what I presume, my rescuer's chest. The impact drove the breath out of me, and I was left lying limp against his sturdiness, irregular pants attacking me vigorously.

"Are you lost?"

His voice was a calm silvery; it reminded me of a long lost voice — Father's when he sang *Dark was the Night, Cold was the Ground* in his study. Tilting my chin up slightly, I shot him a glance through my shutters.

His eyes.

In my soul they went, penetrating my deepest, most inner thoughts. I felt exposed and unarmed; he was reading me like an open book, and there was nothing I could do to repudiate his intrusion.

"Why. Tell me why, Ellie. You have the money, why don't you go?"

It has been 4 months since I've been living under Pierre's roof in the French Concession. Since the day he saved and took me under his wings, it was as clear as the bright blue sky that I was definitely attracted to him.

His voice was like music to my ears.

His touch ignited sparks that danced across my skin.

His scent calmed my wild, beating heart.

His gaze was an intense spear— penetrating my soul into my hidden pyre. I felt vulnerable and naked of my armour under his godly stare. It was downright uncomfortable, yet it felt right. Oh, so right.

"Ellie. Tell me Ellie, please?"

Tears pricked my eyes. I would lose face and dignity if I told him about my feelings towards him, let alone my intentions of staying under his roof. He was my first and only love. And I was not ready to give him up, yet.

I would never be ready.

The river breeze blew a few strands of stray locks on my face. Reaching over, Pierre brushed them aside with conspicuous tenderness.

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier, Ellie.” Pierre mused.

“I was... I was scared to lose you— in case you didn’t like me back.” My voice shaky, yet lined with unveiled happiness at the notion of his reciprocation of my feelings towards him.

“Oh Ellie, you silly, silly girl,” breathed Pierre into my hair as he engulfed me in a tight embrace. I felt safe. I felt loved. If that was how home should feel like—

Then I’ve found way home.

“Take the plunge, Ellie.”

At the sound of his voice, my sane self let go. Shades of blue flashed before my eyes. I dived into the duke blue that was his iris. In I pierced my way through his steel blue orbs. Our lips touched.

Wo hui jia le.

The Curse of the City Walls

St. Paul's Convent School, Au, Tara – 12

“**Y**ou’re late, where have you been today, Chang?” There’s mother’s daily question again, always with a worried tone.

“Oh...em... I em...I was... studying after school, yeah that’s it, I studied after school,” I reply, Obut mother doesn’t seem satisfied with my answer and eyes me suspiciously.

“I’ll go wash the vegetables, go get washed and get ready for dinner.” With that, she left the living room. I heave a sigh of relief, for if mother found out where I have been just now, I’d probably get a harsh punishment..

Mother is always such a strict person, never ever in my life have I seen her laugh or smile and neither would she allow my brother nor me to do so, what’s worse is that she would never allow me to play with other children. Why? I have no idea. Yet all my classmate’s mothers seem kind and caring, like how mothers should be. But all the children know that there’s one thing that all mothers forbid their children to do for an unknown reason: climbing over the city walls.

I had a quick bath and had dinner without a sound, then, I return to my room as soon as possible. The sun starts to set across the horizon and hides behind the tall city walls. Oh, the city walls, how much I wish to climb over them, how much I wish to know what’s beyond those tall walls, how much I...

I am very tired, so I put away those thoughts and went to bed.

The next day after school, I was having just another normal day, I was heading my way home on the quite streets. All of a sudden, I hear laughter coming from outside the walls, laughter filled with such blessedness, the laughter that I longed to have. The idea of able to laugh ia so tempting that I could no longer control my body. I silently leap high into the air and land swiftly on the other side of the wall.

“Let’s go catch butterflies, they’re so pretty.”

“You can go catch your butterflies, I’ll go catch a toad.”

A boy and a girl about seven years old standing next to a tree said. Butterflies? Toads? I’ve heard of them before, but I’ve never seen one with my own eyes, and catching them seems pretty much fun, so I approach them without any hesitation and ask enthusiastically,” Are you going to catch creatures? Can I join you guys? Please, please, please?”

They seem to be startled with my enthusiasm.

“Sorry. Hi, I’m Chang.”

“I’m Hwa” said the girl.

“I’m Nan, so...you would like to join us to the pond?” asks the boy.

“Yes please!” I say passionately. For a long time, I can finally smile.

“Then follow us, the pond is actually quite near.” Nan says.

After a while of skipping and hopping round, we are finally near the pond, and with one mighty push, Nan pushes away the bushes. In front of us, appear the most stunning scenery I have ever seen in my life. Dazzling flowers and sweet scented fruits hang on every tree, fancy coloured fish swam freely in the calm clear pond, some creatures jump here and there on large leaves floating on the water and insects with colourful wings flutter in mid air. One of them lands on my nose and I try catching it, but it escapes rapidly.

“What are these?” I ask Nan.

“Butterflies, you’ve never seen one before?” he asks peculiarly.

“Nope,” I replied, all the creatures that I have seen are annoying mosquitoes, ants and cockroaches, also pigs, cows and chicken in the market.

“Well that’s odd,” says Nan, I wonder why.

Within minutes, Hwa catches two butterflies and were kept in a glass jar. Nan also catches a fat green creature which is in his glass jar.

“And this is a toad?” I ask Nan again.

“Yeah... These are actually really common animals, it’s bizarre that you don’t know what they are,” said Nan.

“Well, my mother is very strict and would never allow me to get in touch with animals.” I tell them, by the mention of mother, I suddenly remember about time, mother must be furious if I arrive home this late. “I have to go now, can we play together again tomorrow?” I ask my new friends, I had so many new experiences today that I finally felt as if I’m enjoying life.

“Of course, where do you live? We can come round and pick you up tomorrow.”

“I live in the town surrounded by city walls, you can wait for me...”

“Wait, you said that you live in the town inside the city walls?” Hwa interrupts me before I could finish my sentence.

“Yes.” I reply, but right after I said that, a terrified expression hang on their faces.

“I’m sorry Chang, I don’t think we have time tomorrow. Let’s go Nan, we don’t want to be with a cursed person.”

Right after Hwa says that, they left in a flash.

Sorrow floods in my heart. A cursed person? Why am I a cursed person? I spend my way home thinking of why. When I arrive home, the sun was already down. Mother bursts out of the kitchen with furiousness in her eyes.

"Where have you been today? It's already sundown, YOU, are supposed to come home before sundown! Now, don't tell me you stayed at school to study, the school already closed four hours ago!" mother shrieks. Although her words are filled with anger, it has absolutely no influence on me.

"Mother, why am I cursed?" I ask her.

At that moment, the whole room was quiet. No one is chatting, no one is laughing. Mother is glaring at me with big round eyes and in an extremely shocked manner.

"I think we should talk upstairs." Mother says in a soft voice. And the next second I know it, I was being dragged up to my room by mother.

When mother closes the door behind me, I thought that she is going to scold me, but she didn't. Instead, she asks me softly, "How did you know about that?" I tell her about my meeting with Nan and Hwa and what Hwa said to me before they went away.

Once again, I thought that mother will be cross at me for breaking the rules, but she isn't. Instead, she sighs and tells me this:

"My dear Chang, you know rules are made for a reason, but since the situation is till this stage already, I think I should tell you the reason on why we, normal citizens living inside the city walls should not go outside."

"Long long time ago, during the mid Ming Dynasty, there was a talented lady called Han Sheung. The emperor liked her a lot and soon, made her the queen. Later, a lady called Wu Wei appeared in the palace. She was as talented as Han and had an even better appearance than her. The emperor liked Wu a lot and spent more time with Wu than Han. Wu soon had four sons and Han had two sons."

"Later, Han grew anxious and killed herself in the nearby river. A lot of people believe that before she died, she cursed two of the sons of Wu that whoever has good relationship with her two sons or their future generations will receive bad luck. The news spread fast and people were very aware that this is true."

"Later, because the cursed sons of Wu received too much hate from the people in the palace, they moved out and developed a village on their own. They were no longer royals, but they still received a lot of hate from people outside the palace. Therefore, they built tall walls and asked their future generations to live inside the city walls."

"So... I'm one of Wu's cursed son's future generations?" I ask

"Yes Chang. We all are, me, your father, your brother, your grandfather, even you great grandfather."

I am astound to hear that. For years I have thought that the community was built on equality and love, but it turns out that I was wrong.

"Do you believe this curse mother?" I ask

"No Chang I do not, but we are way too hated by the others that it is always better to stay silent and follow the rules." She answers.

"But..."

"No more buts Chang, I think you've heard enough and it's time for you to have a good night's sleep. Now we shall have no more talks on this topic and certainly no more climbing over the walls, okay? Goodnight my dear son."

I do not want to promise mother, but to the thought of it, what else can I do to stop people from hating on us, seems like all I could do is wonder what will happen if there were no city walls.

"Goodnight mother."

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St Paul's Convent School, Chong, Chloe – 12

I stare blankly at the ruins of a once wonderful city of Shanghai from the prow of Father's ship. Less than an hour ago, I was having my violin lessons as usual. Then the Japanese bombed the city perimeter. The city had to be evacuated. Minutes after we left the harbor, the Japanese bombed the city again, then everything was gone.

My name is Fabian Zéro. My Chinese name is *Fai Yan Ling*, a precise but plain interpretation of my French name. I'm from Caen, France. I was four when I came to Shanghai. My father is a clothes merchant, and Chinese silks are always in high demand as they were soft and smooth, so he decided to move straight to Shanghai to avoid going back and forth between China and France too many times. He was quite satisfied, but I still do not see how that solved the problem. Anyway, the first thing I noticed when I first arrived was that the city seemed to be split into two. On one side were big villas and new houses and glamorous mansions, some of the plainer ones were the houses I usually see in France, old but comforting. On the other side were a rickrack of houses thrown into a small area. Even though the design is similar to the glamorous side, they were very old and crumbly looking, and I could see hints of Chinese designs on the rafters and windows.

We arrived and settled down in the newer side of the city. Then I realized that there were many other people besides us French – the Russians, the British, the Americans... Strangely enough, there were no Chinese people around to be seen. My father talked to a nice French man which I later recognised as the landlord of our house.

I was ten when I started to be a helper in Father's shop. You'd be surprised by the amount of things you'd learn when you're a part time sales boy in your father's clothing shop. I could not go to school, since I could not go to school, because I didn't speak any Chinese, nor could I read or write it. But since there were lots of foreigners who came into the shop, by the end of March next year I could speak, if not read, six languages. I also went, for the first time, to the main business area of Shanghai. It took us three hours by train and it went by the name of Jingan, I think. It was very crowded and everybody seemed very busy. I remember Father got some strange banknotes with Chinese characters on them from Hang Seng bank and we bought some food and supplies for our home back in Hongkou. I found that apart from being one of China's major economic cities, Shanghai is also an international trading port as well. Silk, tea, porcelain and cotton are some of the many things I saw being passed from hand to hand and piled onto ships bid to other countries at the port.

Then I learned about the social rankings of Shanghai about a year ago, when I was thirteen. I met a Chinese boy at the edge of the city where I was living in. There was a high wire fence separating us, but he climbed over it easily – or, I should say, *he jumped*, rather than climbed. That guy's agility could've rivaled a monkey's. He had us hide in some other rich person's orchard to talk. His name was pronounced along the lines of "*Jingtun*", and he did not know his age, and he didn't have a home or parents, only a "master", which made us both confused. I didn't know much Chinese back then, and he didn't know much British either, so we managed to converse in broken lines of British and Mandarin, which is Jingtun's mother tongue. He told me, rather spitefully about the unfairness of foreigners, especially British. He said that they waged a war and made the government sign a treaty to lease Shanghai and a few other major cities to them. Then the British started moving in and so did the Americans. He told me about the social rankings. First and topmost were the British, who were rich and powerful. The second were the warlords and the gangsters and the Americans, who were also powerful and rich but much meaner. The third

were the French – upper class people like me whose families were usually merchants. I felt rather guilty and tried to apologize, but the other boy told me not to do so. He said that he doesn't really blame me for being born into a French family, since no one could choose their nationality. I was much impressed by his levelheadedness, and he was quite mature for someone who looked no older than twelve; but I suspect he was older than he looked. Maybe he was thirteen like me, hmm? I'm quite mature for boys of my age, even if I say so myself.

Then he proceeded to tell me about the fourth rank and the last. The fourth rank were made up of other middle class foreigners like the Russians or the Swiss. The last and bottommost were the Chinese. He didn't get angry and shout as I thought he would, but shifted restlessly and kept braiding ropes with random vines he picked from bushes, as if his hands had to be occupied for some reason. He said sullenly that they were treated like slaves and dogs for rough work. I felt very sorry for him, so I invited to over to my house. Luckily, my father wasn't home yet, so I managed to persuade my Roman butler, Favonius, not to tell. He came every day to tell me his stories of this peculiar city and we would have little adventures, right up 'till the day the Japanese attacked...

I grimace at the thought of leaving Jingtin alone, helpless in the ruins. With my conscience screaming at me, I order the crew to turn sails. The captain frowned. "Are you sure, young master? Does Master Zéro approve?" I scowl at the captain, and immediately regretted it as I see him flinch. "I apologize, Captain, for my abrupt rudeness, but please, turn back!" I bow my head at him, to plead him to help me. The captain gets rather flustered, and he immediately orders the crew to turn sails.

"*Ting! Stop! Halt!*" says a familiar yet disembodied voice. "Did you miss me that bad, *peng yo?*" I turn. There was no one behind me, except the crew was baffled looks on their faces. "Up here, *Fai,*" I lift my head to see Jingtin perched on the mast, Peter Pan style. I nearly cry from relief. "*Mon copain!*" I say. "I thought I left you!" He slides down the mast and lands in the crouch. He grins at my relieved face and punches me in the arm playfully. The crew gasp at his informal behavior while addressing me, who should be ranks higher in social status. Jingtin was completely oblivious, even when I rolled my eyes at the bunch. "You actually felt guilty about leaving me?" He asks, and I nod. I was so relived I momentarily forgot to speak English. "*Oi, je suis désolé, parce que il y a...*" Jingtin holds up a hand, a universal *stop* sign. "I know you are very happy, but *ni* should not go French on *wo*, okay?" He says seriously. I can't help but crack up at his mixed-up speech. He laughs along too. I could see the crew's jaws drop, but I ignore them. I mean, hey, cut me some slack! I just got reunited with my best friend!

Father comes up from the lower deck complaining about the noise. His jaw drops and hits the deck with a *thud* at the sight of me and shabby, mischievous looking Jingtin laughing at the prow. After all, he is rather old fashioned, so he thinks that we French are superior to the Chinese. "*Péré...*" I try to explain to him about our story. He is reluctant to let Jingtin stay with us, but after a few demonstrations of the other boy's uncanny nimbleness, he grudgingly agrees that he could stay as long as he doesn't cause any trouble and works. We happily agree to his terms. I walk back to the prow and stare at the ruins. We escaped, from the ruins of the city once so splendid, and like a phoenix, we are reborn.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Fung, Natalie – 13

"It's your turn. "

Yin nodded at the sentence, smiling politely at the man before him, he walked into the toilet.

He stood there looking at the strange and weird thing in front of him, and contemplated his choices before opening the door again, and he saw a man in a suit staring at him.

"I'm sorry sir, how am I suppose to... use this thing?" Yin looked at the floor in embarrassment, and looked back up again when he heard a deep chuckle.

"Must have grown up in a village, haven't you?" The man chuckled again and pushed past him, and pointing out the part that he was supposed to use. Yin nodded and thanked the man profusely, before shutting the door.

Yin was on a train to Shanghai, and having grown up in a small village where your business is everyone's business, everything felt weird. He was unused to seeing so many strangers together, but at the same time, felt a thrill of excitement fill him at the thought of exploring the world before him.

//Shanghai, 1931//

The streets were full of people in suits, couples on dates, and there were a lot of women in so little clothing that it shocked him.

Were they only wearing their undergarments? Yin blushed and looked away, because somehow it did not felt polite to stare at these ladies who were near naked and the way they were staring and winking at every man that walked past was... weird to say at least. They were crossing their legs and pouting their lips, and one of them even kissed a man on the lips, and in public!

Feeling a sudden presence next to him, he looked and saw the man from earlier. The man, with a slightly chubby built, grinned at him and stuck out a hand.

"Ming Lee. You?"

Yin stared at the offered hand, before taking and shaking it.

"Yin Long." He replied.

"Dragon, huh. So what you say, friend, come with me and explore the depths of Shanghai? I know some people that can help you fly to the top of the pyramid like a dragon." Ming said.

Yin considered it for a moment before nodding, because after all, what was there to lose?

//Shanghai, 1933//

"Mister Long, Mister Lee is here to see you." Bruce, his bodyguard announced, a stoic expression on his face.

"I want you to find this man called John Warner. He has a list of all the reformed names in his hand of all the undercover traitors in Shanghai and I want ." Ming said, cutting straight to the case.

Yin looked out of his window, taking a drag of his cigarette.

If you were one of the people in suits, there was no way on earth that you have never heard of Yin Long, the dragon of Shanghai.

Yin looked back at Ming and sealed the deal with a nod. After all, with his power and influence nowadays in Shanghai, finding a man wouldn't be that hard, would it?

//Shanghai, 1935//

The Japanese general sat in front of Yin. The man had invited him to a conference room that day, saying that the two had some serious business to talk about. Yin had agreed, even if reserved.

And now Yin cannot believe what the man was proposing.

The Japanese will invade Shanghai and this man, Arakawa, wanted Yin to be the president. Or in better words, their puppet to the public.

On one hand, making an enemy out of the general of the Japanese army is really not a bright idea, but just the mere idea of betraying his blood sends shivers down his spine. Did he want to leave his honour intact, or walk the way of a coward, and accept the offer in fear of death?

Looking down at the offered hand, he ran over his choices one more time and came to a firm decision, and instead of immediately shaking it as he would have a few years ago when he arrived in Shanghai, he does a daring act.

He spits on it.

A big and slimy wad of saliva dripped down onto the green leather glove, the material ruined by the sticky liquid.

Time seemed to have pass quickly in the past few minutes but the spell was broken Yin stood up abruptly as guns were drawn on him. The Japanese general was still staring at the spot of wet on his glove in disbelief, his face growing redder by the minute.

Yin laughed. He strolled out of the door and his laughs echoed down the corridor, and it was uncertain how long it was suspended for, but one thing was certain.

Yin had made an enemy in high places today.

//Shanghai, 1937//

So this was it. The anticipated attack.

Yin stared at the mass destruction of him. Having known of the attack, Yin had tried his best to prepare his men for the attack, but all they had for defence was a couple of guns, nowhere near advanced compared to the ones of the Japanese.

He wondered what would have happened if he had accepted the hand that day. To be a traitor, to join his men with the Japanese, to help them conquer China and its resources.

He would have been safe and secure, but not happy.

"Mr Long, time to go." John, his guard, said to him urgently, coaxing him out of the room and to go downstairs where they could find shelter to get them through this invasion.

Ming had disappeared a few years ago with only a note saying goodbye, and Yin often wonders if somewhere out there, Ming is still thinking of him and their time together.

A bang startled him and he suddenly grew more aware of his surroundings. He looked around and saw glassy eyes, people slumped over each other, and bloody weapons lay all over the ground.

Yin slowly tiptoed towards the door. His guards slowly followed, and as if oblivious to the bodies laying all around them.

The door was locked, and Yin was confused. He owned this building, and for a lock to be installed without him knowing, it would have to be someone he knew and trusted who installed it. And that person was probably Ming, he realised.

The guards shot down the door and they walked out of the building and was faced with even more bodies, and the result of an explosion. There was a sudden flurry of footsteps behind them, and simultaneously, Yin and his bodyguards turn around.

There was a thick tension in the air as both groups studied each other. Yin was not surprised to find the Japanese general standing there with a smirk, and suddenly, the puzzle pieces clicked together.

Bruce, his old bodyguard, dressed in a brand new green uniform with chains of gold dangling down his neck, was stood there next to Arakawa with a sneer on his face, and Yin understood instantly that the problem had been money.

With his hand still poised to shoot, Yin stepped forward.

“What do you want?” Yin stated in a monotonous voice, not letting his voice betray the nervousness that he felt. Drops of sweat trickled down his face as he walked alone to the other end of the street where they were.

Arakawa laughed as he pulled another man next to him. Ming.

In shackles, knelt on the floor, covered in bruises, Ming had a half-dead look on his face with a gun pressed into his temple.

“Your life, or his.” Arakawa chuckled at the idea, all the while smirking.

Yin hesitated. He stared at Ming's worn out face, as he lifted up his head and mouthed *shoot* to Yin. He put his finger over the trigger and was about to press down when a sudden bang sounded behind him.

Arakawa let out a scream and everyone saw a red stain slowly spreading out on his green uniform where the bullet shot him. There was a moment of silence as everyone tried to comprehend what just happened and then Arakawa fell on his back.

Yin looked back and saw his bodyguard, John, trembling in shock as the fact slowly settled in. He looked back at Ming, still on the ground, and with a sigh of relief, he walked over to his friend and started untie his locks, ignoring the Japanese soldiers who were trying desperately to perform CPR on their officer.

And it was there he knew, that no matter what happens then on, his life would never be the same. Even if the general died, Japan is still in control of Shanghai, and it would do him no good to remain here. Maybe he could consider going back to his hometown, or moving to other places.

Maybe Hong Kong, he mused, he heard that it was quite prosperous these days. His title could change to the “Dragon of Hong Kong”, it isn't such a bad name after all.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Hau, Anatasia Rachel – 13

I was born in 1926 in Shanghai. My father, or I should say, creator was a doll maker. He had made hundreds of brothers and sisters before me. They were all nearly two feet tall, dressed in the silken fashion in Chinese Opera Costumes with faces painted in attractive colours – except one, and that's me. I was just mere one-foot-tall and decorated in dull colours of black, white and grey. I have always muttered to myself that my father must have used some leftover fabric he unearthed from nowhere to make me, and that's unfair! Our stage was a glass cabinet with display window facing the main street. But I was in the dark corner at the bottom level. Although unable to move, we try our best to attract customers coming in to secure the monetary gain of our father in exchange for our rewards – being wrapped up in silk and placed in an exquisite velvet box.

Day by day, I saw my brothers and sisters receiving their honours and left me with an imaginary smug face. Even if I were put in my best effort to perform, people just looked past me as if I never existed. During these gloomy days, in order to keep myself entertained, I gazed idly at the streets of Shanghai.

In those days, Shanghai was occupied by different countries Like England and France. International Settlement System was implemented following the defeat of the Qing army in the first Opium War. Barricades were set up at the boundaries restricting free access of people. I often see fully armed army marching across the streets. Shanghai may look peaceful on the outside, but don't judge a book by its cover, as on the inside it was chaotic with tensions rising.

I led this kind of decadent life for months, until I met this young English boy. We first met when he walked into the shop with his parents. His mother was superbly elegant and his father was in military uniform. He was poshly dressed in tuxedo and there was an air of well-groomed manner as he set his eyes on me.

"Mommy this doll looks dainty, can I have it?" he asked

Before his mother could answer, his father boomed in a husky dominating voice.

"Johnny, be a man! We men don't play with sissy toys and dolls!"

Before Johnny could mutter a word, he was grabbed by and muscular arm and dragged out of the shop. Since our brief encounter, I saw Johnny and few times walking past the shop with his mother. He would glance at me longingly as if to take me away with him. My days returned to these 'idly gazing at streets' routine with no prospect.

Not long afterwards, as I was gazing aimlessly at the street, I spotted Johnny's father, his eyebrows tightly locked, he had a pistol held tightly in his hand, while scurrying across the street followed by a group of soldiers at his back, and soon disappeared among the crowds. A few moments later, a heavy exchange of gun fire filled the air, followed by a deafening roar of an explosion.



Then silence.

Two days later, Johnny came into the shop with his mother. They were dressed in black and wore a long face. Their sorrowful look resembled someone who had just lost a close relative. His mother came up to my father. After an exchange of words, my father turned and approached me, picked me up, and handed me to Johnny. Without a single word, Johnny cuddled me tightly. In his embrace, I could see no happiness but sorrow and emptiness in his rheumy eyes. With me still tightly against his chest, they both shuffled out into the streets in total silence, to prepare for a new page in his life.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St Paul's Convent School, Kan, Karina Choi Tung – 14

“**M**ay God let me go travel around the world and allow me to earn a lot of money and buy a lot luxury things and so that I won't need to be forced by mom and the school to donate money to the poor anymore. They are none of my business and I want use my precious money to buy things I want. Through Christ our Lord, Amen” Drowsily, I combed my hair and left it on the window pane and climbed onto my bed and went to sleep “MOM!!!Where is my comb??” “I put it on the window pane last night!!” I go and check my window pane once more. But what I see is a paintbrush with glitters on it and I scream to my sister, Azura “I am 200% sure that you have stolen my comb and replace it with your old paintbrush which you uses it when you are still a toddle. See? It is stick with glitter on! Have you done it, HUH?” “No, I did not” replied Azura calmly while chewing her bread with one eye closed. I ran back upstairs and checked the window pane once more, thinking that : last night is was still a comb itself and now became a paintbrush with glitters on, no it won't be ,that's crazy. And I was wrong. When I arrive at my bedroom's window paned, there is note lying beside that paintbrush. It writes that....

To the little girl who prayed to me last night:

This was your long awaited wish. When you get to the place you want to go, the time in your world will be stopped until you have complete what you should complete. And you will gain more than what you got and what you want through this place. By the way don't blame your sister. It is the meteor who had done it. GOOD LUCK.

As soon as I have finished reading it, the note disappear and became gold dust flying around. Then, it flew out of the window and became 7 baby birds in different colors. Whoa! I was thinking on how to use this paintbrush instead of thinking what I have to complete. After a few minutes that I was lost in thought. I think of places that I want to travel in China. Beijing? Xi'an? Guilin? Shanghai? Wait ... Shanghai is my hometown! Since I haven't gone back there in a while, why don't I give it a go? So without any hesitation, I just wrote the word SHANGHAI on the wall and suddenly I was in darkness....

I think I must have been sleeping for hours in that darkness. I was woken up by a loud boom, a sound I have never heard of before. Wait... what is that? Why do I see a pool of blood in front of me? Why are there loud booms? HELP why is there an arm in front of me? Where am I? Why I am in ragged clothes? In this messy and horrible situation, I realized that I am in the middle of a war alone. My arms are severely injured. Some people were helping out each other. I had a moment of impulsiveness and wanted to help them as much as possible to save the injured. But on the other hand I saw a pile of dead bodies piling up in which I think is horrible and creepy so at last I chose not to help and head to find water to clean the blood and some herbs to treat myself. And I think that it is very disgusting when I see their injured places are badly mutilated.

On my way to find water, an old woman came to me saying that she is blind and needed help to find food as she haven't eaten for 2 days as she wanders in the forest. I immediately searched all over my pockets hoping, I can find some food for her to eat. I had a half melted chocolate in my pant pockets. I hesitated before giving out my only chocolate to the old granny but because I felt sorry for that old granny so I gave it to her. While the granny was eating the chocolate, I asked her why was there a war happening and what year it was. She looked at me in shock and said to me “oh boy, shanghai is in a civil war, this war has been ongoing for 3 days. Today is 15th May, 1949! Are you too scared until you lost your memories?” The only response I was giving was “Ha, Ha ha.... Oh really?”

I went back to the past! Why I am here, what is that thing that I need to be completed? When I turned around, the granny disappeared! I looked around, but what I see is that on the ground there is a wooden box. I opened it and it consist of a piece of paper with a letter P and when I was still thinking what was that, a red small bird landed on my shoulder and it started to speak, "I will be your companion for the rest of your journey"

After saying that, I was taken to another place which is that a unique place for all shanghai people --- the longtang, which has are neighborhood lanes populated by lilongs housings.

This place have beautiful decoration and architecture before. But now it is very crowded and very dirty saw many patients waiting to get medical treatment in which I feel sorry for them because they are very poor and cannot buy food for themselves to eat. I even see children fighting for food and clothes. I feel distressed for them so I asked The Baby Red bird if he can make some food for them. The red bird looked at me while smiling, nodded his head and all the children in these village have enough food for themselves and their family. Then red baby bird chirped reminding me that something is right beside my feet. I took a look, it is another box! I opened it, this time the paper had the letter E and another bird, which is orange also landed on my shoulder saying that " I will be our companion for the rest of your journey" I was then zoomed to another place. It is the most horrible thing I have ever seen! A pile of dead bodies stacked up together like a mountain! Beside that tall mountain, I saw a little girl crying hysterically shouting "Give me back my mama and papa!!!!"

My heart was breaking, I went up and hugged the little girl and let her cry. I feel so sorry for her but I know I can't resurrect the dead, so I asked orange baby bird to give her a couple to adopt her and hope that she can forgot the past and continue to live happily. And so, the couple took her away and I prayed for the little girl in my heart.

Orange baby bird chirped just like what red baby bird had done. I picked up the box which always appear by my feet and this time the paper consist of two letters "A and C". Baby Yellow bird and baby Green bird came and I was zoomed to another place, which is the army camp. In here I saw many soldiers feeling sorry for what they have done to the citizens of Shanghai. When I saw this I felt angry but sorry at the same time because I believe that the soldiers wouldn't had wanted to hurt the citizens because they had done nothing wrong and why did they need to suffer? These are government business. Why did the citizens need to burden the pain and feeling so helpless? So I ask both Yellow and Green Baby Bird to combine their power and asked God to wash away their sin and to feel not such a big burden for themselves. They both chirped together and while Blue and purple baby bird need some time to fly onto my shoulder. I bent down and picked up the box. This time it consisted of the letter E again. Then I group all that alphabets together "P-E-A-C-E PEACE! Yes, in my world or in this world, we need peace, nowadays the society have too much discriminations and such a disparity of wealth and the poor, among many other problems !Yes, LOVE AND PEACE is the formula to cure everyone's heart." And suddenly I was zoomed back home and all the 6 baby birds disappear and the last bird, PHOENIX came and I made my last wish which is "to establish a charity organization and to help the poor!" I shouted proudly... smiling to myself understanding what needed to complete is now completed, that is... my heart.

Freedom Found

St Paul's Co-educational College, Kwan , Yuet Yan Cheryl – 13

12th April, 1927

I remember when my parents told me about the Shanghai City when I was small. I was intrigued by how my parents described it – lively, bustling with people, and the city encircled by great stone walls. It was considered as the “Paris of the East” and the “New York of the West”. I’ve never been to both cities before, but I’m sure they are a thousand times better than Shanghai City. When I first arrived, I was greatly disappointed that most of the walls had been destroyed right after the end of the Qing Dynasty. I’ve been here for more than two years, and all I’ve seen is opium being smuggled when they think nobody’s looking, people huddled together, gambling incessantly, blowing thick, white smoke out from their pipes. I’ve since grown tired of wandering mindlessly down the streets, trying hard to ignore the leers of the gamblers when they’re blocking my way, and having to pinch my nose at the foul smell of the opaque smoke as they curled through the hazy air, its scent lingering on my clothes even if I had left the area hours before. I can’t see why people adore this city, and hope that they can soon realise how truly disgusting this metropolis is.

I’m used to waking up early and making breakfast for my family: my father, who needs to go to work every day, my mother, who is often unwell and usually stays in bed, and my little brother Ming, who is seven and can’t really take care of himself. I routinely tiptoe out of bed cautiously as not to rouse my family, and make breakfast after a quick wash-up. But at dawn today, I was awakened by screams of pain. I was frozen on the spot, my heart beating rapidly as a militia of chills marched down my spine. My breathing became erratic, and somehow tears of fear tumbled down, making my skin feel even colder. Suddenly, my father rushed past, almost knocking me to the ground, and hurtled out of the house.

“What happened?” he demanded as some petrified-looking citizens scampered past.

“Kuomintang,” one of them said breathlessly, “They attacked the district offices.”

After that, father commanded me to remain in the house, while he went to survey the scene. I remember the people’s screams ringing clearly in my ears, as if begging me not to forget the pain they must’ve gone through. I was rooted at the spot, in shock of what had occurred. A few hours later, I crept out of the house. As I walked slowly and cautiously down the streets, I noticed the usually unsoiled pavements were speckled with tiny dots of red—blood. I watched as the wounded staggered, their own crimson blood falling and mixing with the ones on the floor. I saw communists being restrained and taken away, their faces contorted in pain. I saw a man with a bullet wound on his leg, struggling to move as his wife and children wept for him. How many have been wounded? How many people had lost their loved ones today? How long would they have to wait to see their loved ones again? I couldn’t bear watching anymore, so I hurried back home.

Now I’m nestled in my warm bed, recollecting the events of today and putting them down in this diary. Every time I close my eyes, the images of the wounded and the prisoners spring up vividly, and I would feel a wave of nausea sweep over me. I don’t like being trapped in this city—this city full of people slowly committing suicide by drugging themselves, people throwing away their money absent-mindedly, people assassinating others just because of different political views... I abhor being confined in this terrible place. *Ling*

I stare blankly at the yellowed, tattered page, the words boring a hole in my head. It's been 200 years since this diary entry was written, and I'm shocked at the realism of my ancestor's words. Since 1927, Shanghai has faced an abundance of terrible events—the Japanese occupation, Shanghai becoming an independent nation, the bombing that triggered World War III, the execution of General Li, who led to the Allies' defeat in said war... Due to the aftermath of World War III, in which Shanghai was scorned and publicly humiliated, the president banned any immigration or emigration and built walls surrounding the country borders, enclosing us in the country and annihilating our freedom. It's a wonder how we do everything independently without any outside help, and that we have enough resources. Banning outside contact also meant removing almost all forms of communication through technology and transport, and even things like aeroplanes are dreadfully unfamiliar. To us, the outside world is so unexplored, so exciting, so unrealistic. It's strange knowing that the confined world you live in is actually a small part of an even bigger world, one without rules and laws dictating your every move. I guess the metropolitans haven't changed much these 200 years, since most of them drown themselves in alcohol once work hours are over, Smoking Tubes are passed around, polluting the air with the foul smell of the smoke and dyeing the air grey. Tobacco was bad enough, but the chemicals in the Tubes could kill in a heartbeat when excessively inhaled. People bustle in and out of the giant glass casino, betting huge sums of money every time without a care, and security droid cameras hover around, making sure the laws were always abided by.

I don't want to live in this endless world of strict rules and enforcement, and lay on my deathbed regretting not fighting for freedom, for what we deserve. I long to watch an aeroplane take off, to travel and see every corner of the world with my own eyes, to live life at its fullest—but not now, not when we're trapped in this confining, remote nation. The wind rustles, flipping the pages of Ling's diary, breaking my train of thoughts. On the last page, there was a quote written down in beautiful calligraphy: "*I prefer dangerous freedom over peaceful slavery – Thomas Jefferson*" That seems fitting to this current situation, although 'peaceful slavery' would be quite an understatement. I don't want to follow the government's authoritarian laws like a robot regarding what women in society should do. I don't want to live with the rules stopping me from achieving my dreams and goals in life. I'm seventeen years old now, and I've spent years studying in secret to pursue my dream of being a paediatrician, and I can't afford to have a law stopping me and other young people with dreams.

That's why I'm going to fight for my freedom and to stop laws from shaping out our lives before we were even born. My lips curl into a smile as I picture the mayor's disbelieving face when we rebel. I hop off the stone I've been perching on since Curfew, which is eight o' clock at night. My flashlight flickers, illuminating the road to camp. I slowly crouch down, dodge the security droid cameras and head towards an old, worn down building. Tentatively, I brush my fingers across the handle of the battered wooden door, and softly rap the wood four times. The door creaks open, and I'm welcomed by my friend, Fei. "Are you ready?" she asks, her eyes shimmering with excitement. I step inside the dimly lit hallway as Fei goes to the supply closet and pulls out a green backpack full of emergency supplies and food. "Emergencies only," she reminds me in a singsong voice. I can feel her confidence radiating out from her. She must be positive that tonight's events would go well.

"Lee's managed to get a microphone, and if everything goes well, every speaker in Shanghai would be able to hear you. He's in the storeroom, wiring up the gears."

I smile. "The others?"

Fei beams back at me. "Armed and ready." "Good," I say, reaching out to take my bow and quiver from the wall. My heart's hammering wildly, and I pray that everything will be all right.

“We’ve been preparing for this since we were thirteen. It’s going to be fine,” she reassures. My sister May steps out from the shadows and gives me a hug. “Mum and Dad would’ve been proud.” I embrace her tightly, and I step into the storeroom. Lee, the burly technological genius, passes me the microphone. “Take a deep breath, Lou. You can do this.” He gives a reassuring smile, and turns to the conducting panel. “And we’re on in three, two, one!”

I take a deep breath and try hard not to let my voice tremble. “Good evening, citizens of Shanghai. My name is Louise Wu, and I’m here to strive for freedom...”

We may be young, and we will go through ups and downs, but in the end, we’ll still be fighting for freedom, because there’s nothing left to lose.

Memories

St Paul's Co-educational College, Lai, Tin Long Kenaz – 15

Old Ben Seet had lived for a long time. He was a professional photographer, journeying his homeland, China, for beautiful sceneries. He loved taking photos and loved the sceneries nature could provide, but as he aged he could not travel that much anymore. He had bought a small, modest flat in modern Shanghai. Nothing flashy, but it would do for living.

Today was his 92nd birthday. The old man rose from his chair, his pearly white beard gleaming in the moonlight. He was old but still fit and had eyes that almost glinted with knowledge and wisdom. Ben walked towards his bed slowly. He was afraid of death that he knew was coming soon. After all, he was diagnosed with a deadly illness. He was afraid that he would never be able to see what he loved and holds dear ever again.

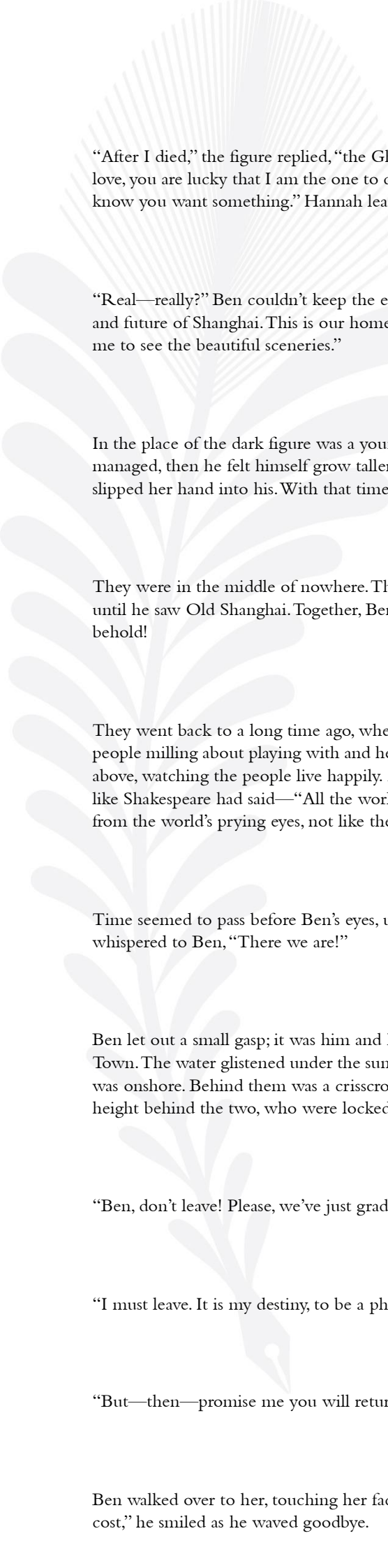
He lay on his bed, thinking of what he would like to do most in his life. He loved sceneries but sometimes he just wanted to go back in the past and see the world through his own eyes, not photos. As a photographer, one of his favourite things to do was to envision how the future of the world would look as well.

A cold wind rushed up his spine. There were soft footsteps, then a dark figure appeared. “Death comes...” it whispered, gliding towards the old man. The figure was cloaked from head to toe, but its eyes gleamed purple.

Ben was mortified.

“Ben?” And for a second, the voice sounded human—almost female. Ben recognized the voice, one that he had heard for 70 years.

“Hannah?” Ben managed out. Hannah Yu had been his best friend at school, then his wife in the later years of his life until she died. “What are you doing here?”



“After I died,” the figure replied, “the Ghost King sent me to collect the souls of dead people. There are many more of us. Ben, love, you are lucky that I am the one to come here today. You will still pass away—your time is here. But I know you fear death. I know you want something.” Hannah leaned closer to him. “I can grant your last wish.”

“Real—really?” Ben couldn’t keep the excitement out of his voice. He knew what he wanted. “I want to go to the past, present and future of Shanghai. This is our home, we lived here, and I would love to see again how it looked and how it will look. Take me to see the beautiful sceneries.”

In the place of the dark figure was a young woman, about twenty, with flowing black hair and inquisitive eyes. “Hannah—,” Ben managed, then he felt himself grow taller. Suddenly he too was twenty, a handsome young man. Hannah was real now, and she slipped her hand into his. With that time began to swirl around. The room became a blur.

They were in the middle of nowhere. Then Ben’s sight began to zoom in, until he could see Earth, until he saw the continents, until he saw Old Shanghai. Together, Ben and Hannah were hovering in midair, a young couple floating—what a sight to behold!

They went back to a long time ago, when Shanghai was just a small settlement, before photos were invented. It was a rapt place, people milling about playing with and helping each other. A simple but enjoyable lifestyle it was! Ben and Hannah glided silently above, watching the people live happily. *IT* was the lifestyle Ben always enjoyed—people in the present wore a mask every day, like Shakespeare had said—“All the world’s a stage, and everyone’s an actor.” Behind each face was a façade of emotions hidden from the world’s prying eyes, not like the pure and true people living back then.

Time seemed to pass before Ben’s eyes, until things became more recent, old memories that he still remembered. Then Hannah whispered to Ben, “There we are!”

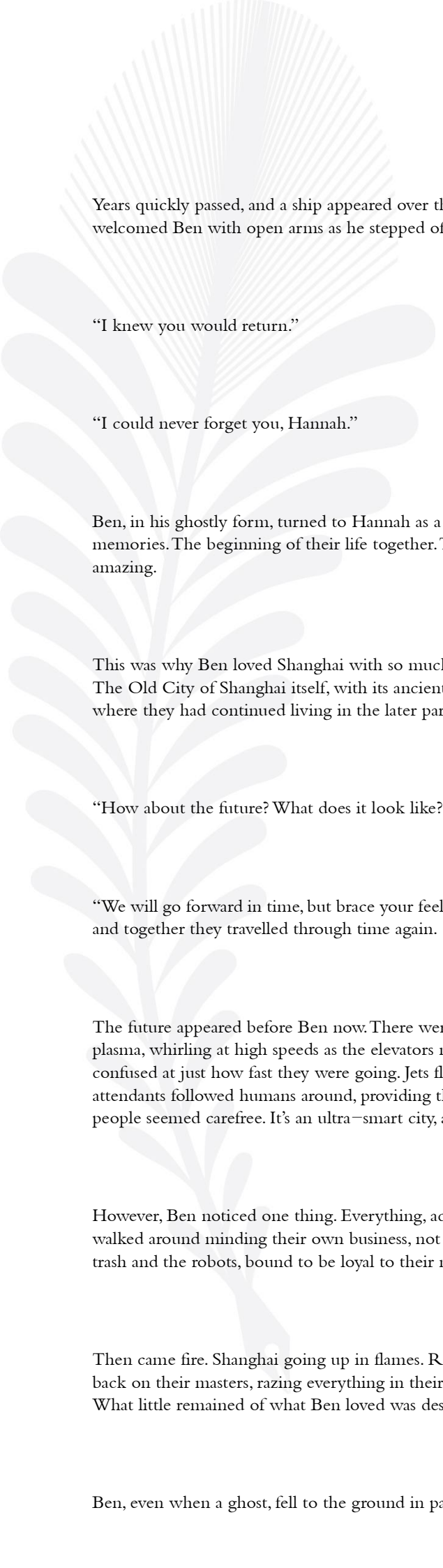
Ben let out a small gasp; it was him and Hannah when they were eighteen, at the peaceful village known as Nanxun Ancient Town. The water glistened under the sunlight where the Ben of the past, on a boat ready to set sail, was speaking to Hannah who was onshore. Behind them was a crisscross of canals and bridges. Traditional Chinese and Western traditions stood to their full height behind the two, who were locked in deep conversation.

“Ben, don’t leave! Please, we’ve just graduated from school!”

“I must leave. It is my destiny, to be a photographer to capture the beautiful moments of humanity.”

“But—then—promise me you will return! Please, I can’t lose you!” Hannah blurted.

Ben walked over to her, touching her face with his hands, replied, “I promise. I will always come back for you, no matter the cost,” he smiled as he waved goodbye.



Years quickly passed, and a ship appeared over the horizon, sailing down the Whangpoo until it docked at the Bund. Hannah welcomed Ben with open arms as he stepped off the ship.

“I knew you would return.”

“I could never forget you, Hannah.”

Ben, in his ghostly form, turned to Hannah as a large grin threatened to split his face. The quiet city was filled with their memories. The beginning of their life together. The formation of their friendship. The love sparking between them. It was amazing.

This was why Ben loved Shanghai with so much passion. This village near Shanghai held so many memories that he holds dear. The Old City of Shanghai itself, with its ancient winding streets, temples and gardens, street traders and steaming hot buns, was where they had continued living in the later parts of their life together. It was his home.

“How about the future? What does it look like?”

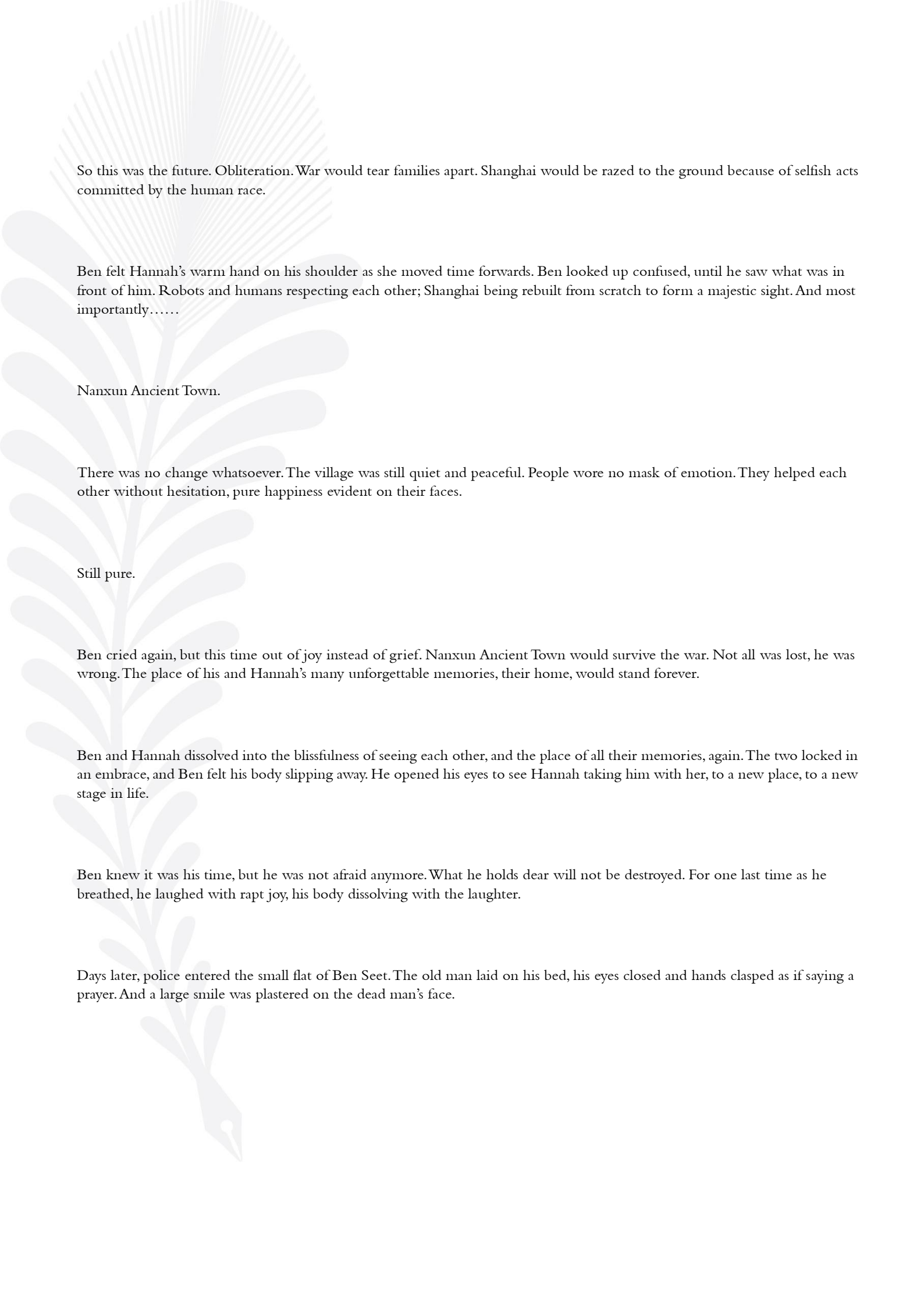
“We will go forward in time, but brace your feelings. The Shanghai you love will not be the same.” Hannah drew Ben into a hug and together they travelled through time again.

The future appeared before Ben now. There were many high-rises, but not just any normal buildings. They were coated in blue plasma, whirling at high speeds as the elevators moved. Cars hovered on top of roads, shooting with such speed that Ben got confused at just how fast they were going. Jets floated in mid-air, arms extending from them to clean windows. Robotic attendants followed humans around, providing them necessities at their request. The buildings reached up almost to the sky and people seemed carefree. It's an ultra-smart city, a tech dream.

However, Ben noticed one thing. Everything, actually. Everything that made Shanghai precious to his eyes was gone. People walked around minding their own business, not one stopping to smile at or greet someone else. They treated their robots like trash and the robots, bound to be loyal to their masters, received the abuse with no complaint.

Then came fire. Shanghai going up in flames. Robots, with their minds intent on taking revenge on the abusive humans, turned back on their masters, razing everything in their path. A war between humans and robots begun, violence was at every corner. What little remained of what Ben loved was destroyed utterly.

Ben, even when a ghost, fell to the ground in pain. Tears welled up in his eyes.



So this was the future. Obliteration. War would tear families apart. Shanghai would be razed to the ground because of selfish acts committed by the human race.

Ben felt Hannah's warm hand on his shoulder as she moved time forwards. Ben looked up confused, until he saw what was in front of him. Robots and humans respecting each other; Shanghai being rebuilt from scratch to form a majestic sight. And most importantly.....

Nanxun Ancient Town.

There was no change whatsoever. The village was still quiet and peaceful. People wore no mask of emotion. They helped each other without hesitation, pure happiness evident on their faces.

Still pure.

Ben cried again, but this time out of joy instead of grief. Nanxun Ancient Town would survive the war. Not all was lost, he was wrong. The place of his and Hannah's many unforgettable memories, their home, would stand forever.

Ben and Hannah dissolved into the blissfulness of seeing each other, and the place of all their memories, again. The two locked in an embrace, and Ben felt his body slipping away. He opened his eyes to see Hannah taking him with her, to a new place, to a new stage in life.

Ben knew it was his time, but he was not afraid anymore. What he holds dear will not be destroyed. For one last time as he breathed, he laughed with rapt joy, his body dissolving with the laughter.

Days later, police entered the small flat of Ben Seet. The old man laid on his bed, his eyes closed and hands clasped as if saying a prayer. And a large smile was plastered on the dead man's face.

A Second Chance

St Paul's Co-educational College, Lam, Justin – 13

I had just set out from the research centre at the military base when I felt it. There was a certain wrongness in the atmosphere, as if reality itself had been flipped inside out. Before I could react, the prototype time machine's instruments went berserk, sending the machine spiralling towards some unknown destination. Then, as I drew near, I glimpsed the problem. It was like someone had sliced a hole through the very fabric of reality, leaving a gaping hole. There was a violent shuddering as I was pulled in and catapulted into another existence.

I materialized in an unknown river. I hacked myself free with my pocketknife, but I was weighed down by my time travel suit. Gradually, my consciousness faded as I struggled to breathe, and the world went black.

Slowly, my eyes opened. I was in a small boat.

"Where am I?" I asked, my voice hoarse.

"I'm Li, a fisherman. I found you floating in the Huangpu River," he said. "We're nearing the Old City of Shanghai."

"What dynasty is this?" I asked, hoping to get more information.

Li gave me an odd look. "It's the Republic of China. The dynasties were abolished. Didn't you know that?"

"Did you see my...er...boat?" I asked, changing the subject swiftly.

He shook his head. "It probably sank to the bottom of the river."

How am I going to get back to my own time? I thought, a mounting sense of despair growing inside me. As I was mulling over my situation, going over the tools I still had with me, another question occurred to me: *what had smashed a hole in space-time?* It couldn't just have been a time machine. *It had to be something far more cataclysmic*, I thought. When I was considering the implications of a hole in reality, a far more immediate problem happened.

"There's a gang fight on the wharf!" Li yelled, his voice urgent. "We can't go near yet."

Directly in front of us, gangsters were tussling with the local police, gaining ground as the policemen fell one by one. When I looked closer, I realized that the gangsters' weapons were laser blasters. *Why do they have lasers?* I wondered, a sense of foreboding dawning upon me. Before I could say anything, a giant orb-like ship appeared from thin air, its cloaking mechanism deactivated. Next to me, Li's mouth was agape in horror and shock. Carefully, I took a palm-sized locator from my pocket and inputted its coordinates, throwing it in the direction of the ship, where I knew it would find its way to the bottom and adhere there.

As I watched, the gangsters streamed back inside. A turret on the ship swiveled and hummed. My mouth was already open in a warning that was drowned out by the roar as a beam obliterated half the dock. I took a step back in shock, staring at

the smoking crater. The ship neared the port and stopped, hovering above the water. A man wearing a metal mask and a black trench coat stepped out. He seemed to glance in my direction, but it could have been a trick of the light. He pulled out a megaphone, speaking directly into it.

“People of Shanghai,” he said, “Surrender, or risk destruction. You have one day.”

With that, he returned to his ship and left. The realization dawned upon me: the man was a conqueror from the future. By changing the past drastically, he was tearing an irreparable hole in reality. I stepped out onto the destroyed dock and tried to look for a rental boat, preparing to leave. Li caught up with me.

“I’m coming with you,” he said.

I shook my head. “It’s too dangerous.”

“I have a duty to my city too. Besides, I was the one who saved you,” he said.

Warmed by his gesture, I embraced him. No matter what happened today, we would be friends forever.

Together, we set sail, following the locator I had attached to the ship. Using my pocket computer, I hacked into the system and opened a maintenance hatch. We climbed up, emerging in the engine room. As we made our way through the corridors, Li voiced his concerns.

“This is too easy,” Li said. “I don’t like this.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Whatever you say,” Li said, looking skeptical. “I just think something’s wrong.”

“You’re right,” a voice echoed in the passage, sounding amused. The masked person was standing before us. He held up his hand, signalling the gangsters to step forward. We froze and raised our hands.

We were escorted to a dark, ominous room, where Li was strapped into a machine.

“Watch over him closely and make him stand next to me,” the man said to a gangster, gesturing to me. “It will be... amusing for him to see what happens next.”

I was forced to watch as the gangsters attached electrodes to Li’s head, the masked person chatting with me all the time.

“The machine activates pain sensors in the brain,” he explained casually, like he was chatting at a dinner party. “Some people have been known to go mad from the pain.”

Li’s breath caught in his throat as he realized what was about to happen to him.

“Why are you doing this?” I asked, desperately trying to stop Li from being tortured.

“To demonstrate to you the merciless qualities of human nature, he replied. He pressed a button on the console.

“No!” I screamed, but my voice was covered by the agonized yells of Li. Helplessly, I watched as my friend screamed and jerked before my eyes. I prayed that his death would be short. After an unbearable amount of time, Li fell back against the chair, unmoving.

“Why won’t you kill me?” I challenged the masked person, beyond caring. “Kill me now, and be done with it. I don’t want to live!”

He threw his head back and laughed, a chilling sound that turned my blood to ice.

“Do you know why you got this far?” he asked. “It was I who opened the maintenance hatch for you. None of this was accomplished by you.”

“You mean you let us in?” I asked, despite myself. “Why would you let us in when you could simply block our entry?”

He lifted his mask slowly. He had a familiar face that I couldn’t place. He was approximately ten years older than me, with streaks of gray at his temples. I frowned, trying to recall him. Then, it hit me: the man was familiar because he was me.

“You!” I exclaimed. “You’re me!”

“Exactly,” he cackled, a harsh light glimmering in his eyes. “I’m you, twelve years in the future.”

“But why would you — why would I do this?” I asked disbelievingly. “Why would you do such a thing to me?”

My older self smiled bleakly. “I was once as naive as you. Then, when I returned from the trip in time, the military dismissed my time machine, saying that it was too dangerous. In the end, I was fired and imprisoned for corruption.”

His eyes were dark wells of anger and pain.

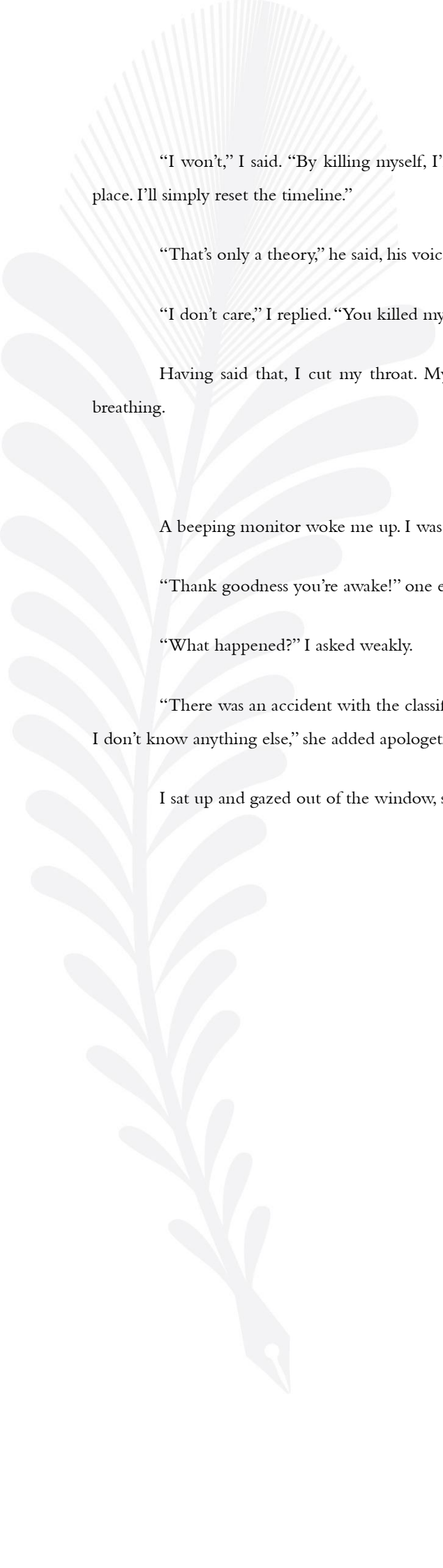
My older self continued, “Later, I found out that my colleague had bribed my superiors and ruined my life. My thoughts turned to the future self I had seen. Long story short, I travelled back in time and recruited this gang, planning to take over the world, one city at a time.”

“You’re insane!” I told him. “Just because the world was unfair to you doesn’t mean you can torture people and threaten helpless cities!”

He smiled bitterly. “You’ll realize the truth of my statement,” he paused. “After all, you are me. You will complete your destiny.”

For the first time since I was captured, I smiled. “No. I’m not you. Not yet.” I moved suddenly, twisting and pulling out my pocket knife. I pointed it at my throat. My future self’s face went white.

“You wouldn’t dare,” he said warily, his eyes fixed on my knife. “You’ll die too.”



“I won’t,” I said. “By killing myself, I’ll make you cease to exist, which will stop me from travelling here in the first place. I’ll simply reset the timeline.”

“That’s only a theory,” he said, his voice tinged with fear. “You might die too.”

“I don’t care,” I replied. “You killed my friend.”

Having said that, I cut my throat. My eyesight blurred in a haze of red, and I dropped to the ground, no longer breathing.

A beeping monitor woke me up. I was in a hospital, surrounded by nurses.

“Thank goodness you’re awake!” one exclaimed.

“What happened?” I asked weakly.

“There was an accident with the classified project you were working on. Some kind of explosion,” she said. “Sorry, but I don’t know anything else,” she added apologetically.

I sat up and gazed out of the window, smiling at the golden sunset. I had been given a second chance at life.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Leung, Wing Yan Janice – 14

“Rub a little faster, would you?” The tall man in the shiny black suit snarled, his face twisted with annoyance.

"Yes, sir," I mumbled. I tried moving my arms a little faster, but immediately regretted it as I winced at the sharp pain from my side left by the beating yesterday.

The man clicked his tongue, "Forget it." He withdrew his half-polished shoe from the brick and left without paying a penny.

"Mister, you haven't paid me yet! Please!" I cried out and ran after him.

The Leader's voice echoed in my ears, "You will not get a grain of rice if you come back with less than 10 pennies tomorrow, you hear me you little rascal?"

"I'm going to go back empty-handed again," I thought to myself. I felt a lump in my throat. Hopeless and freezing, I sank onto the ground and buried my face in my hands.

A stream of warmth on my shoulder brought me back to reality. I lifted my head a little, and a pair of stitched flowery shoes entered my vision. I moved my gaze upwards until it met a pair of round eyes.

"Why are you so sad?" a crisp, singing voice asked.

"It's just... I can't earn enough today," I answered, quickly wiping away my tears with the back of my hand.

She ruffled through her pockets and placed a few dimes in my palm. "That's all I have, it's not much, but I hope it'll help!" she said in a sincere tone.

My jaw was frozen in place and I couldn't respond.

"Well, it'll get better tomorrow!" She said cheerily with a pat on my shoulder, then turned around and left.

She trotted a few steps before coming to a halt and turning back around. She walked back over to me and removed her red mittens.

"It's cold today," she handed me the pair of mittens and ran off again.

That's how Peony and I met.

One afternoon, I saw the same pair of stitched flowery shoes again, this time along with a pair of brown leather boots. The man wearing the boots started talking as I polished his shoe, "Is this him?" He asked the girl. "Yes, master. This is the boy I was talking about the other day," the singing voice answered.

The man held my chin with gloved fingers and tilted my face left and right. "Yes, he does have a great face for my business. I like his high cheekbones, which show character," he said as he let go of my face. "Son, where are your parents?" He asked.

"Me? I... I don't have any," I answered.

"Then who do you belong to? I want to speak with him, bring me to him," 'master' ordered.

I looked at the girl, and she gave me a nod. I got up and led them to the lair.

The 'master' bought me from the Leader. I learned that he was called Master Po, and he ran one of the biggest Chinese Opera houses in Shanghai. He offered a bag of gold coins for me, and I was sold immediately. Ever since that day, I was trained in Master Po's theatre, with a newly given name, 'Dawn'. I remember hearing on the radio that Master's show was sold out completely in Shanghai, and I realised my life had been completely turned around.

The reason I was chosen was to pair up with Peony. Master Po had been searching for new talents. He would always say, "In ten years' time, you two would be the best-selling couple in my show." Peony and I trained restlessly every day, and were inseparable. Our lives slowly melded into one.

One summer afternoon, a few years after I joined the show, we sat side by side, shoulders flush against each other, munching on icy watermelon slices to cool us down. "Peony," I muttered to no one in particular. "Hmm?" She hummed lazily in response. "Peony," I repeated again. "It's an unusual name. Aren't girls all called Ling or Mei or something like that?" I asked. Peony giggled, "Haven't you figured it out by now? Peony's not my real name," I raised my brows in incredulity. "We all get a new name after we join the show, a more...enthralling name, I guess," she explained. I nodded, "So what's your real name?" I asked her. She flashed me a warm smile, "Moon, but nobody's called me that in ages," she replied, "What's yours?" she asked. I tilted my head in confusion. I never really had a name, my parents never named me before giving me up. "I don't really have one besides Dawn," I told her truthfully. She laughed, a clear, cheerful sound, "Then I guess we'd have to name you." She stared at a sparrow flying above us. "Sky," she blurted out after a while. "Let's name you Sky," she said. I beamed at her, "I like it. You can call me that from now on." "And you can call me Moon," she grinned and rested her head on my shoulder. I felt my cheeks grow red from something that wasn't the heat.

Peony and I bonded a lot. She was the closest thing I've ever had to a family. Just as Master Po said, we became the best-selling act in the show. All was well, until the third year anniversary of our first performance.

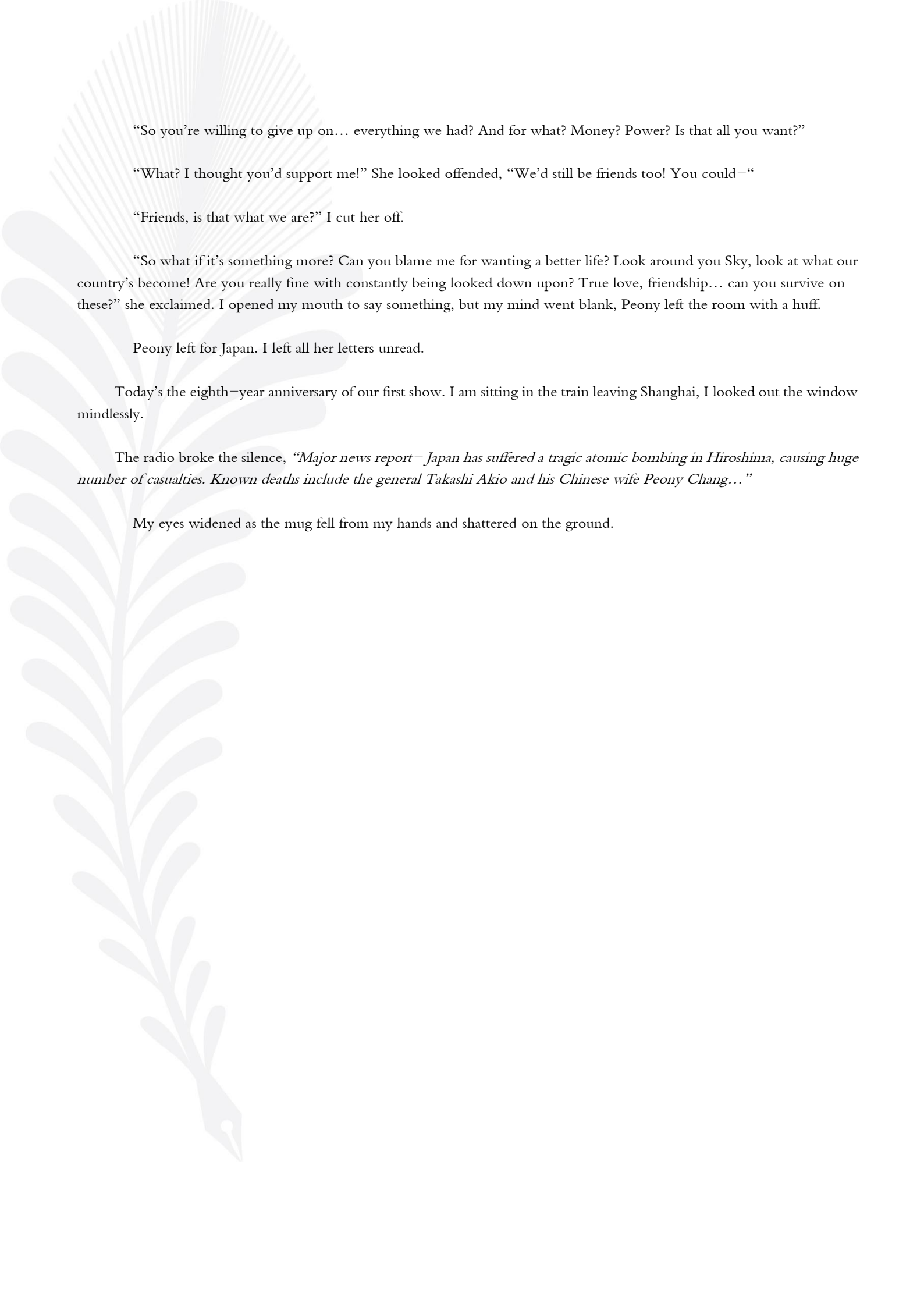
"You were great out there today, Moon," I said as we walked out of the changing room. We just finished a show. "Not so bad yourself, Sky," she replied with a cheeky grin.

Just as we were about leave the empty theatre, Master Po approached us with an unfamiliar-looking man. The man was dressed in formal attire, which seemed like military uniform. Judging from his posture and stance, he was a man of high status. "Peony, Dawn, meet General Takashi," Mr Po announced. Peony and I bowed slightly. Ironically, I could hardly remember the General's face. After all, no one dared to look directly at a Japanese, especially a general.

"Hello," the General said with a thick accent. He was speaking to the both of us, but all of his attention was on Peony alone, "I watched your show just now, and I have to say that I was deeply impressed," a proud smile tugged at my lips, "by your beauty, Miss Peony," my smile faltered instantly as the General finished. The General continued with his small talk, but my mind was elsewhere. He invited Peony to dine with him. Peony stared at me, and I stared right back. Peony and I had a tradition of going to the noodle stall next to the theatre after every show, we've been doing that since our very first performance. She wouldn't ditch me, not on this special day. Peony tore her gaze away from me and faced the General, "Of course, General Takashi! It would be my honour!" He extended his arm to her, and she walked away with him, arms linked, without looking back. That night, Peony returned at late night, and rambled on and on about how great the meal was with General Takashi. My heart was pricked by a thousand needles, but I all I did was smile.

I would never forget that night. "Sky," she started. I looked at her, "Yes?" She deliberately averted her gaze from mine. Something wasn't right, I thought to myself. "General Takashi asked me to go to Japan with him." I froze in place. No, no, no, was the only thing in my mind. "And your answer?" I asked, failing to conceal the shakiness in my voice. "I said yes," Peony said in nothing more than a whisper.

I let out a breathy chuckle. "Sky? Say something," she shot me a look of concern.



“So you’re willing to give up on... everything we had? And for what? Money? Power? Is that all you want?”

“What? I thought you’d support me!” She looked offended, “We’d still be friends too! You could—“

“Friends, is that what we are?” I cut her off.

“So what if it’s something more? Can you blame me for wanting a better life? Look around you Sky, look at what our country’s become! Are you really fine with constantly being looked down upon? True love, friendship... can you survive on these?” she exclaimed. I opened my mouth to say something, but my mind went blank, Peony left the room with a huff.

Peony left for Japan. I left all her letters unread.

Today’s the eighth-year anniversary of our first show. I am sitting in the train leaving Shanghai, I looked out the window mindlessly.

The radio broke the silence, *“Major news report—Japan has suffered a tragic atomic bombing in Hiroshima, causing huge number of casualties. Known deaths include the general Takashi Akio and his Chinese wife Peony Chang...”*

My eyes widened as the mug fell from my hands and shattered on the ground.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Liu, Jennessa – 12

The old Shanghai has always been known to be bustling and substantial in ways of living and business—it had the most ravishing architects and costumes which every country cherished and admired. Citizens there were confident and proud of their city and unique Shanghainese dialect. But fate did not bring much luck to this glamorous city as she faced an ordeal in the 1940s—in the midst of World War II.....

Well, that was in my history book. The lesson was tedious and I just couldn't refrain from a divergent dream.....

I shut my eyes calmly.....

Soon, I wake up finding myself standing on a towering architect with a splendid rooftop painted in gold! Apparently, it is a building situating at the famous wài tǎn, in front of Huang Po River.

I gaze around....I see lofty buildings everywhere. They all look superb with tints of foreign architectural design. But...the whole environment lacks the feeling of modernism in the 21st century. This all looks strange to me, but how...? 'Oh!' I scream, 'I've seen this!' I pause ...'from my history book!' I suddenly realise that I have voyaged back to the old Shanghai! I am shocked ...Very shocked. "Well...it may be a dream" , I say to myself. BTOOM!!!!!! The blasting sound tells me that I am living at a warring city. The sound came from my back, so I turn around. I see a demonised building with people dashing and screaming on the street down below! I see armies and tankers everywhere.....I realise that I am right in the old Shanghai occupied by the Western powers with war fighting. What I can see around is so different from what I have read in the book about the old Shanghai.

Instead of a bustling night with music and dance, it is now a quiet and fearful darkness with occasionally gunfire. Peoples are not wearing glamorous dresses, but are covered by ragged clothing with bandages as part of the ornament. Piles of rubbles should have been parts of the ravishing buildings. Ruins might have been the astonishing architectural designs. I stare at the running people and try to find their confidence and dignity, but their faces show only fear. Their conversation no longer exhibits the very Shanghainese leisure, but full of hysterical enquiries of the whereabouts of their loved ones. This is not the old Shanghai I have known! It should be a wonderful utopia where everything has its own role and everyone lives in harmony!

I am so outraged. The war and the conquerors have turned the beautiful city into a mourning place. I am over taken by my rage, and do not realise my position that I am on top of a tall building! I slip and fall down, but I do not get hurt, and find out that I can even fly as my body is as light as a piece of silk! I am a human with super powers in this war—torn city!

I can leap as high as close to the sky and scamper as fast as a racing car, and am so powerful as a buffalo! With this power, I can liberate people from tragedies and ordeals! I test my power for a few more times and give myself a smirk. I can be the hero to save the old Shanghai! I hurtle and fly around busy helping everyone who needs help and aid care. 'Help! Help!' I find a pregnant



woman stuck under a fallen building. She is grateful as I help her out of all those heavy ruins, yet so shocked to see me with all the might and powers to do so. She asks me skeptically, "Who are you?" I say doubtfully, "You can call me 'Ms Hero'".

As I am feeling proud of myself and thinking of all the great things I can do next, I suddenly hear a familiar voice over my head, "Wake up! Wake up!"

The sudden interference caused me a headache! I shook and shook my head, trying to get rid of it. When I opened my eyes again, I found myself sitting at my ordinary chair, in my ordinary classroom inside my school, facing my ordinary teacher whose face was as red as a tomato. "Stop daydreaming!" Yelled my teacher. Well, all that crazy stuff was just a dream: I am not a superhero, and definitely not in the old Shanghai !

I hurriedly opened my history textbook, waiting for the lesson to terminate. Suddenly, something in the textbook thrilled me and I nearly had a heart attack! There was a passage on this page , with the heading "Mysterious event in the war-torn Shanghai": There was a mysterious girl who called herself 'Miss Hero' who saved thousands of people and vanished into the cheering crowd....."

The Prophecy of the Yin Yang Jades

St Paul's Convent School, Luk, Ho Yan Katie – 14

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang describes how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. In the 20th century, there was a well-known myth in Old Shanghai, the traditional urban core of China, about Jade stones, one of the most valuable treasures. Families or couples who are separated will reunite one day, no matter where they are, by the gravity-like Yin and Yang forces possessed in the two complementary pieces of Jade stones they each carry with them, when the powers within the Jades exude.

“Oh not again!” I mumbled under my breath as I sheepishly hauled myself up after slipping, wincing in pain when my finger was sliced inadvertently by a red booklet. “I don’t think I’ve seen this anywhere in the house before, what could it be?” I shrugged and shuffled into my room with the booklet held tightly to my chest, the stinging pain long forgotten.

Kneeling on my bedsheets I flipped open the first page of the booklet. I smiled. Well, who could resist the idea of a little adventure amidst their repetitive life of adulthood?

“‘Liang Luoyang’s Diary’? Hold on...does this belong to mama?” I wondered. Unending questions flooded my mind. I picked up a miniature map of Old Shanghai with red markings on random spots of its defensive walls. A thought suddenly occurred to me and I gasped.

“Daughter...” my mother whispered. “Yes, mama!” I mumbled. “Find papa and gege for me, okay? This is my last wish...” she breathed out inaudibly. “And... and how shall I do that, mama?” I whispered. “Remember the myth of the Yin and Yang Jade stones I’ve told you since you were young?” I nodded. “The only way to find him is through the power of the Jade stones, only then can papa and I may be reunited...” Mama coughed out. “So where is your piece of Jade stone, mama?” I urged, but there was no reply. That was the day mama officially left me, all alone.

As days passed, I was too busy striving to survive in this dangerous world alone, soon forgetting about my mother’s last wish. Who do the merchants think they could fool into believing these stupid myths anyways? Not me, as a fully grown adult. It occurred to me now I’ve found mama’s diary as the directions to find papa, I could at least be a filial daughter and show her that I’ve actually paid some effort in fulfilling her wish.

Stepping out into the fresh summer breeze, I walked down the streets of Old Shanghai, occasionally glancing to check the map. Then the Dajing Ge Pavillon museum, my first destination, caught my sight. It was one of the only two sections that remained after the City walls of Old Shanghai were dismantled. I silently praised myself for remembering what I was taught in school when I spotted barely decipherable words beneath the red marking on the map. “The first time I met him? Why does this sound like some old cheesy lines from romance novels?” I spluttered. “Could this relate to papa?!” I flipped the page.

“23rd June, 1917

*What a beautiful sight to behold,
a scenery of gold,
ravishing and entrancing;
bewitching and captivating;
Why don't we dance,
In this song of endless romance?”*

“Seems like someone had a crush then...” I smiled unconsciously, examining the half-faded picture of the man's silhouette. Who doesn't love romance? “What directions can I get from a poem though...” I sighed as I proceeded to the Bund, the location of a mark on the map that can be clearly seen. The turquoise-blue seawater in front of me prompted me to flip the page.

“5th October, 1932

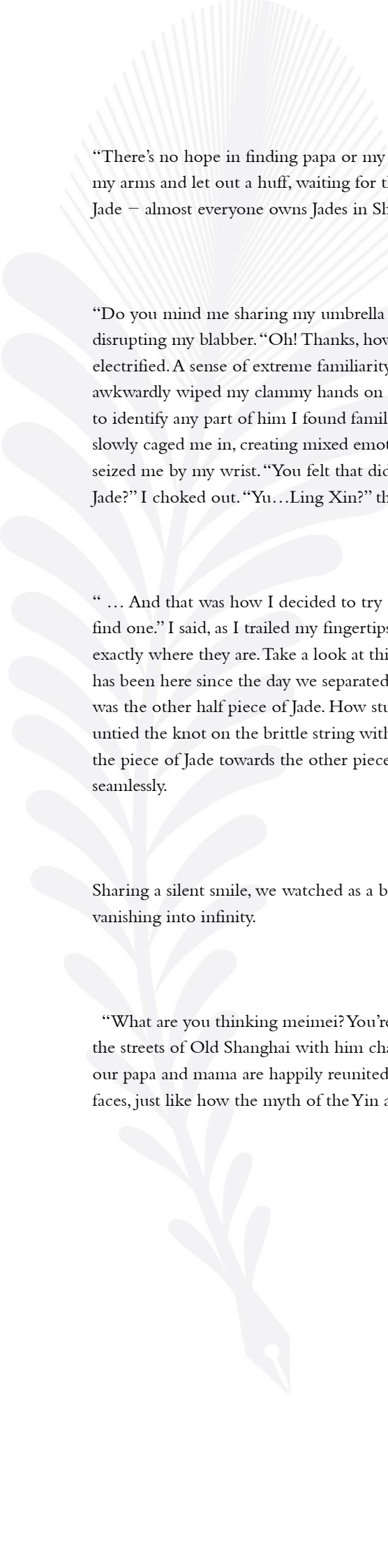
The Japanese officially took over Old Shanghai. My world turned upside down. I still remember the screams and shouts of soldier in the cold malevolent air, the gunshots and explosions which startled the kids, especially LingXin, the remains of our bombed house from the underground emergency shelter... We have no idea what the future holds. Even if we all survive this war, we had no home, no capital, absolutely nothing. Laogong suggested he'd bring Li Shun with him to find refuge in Hong Kong, but that means separation, and I might never see my laogong and son again. What a despair.”

I remember my mum telling me about this famous beach that she always goes to when something is bothering her. On the day papa and my gege LiShun departed, she must have come here too. I involuntarily frowned as I picked up a family portrait. The vibrant smiles of my family pulled my heartstrings, triggering a wave of emotions as I caressed the photograph dearly. I am the only one left now. I missed papa and gege dearly. I grimaced, rubbing the stone on my necklace which was a usual habit when I feel down or nervous. A loose piece of paper danced in the wind and landed gracefully in the sand.

“21st December, 1933

The whispers of the wind can seem as sinister as the murky midnight sky. Four silhouettes became two on a shingle beach. The sea dashes the sand and retreats, the spiritless sky and the featureless waterscape reflecting my soul's emptiness. It stings my heart with its saline touch. The seagulls' trident cries are brash in the faltering light, reminding me of the screams on the battlefield. Dear Lord, why must you send them away from me?”

A pang of shame washed over me for not taking mama's last wish seriously. My tears were camouflaged by the beginning of a hard rain as I awakened from my trance, shoving the diary under my cardigan and sprinting off to search for the nearest shelter.



“There’s no hope in finding papa or my gege anyways. I knew this myth was just some merchant’s selling techniques.” I crossed my arms and let out a huff, waiting for the incessant rain to end. “Moreover, I don’t even know where mama hid her piece of Jade – almost everyone owns Jades in Shanghai! ”

“Do you mind me sharing my umbrella with you? The rain is unlikely to stop in a short period of time.” A stranger offered, disrupting my blabber. “Oh! Thanks, how nice of you!” I smiled. At that very moment when our eyes met, it was as if I was electrified. A sense of extreme familiarity overwhelmed me. The man had hazel eyes like me, which was odd in Shanghai. I awkwardly wiped my clammy hands on my dress, then habitually rubbed the stone hanging on my neck again. I was desperate to identify any part of him I found familiar. It was also then I felt a sense of melancholy, matching the solemnness of the sky as it slowly caged me in, creating mixed emotions in me. I couldn’t help but turn to the stranger, halting us both into a stop. The man seized me by my wrist. “You felt that didn’t you” he stuttered, looking straight into my eyes. “Are you here to... find a piece of Jade?” I choked out. “Yu...Ling Xin?” the man whispered. “Wait...Is this...Li Shun? Gege, is that really you?”

“ ... And that was how I decided to try and find the pieces of Yin and Yang Jades to fulfil mama’s last wish, yet I couldn’t even find one.” I said, as I trailed my fingertips on the sand. “I didn’t know about the myth of the Yin and Yang Jades, but I know exactly where they are. Take a look at this.” My brother smiled, pulling out a piece of jade tied up by a string around his neck. “It has been here since the day we separated.” I stared with wide eyes at his piece of Jade which glistened in the sun, and gasped – it was the other half piece of Jade. How stupid of me. Why hadn’t I ever given a thought to the stone on my neck? I carefully untied the knot on the brittle string with shaking hands and watched as the Jade slid out, gracefully lying on my palm. I held out the piece of Jade towards the other piece on my brother’s hand. A force pulled them both forward. ‘Click!’ the Jades sealed seamlessly.

Sharing a silent smile, we watched as a bead of lustrous—gold circled the completed piece of jade, lingering for a second before vanishing into infinity.

“What are you thinking meimei? You’re smiling like an idiot.” “Not telling you,” I stuck out my tongue at gege, then ran down the streets of Old Shanghai with him chasing behind. I rubbed the completed piece of Jade in my palm, and silently wished that our papa and mama are happily reunited up in eternal paradise, watching us chasing each other like kids, with a smile on their faces, just like how the myth of the Yin and Yang Jades promised we would be.

The Magic in Qipaos

St Paul's Convent School, Lum, Pui Wing – 13

Once upon a time, on the central coast of China, there was a land with short yet attractive buildings, with foreigners who had ventured far and wide just to catch a glimpse of this special and fascinating piece of land. And the wondrous place was the Old Shanghai.

There were not many schools then, and the students were chiefly male, as it was a male-dominated society. Females were treated as housewives or employees, and were always looked down on.

However, there was a young independent 16-year-old girl named Ka Li. She was intelligent and multi-talented. Her father was once an eminent millionaire, was wealthy and powerful, until his wife fled with a foreign man with all his possessions, leaving Ka Li and her father penniless. Before she departed, she left a full box of good thick drawing papers and the priciest set of colour pencils for Ka Li. Her father was disheartened and furious, and drank all day and night. Her father knew she was brainy, and took a bright child for granted. She could read a page in seconds and memorize a poem in minutes, so she was pressurized by her merciless father who told her that if she does not study or procrastinate or even just take a short break, he is going to abandon her. It is pathetic that her true talents were never recognized by anyone, not even her relatives, her closest friends, nor her own father.

Though Ka Li had been depressed about losing her mother for such a long time, she treated her last memories of her mother as gold. The papers and pencils influenced her so much that she adored designing the traditional outfits of China, the renowned 'qipao', tight-fitted one-piece Chinese dress for women. She aspired to be discovered and have her very own brand one day, yet, she knew deep down inside, it was merely a naive dream.

One rainy night, Ka Li's father returned home, drunk and fatigued. Ka Li fell asleep, lying on her table. Her father caught sight of her and thought she was slacking off again. He violently pushed her aside, waking Ka Li, unfortunately, he spotted the breath-taking sketches of her daughter, and grew furious, as all he ever wanted was for the poor child to do continuous studying, and having no enjoyment at all. Ka Li tried to grab her hard work from the table before her father did. However, it was too late, her father already snatched the sketches and was ready to crumple them up, Ka Li begged and pleaded. Her father showed no compassion, and cold-heartedly shattered Ka Li's heart into tens of thousands of pieces as he threw the papers out of the window, which landed onto the wet streets like snow. Ka Li wanted to dart out of the house but her father stopped her and banned her from leaving. She was crushed and cried herself to sleep that very night.

The next morning Ka Li woke earlier than the sunrise. The streets were dried up and from her window, she saw the white rectangles on the streets and gasped. She rushed down to the streets and picked up her priceless creations as rapidly as possible. A foreign man down the street picked up a sketch of one of Ka Li's favourite dresses, admired it, and walked up to Ka Li. In a friendly voice, he said, 'I assume this is yours.' 'Oh, thank you! How could I ever thank you!' Ka Li said gratefully, 'by the way, I am Ka Li, pleasure to meet you.' 'I am surprised the pencil marks were not smudged at all after the heavy rain!' the man exclaimed. Ka Li said, 'My dear mother left me in the best papers and the best pencils. She is no longer with me now, oh how much I miss her, if she was still here, I would not need to suffer, I would not need to be, well, like this...'



'Do you want to be here? I can bring you to a place far, far away from this torturing world you're living in. It is heavenly and fashionable — France,' the man said. 'Really?' Ka Li asked, 'you are taking me away? Why? What is your motion?' 'Don't get me wrong. I am a good person,' he smiled, 'I am looking for a fashion apprentice. Would you like to be this lucky person?' Ka Li agreed without hesitation, she left a letter for her cruel father about all he did in the years and packed all her things and left with the man for France with no regret.

They were on the ship for weeks. Ka Li has never felt so free. She did not have to hide her sketches again. The man told her about the history and rich culture of France on the ship, distinctly different from Shanghai. Ka Li as her smart self even learnt to speak some fluent French on the journey to France. She also learnt that the man was a well-off merchant, and everybody called him Mr. Robinson. She had a fabulous journey and she enjoyed every minute of it.

Finally, Ka Li arrived the perfect world Mr. Robinson described to her. Mr. Robinson welcomed her to his house. It was luxurious with marble staircases and bejeweled tiaras and crowns were showcased in the hallways. Ka Li could not enjoy herself more in such a paradise.

Years and years passed by as if they were days. Ka Li not only knew how to design traditional qipaos but also fancy gowns and dresses of the western world. Ka Li found a way to combine both cultures and created a magnificent series of dresses. Mr. Robinson took care of her as if she was his own daughter. Ka Li was so successful and Mr. Robinson took deep pride in her. On her eighteenth birthday, Mr. Robinson surprised Ka Li with the best present of her life, her very own brand. She named it 'Ka Li Robinson – Shanghai'. She added 'Robinson' to the shop name to commemorate Mr. Robinson, who saved her from the agony she was living in while she was the Old Shanghai. He also took all of her sketches to famous French tailors and made all of her dreams come to life. When she was twenty, he gave her another gift which was her first store in France. Soon, there was a store in Shanghai, and the number of stores increased year by year, and by the time she was thirty, her brand was the talk of the town all over the world.

Of course, Ka Li got quite wealthy over time with continuous hard work. She never forgot about Mr. Robinson's aid when she was helpless and still adored him. But, she decided to return to where she came from. She went back to Shanghai for a little vacation from work and saw her stores on every crowded street.

One thing that touched her heart the most was when she heard a little girl in one of her stores who asked her mother if she could get one of the one-of-a-kind dresses when she turned eighteen. Her mother whispered in her ear that it was too expensive. Ka Li told the girl and her mother to return to the store in a week. The mother and the child agreed. Ka Li immediately got to work took some extra fabric and thread to the sewing machine she brought from France and sewed the little girl a custom-sized dress. After a week, the mother and the child went back to the store. Ka Li was ecstatic to see them and handed the dress to the little girl, she looked puzzled. Ka Li silently told her, 'I am Ka Li... I designed the dresses here.' The little girl smiled and hugged her tight, and left the store merrily. Ka Li grinned from ear to ear, and was satisfied of her act. Ka Li thought to herself, 'Isn't this a great story of Old Shanghai? But, it is not a story, it is a dream, a dream which came true.'

7 Seconds of Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Mohan, Suyasha – 12

I once heard, “If you ever loved anything or anyone, you should let it go.”
I loved my life, so I let it go.

5th April, 20XX

I was sitting on my hospital bed, more like my death bed with my tumour running around in my brain when suddenly—

“Nurse, nurse.” yelled my mother.

I saw my mom rush out the room. Everything was blurred. It was like a storm in front of my eyes.

I felt a gust of motion happen on my right side — my brother, Austin knelt down and said, “Just hang in there, Avery.”

My doctor, Dr. Jimmie darted into my room with my mom. She looked around the room of nurses with eyes which clearly asked, what happened. My mom panicked and stuttered, “D-d-doctor, Avery was doing just fine when her heart rate suddenly just shot up and she just, I just, I don't know what happened.” My mom broke down into tears, scared for my life.

Things were getting more blurry. Voices were fading. I could barely hear sentences.

Dr. Jimmie rushed around and instructed, “Inject one of epi and—”

“And what?” I heard myself shout.

Instantaneously, I realised I was standing in the middle of nowhere, it was pitch black and there was a pin drop silence. I could see nothing or hear anything except of my shaky breaths. I gazed above me for moments.

“Am I ,” I halted and took a deep breath, “Dead?”

I blinked my eyes open and shut countless times, thinking this might be a dream but stopped after feeling like an idiot fluttering my eyelids like butterfly wings . I walked forward in pitch black calmly while there was only one question running in my head ; Dead or Not.

I suddenly stopped and stood still. My eyes shut like I felt a need to close them. I was positioned there, hands on the side of my hospital gown, feet sticking together and my back still.

I inhaled a long and deep breathe as I opened my eyes. I couldn't believe what I saw— RED. Yes, red everywhere, lanterns, scarves and shades. It was a marketplace. It was beautiful. Yet it was empty. I looked up in the upper right hand corner, red flashing in my eye and saw some characters which was chinese. Underneath it said ‘Welcome to Shanghai’ That was when I realised where I was.

Chinatown, New York City— My favourite place, Shanghai. I always loved Shanghai and its history. Of course I was in downtown New York, ambience of China. However this could be all just my imagination. When I glanced up and saw a Brobdingnagian sign “Astor House Hotel”. Why would this sign be there? Anyway, I kept walking straight, I passed through so many canons staring at my slippers. I look down at my feet and I realised that I wasn't wearing my hospital gown and flip-flops. I was decked up in a red shirt, khaki shorts and sneakers. Something about this outfit jogged my memory but I casted it aside. I heard a small shout which was more like hearing someone scold. I ran down an alley to see what was happening. I hid behind a radish cart. There stood a man in all black. He was tall and had a strong build. He wore a black hat over him with strands of his blond hair showing. He had a rather Caucasian colour and a black stick in his arm. This man raised his stick and was about to hit a man opposite to him. That man was short and wore a round cap with dragons on it. He wore a light blue gown with pants . As he raised his hand in front the man I shouted, “stop”.

I closed my eyes to avoid the scene. I was looking at the back as I heard a loud shriek of pain. Didn't that man hear me. I walked closer and closer until I was so close, I bet he could feel my breathe. However, he didn't budge. He kept talking to the man. Before I said anything, I took a moment to notice his clothing . He wore very primitive attire. He looked exactly like a British army general. That's when I noticed a surname on his left hand side chest. ‘Warren ,’ it said. Then I saw a boat and a beautiful ocean in front of me. I looked on to the ground and saw opium— yes opium in the 21st century. A thought rush through my head, maybe this wasn't Chinatown or the 21st Century. I was in Shanghai, in old Shanghai. And that short man was illegally shipping opium. I stood there frozen. I wanted to pull away but it wasn't right... I know it sounds like I'm the Good Samaritan, saving other people but truly... I just felt sorry. I threw a random, sharp radish as far as I could in his direction. Miraculously, the radish punctured his nose, giving the Chinese man a chance to escape. I could hear his bone crack even from a distance. He shouted obscenities that could bleed any person's ear. He sent his gang of tough-looking men to kill me. Fortunately for me, I had a head start and before I got cancer, I was in the running team and the marathon team. I could run fast to get rid of them and I would jog while I find a safe place. After around 20 minutes of running, I found a nice-looking tea shop called Yang's Cha Chaa Teng. Even though there was nobody there, the tables were full of delicious Shanghai delicacies I sat behind a fan near to the various Shanghai tapestries near the exit. After stuffing my face with dim sum, suckling pig and put chai pudding. After the hectic run and the amazing food, I began to nod off... I woke up to a sound of dishes shattering. A man's voice floated from behind the fan saying, “Look. Look. Girlu Girlu behind fan fan.” I knew that it was the local gang. I immediately headed towards the exit. Unfortunately, I had to completely destroy different artefacts to get to the exit. I shattered a golden dragon statue to pieces with my rear end when I fell whilst my attempt at fleeing. I finally reached the exit and I ran as fast as I could. It felt terrifying but exhilarating as I leapt from pavement to pavement. I kept running until I noticed the first being I had seen in a long time except for the gang. I stopped. As I proceeded, I saw a shadowy image of a tall lean woman with wavy hair about a block away. I slowly crept toward her . I was trying to picture her face. When suddenly I stopped, I couldn't believe my eyes.

“Oh my goddess” I mouthed and jogged forward.

“Athena ” I said.

“Avery, w—what are you doing here.” which confirmed it was Athena. —My sister—

I stared at her a without stopping, understanding why she was here.

Athena was my elder sister. She and my dad passed away when I was 7. They were killed in a car crash when my family and I were coming back from a trip and I was wearing the same exact clothes as I was now. This made my suspicions about being dead even worse. I used my courage and started a conversation with the most idiotic question

“Am I Dead? Athena, am I like a ghost now,?”

She giggled and simply replied, “No. This is Mid—Heaven”

“Mid—heaven, I'm dying, right.”

“You figured it out .” She said in a sad way.

“ And, my cancer has taken me here and you to me.”

“Cancer, what cancer, what are you talking about?” Athena questioned.

“Athena, last year, I was diagnosed with Stage IV Metastatic Melanoma . And this cancer causes serious hallucinations.”

I slowly figured the whole thing out. Shanghai is my favourite place on earth and Athena was the closest person to me and she died on the day we came back from Shanghai . Athena explained that it would be about now that I have to choose between living and dying and I had to spend all time and make every moment count. It sounded like cheesy romance film but it was true. In that exact moment, two shiny, bright, white lights appeared at the two sides of me. From my right side, I heard the voice of doctor Jimmie saying, “Get the shock paddles and charge it to 200. We can bring her back to life.” That's when I realised that it had only been 7 seconds since I «dozed» off. On my left side, I knew I could be with my dad and Athena in Heaven.

What should I do?

I knew my decision then and stepped into the flash of light.

I once heard, “ If you ever loved anything or anyone, you should let it go.”

I loved my life, so I let it go.

The Hidden Truth

St. Paul's Convent School, Thiruvankadam, Bindhiya – 12

“This way, this way. Everyone follow me! ‘Shanghai Modern Travels’, this way.” said a tall, confident lady named Alice. She was leading a tourist group into a museum in Shanghai. The tourist group included 2 families: Mr. and Mrs. Chan with their daring but sweet daughter, Gabrielle and a happy couple named Mr. Arthur and Mrs. Ann Montez with their twin boys, Mason and Malcolm.

As they entered the majestic hall in the history museum, Alice, said “Listen up everyone, we’ll meet up back here in an hour and a half. Then, we will set out for lunch! Okay, see you all later.” And as she said those last few words, everyone in the hall was already hurrying into different parts in the museum. Just then, Gabrielle went up to her parents and said, “Mum, dad, would you mind if I stay around here...um, alone please? It’ll... er... give me some peace of mind.” Their parents weren’t sure what she was up to but said “Okay, but be careful. We’ll come check on you after some time.” “Thanks!” whispered Gabrielle and then waited for them to leave the room. She thought to herself, “This is it. We’re finally in Shanghai, at our first tourist spot!”

Gabrielle Chan was born in Shanghai but then moved to America at the age of 3. As she spent only 3 years in Shanghai, she couldn’t remember much of her childhood there and weirdly, the only memory she could recall were the times when her lovely grandfather narrated stories for her before bedtime. She really did love those moments. Also, for some sort of reason, her parents didn’t bother telling her a lot about her birthplace or her early days in Shanghai, though she asked them countless times about it. That’s why she took up this golden opportunity and persuaded her parents to sign up for this tour group with the hope that she could, somehow, reconnect with her hometown... She looked around with eager eyes and was wondering where to start her quest. She decided to explore the corner with the most pictures which was ‘The past livelihoods of people in ancient Shanghai’ section. She immediately commenced her reading.

She was getting even more interested every second that she could not even take her eyes off the display boards and pictures. After a while, she decided to take a short break before exploring another corner of the room. She sat down on a comfy sofa near the magazine shelves. As she was resting, she suddenly remembered her grandfather and started to miss him. Gabrielle started to tear up. ... Just then, Gabrielle heard someone whispering just a little further behind her.

A hushed voice said, “Psst, look! Should we go and...” “No! Let’s leave her alone for some time.” Another said in a low voice. The two boys started to turn round and leave the room when Gabrielle suddenly got up and said in a normal voice, “Hi!” She didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for her at the time. The boys turned around to reveal that they were the twin boys, Mason and Malcolm! Mason looking relieved that Gabrielle was feeling better and said, “Oh, hi! I’m Mason and this is my twin, Malcolm. We’re both nine. What about you?” “Hey, how about that?! I’m nine too!” exclaimed Gabrielle, forgetting all about her grandfather’s death. “Don’t you find this museum boring? We do, a lot!” commented Malcolm in a very childish manner. Gabrielle thought for a second, and said, “Well, I think I have something interesting for you... Sit down; I’m going to tell you a story!”

“It was August 13, 1937”— she started, in a dramatic voice— “Thousands were dying during the clash! It was called... the Battle of Shanghai! There tons and tons of troops from China and Japan. Indeed, it was truly a fierce battle. Not only troops, but tanks, aircrafts as well as naval ships. Each country had tough and bold leaders. The Battle had commenced...” Gabrielle continued with her strong voice when narrating the rest of the story. As she went on, the twins kept ‘Whoa’ing and ‘Ooo’ing

throughout the storytelling. When Gabrielle finished narrating her story, Mason and Malcolm bombarded her with so many questions and yet, she was delighted to hear them all. She never had an audience before, so she felt quite over-whelmed! As she was answering one of the questions asked by Malcolm, a hand touched her shoulder...“It’s time to go, Honey.” Said Gabrielle’s mum in a soft voice. “Right!” said Gabrielle and she jumped on to her feet. “Well, come on then.” She told the twins, “I’ll answer your questions on the way out!”

The next day, Gabrielle decided to go for a walk just outside the hotel. When she reached the lobby, she met the twins at the souvenir shop. They decided to join Gabrielle. While walking, the trio talked about the story Gabrielle told them about yesterday. Mason had thought about the plot of the story and changed it. Malcolm changed the main character into a wizard. Gabrielle found all of this very amusing. As they were talking, they didn’t realize that they were actually going to a very peculiar street. It had ancient-looking relics along the sides of the street. Gabrielle was the first to notice a temple that was beautifully built and decorated. She entered the temple gazing at all of the amazing architectures while the twins followed closely behind as well as being mesmerized by the designs everywhere...

When Gabrielle turned around, she noticed an elderly woman telling a young child something. “They must be having a grandmother and grandchild relationship. How sweet!” Gabrielle was about to nudge Mason and Malcolm to see this touching moment but she found out they were not beside her at that point. She then saw them drawing close to the grandmother as if they were eavesdropping on her conversation. “They can’t be this rude...” thought Gabrielle and she then went up to them, trying not to catch the attention of either the grandchild or the grandmother. Mason saw Gabrielle coming and signaled her to come faster. She came and the twins literally pinned her to the wall and made her listen to what the grandmother was saying before she herself could pull them away. As she was listening, she realized that the grandmother and her grandchild are not having a conversation instead; the grandmother was narrating a story.

“It’s the same story you told us yesterday, Gabrielle. Isn’t that weird?” whispered Malcolm. “Yeah...yeah it is, isn’t it?” Then, without hesitating or thinking, she went up to the elderly woman and said, “Ma’am, sorry to interrupt, but...er...don’t mind me asking but, who told you this story? No, it’s because my grandfather narrated to me this, exact, story when I was a very small kid...” Gabrielle didn’t really plan what to say. The grandmother looked at her with a confused look on her face for a very long time and then unexpectedly she got up and... she hugged Gabrielle with tears in her eyes! “Gabby...o Gabrielle, my dear granddaughter...it’s been so long, I thought I’ll never see you again...” she said crying. “Um... who are y –wait– are you my grandma?” Gabrielle said, startled. Just before her grandmother could reply, Gabrielle’s mom came bursting in.

“GABRIELLE! GABRIELLE, why on earth did you not tell me you were going walking? How could you be so irresponsible? We were both sleeping but still! How—” Her mom surprisingly stopped yelling. When Gabrielle looked, she saw her mom staring with an open mouth at the elderly lady. “Mama?” her mom said. The old woman choked in tears and said, “Lucy!” and hugged Gabrielle’s mum as well! Gabrielle was super confused. “WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON RIGHT NOW?” She screamed that even the little girl and the twins looked scared of her. That was when her mum said in a soft, gentle voice, “Gabrielle, meet your grandmamma...”

Everyone sat down except the twins; they waited outside as they knew this was a ‘personal matter’. Then, Gabrielle’s grandma and mom started revealing that actually Gabrielle’s mum, Lucy had argued badly with her family and then left her home, went to America with Gabrielle’s dad, Mark and with Gabrielle and vowed to never to talk about or talk to anyone from their family in Shanghai. Gabrielle finally knew the truth they were hiding for so long and also understood why she never



talked to her relatives, why she didn't just stay at Shanghai and why she had to persuade her parents to come here. Everything was crystal clear now... There was awkward silence. Then, both Gabrielle's grandma and mom said sorry and admitted that they missed each other a lot. At last, everyone had a final, touching, group hug together, including the small girl, who apparently was Gabrielle's cousin.

This was the ancient tale of how one story could reunite an entire family together....

THE END

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St Paul's Convent School, Tsoi, Cheuk Ling Anna – 14

‘Shanghai is named as the Pearl of the Orient for a reason. It is a place of intrigues and mysteries, a place full of fantasies and wonders, a place where significant battles were fought and true, honourable heroes are made in these battles. Particularly in the Battle of Shanghai...’ the teacher droned. I stifled a yawn. The heaviness in the room seemed to weigh down on my eyelids, causing them to droop. The weather didn’t help to lift up my spirits either. It was stuffy, sweltering and suffocating, and the sky was murky with a hint of thunder. ‘Surely nothing unusual will happen today.’ I thought.

As I was walking back home after school that day, I saw a beam of bright light appearing from an alley suddenly. With my breath caught in my throat, my heart thudding like a drum, and my palms slick with sweat, I approached, step by step, to the source of the bright light. To my shock, I saw that it came from a tattered book and a flag.

‘How come they are so bright?’ I wondered, picking up the book to examine it. All at once, the winds around me grew stronger, and to my utmost astonishment, a portal appeared, sucking everything inside. Before I blackout, I took a glance at the title of the book, which says—‘The New Tales of Old Shanghai’.

‘Wake up! Are you alright?’ a voice shouted beside my ear. ‘Where am I?’ I slurred groggily, blinking my eyes to adjust the dim light in the building. Standing in front of me was a girl of nearly the same age as mine, probably a few years older. However, she looked as if she’s been leading a harsh life. Her face was smudged and haggard; the bones prominent against her cheeks, the uniform she’s wearing appeared to be rather faded and torn. Still, her dark eyes burned with a fiery spirit as she was squinting at me.

‘Who are you? Which year is it?’ I burst out. After a profound silence—‘I,’ she said slowly. ‘am Wei Men, and you are now in Shanghai, 1937, which is in the midst of the Battle of Shanghai.’

‘Why and how did you call me here?’ I questioned, thoroughly discombobulated. ‘Can you help me with my mission?’ Wei Men answered. ‘I can. But why wouldn’t you find someone more capable than an ordinary secondary student who has absolutely no idea of the mission and only gives burden to others when she tries to help out?’ I screamed, venting out my frustration without knowing.

Just then, a gunshot sounded in the distance. ‘Hush!’ My companion whispered while shoving the flag and the book I saw earlier into her uniform. ‘What are you actually trying to do?’ I asked. ‘Our troops are nearly flattened out by the loathsome enemies. Despite being a teenage girl, I really...wanted... to try my very best to raise the soldiers’ morale and beat our detested enemies by giving them the flag, even if...if it means sacrificing myself.’ Though her voice shook, she still replied decisively. ‘Let’s go then.’ I told her. ‘Really?’ She asked incredulously. ‘Yes, let’s face it together.’ I answered her steadily.

‘Wait! You need to change first.’ Wei Mei said, thrusting a bundle of clothes to me. ‘Why?’ I wondered. ‘Come on! You can’t risk leaking out your identity, or else you will not only be killed, the history might be rewritten and it will be a catastrophe. Understand?’ She interrogated. ‘Yes.’ I answered meekly.

‘Where are we heading to?’ I enquired, as we finally set off in a fast pace. ‘To Sihang Warehouse as fast as possible, which is opposite to here. Great, now we’ve got to get over that crowd of people to leave here.’ Wei Men groaned. ‘Don’t worry, as long as we didn’t act suspiciously, we’ll be safe as I get along well with most of the English soldiers downstairs.’ She added, sensing my uneasiness.

Slinking stealthily, we successfully arrived at the exit. Outside, it was an eerily silent starless night, as if Death had been following us. Soon, we reached a wire fence. ‘Be quick! Do you have anything sharp?’ Wei Men asked, after looking at it. ‘I think...I have a pair of scissors in my bag,’ I suggested, reaching for them in my bag.

After much effort and some deep scratches on our hands, we eventually made a hole on the fence. Just when we are crawling through the fence, to my horror, I heard a series of bangs fired at our direction!

‘Squat down and crawl!’ Wei Men urged. Adrenaline pumping, we attempted to crawl as fast as we could with our hearts caught in our throats. Our necks got stiff from lowering our heads to avoid the flying cannons above, which only missed us by an inch. ‘This is it. We’re all going to die sooner or later before we even reach our destination.’ I thought, feeling doomed.

As if someone had heard of my plea, the gunshots died down. In order not to get caught again, we advanced slowly on all fours. It was arduous, with our vision blocked in the pitch black night, the wind billowing dust into our faces, our ears forever prickled for any signs of enemies. ‘Look! We’ve nearly arrived!’ said an excited Wei Men. Immediately, I raised my head for a better look. ‘Is it an illusion though? Why do I hear the sound of water?’ I questioned, puzzled. ‘This river is the famous Suzhou River. The camp for our troops, which is our destination, is actually across the river.’ ‘What?’ I exclaimed, my mouth gaping open. At that exact moment, a sound from behind made us freeze on our tracks.

‘Whoever you are, stop what you are doing or you’ll be killed!’ It was unmistakably the voice of our enemies! ‘It’s no use. Maybe we should just surrender.’ Wei Men suggested softly. ‘No! Think about your family, your friends. They would be heartbroken if you didn’t succeed in your mission. Moreover, think about the Chinese soldiers that are battling their hardest now. They are willing to sacrifice themselves without a second thought, so why don’t you do the same? Lastly, think about the promise you made. One should fulfil one’s promises once they are made, shouldn’t they?’ said I in a fierce whisper. ‘In fact, I... was thinking of that because... because I couldn’t swim.’ Wei Men stammered. ‘No worries! I am a strong swimmer myself. Now jump!’ I responded. Just as the silhouette of a Japanese soldier emerged from the bushes, we leaped into the river.

Blinking water from my eyes, I swam towards Wei Men. Dragging her using my arms, I attempted to pull her up to the surface. Before long, my chest was burning for want of air, my legs were flailing feebly, my arms were getting sore and numb, the weight of my companion felt like a dead weight. Just when I was about to give up, I remembered the words I spoke to Wei Men. ‘I couldn’t. I couldn’t just surrender that easily, with the trust of my companion on my shoulders. Come on!’ A voice in my mind screamed. Mustering my last reserves of energy, I kicked my legs, propelling me forward. ‘I must be near to the shore. The water was shallower already.’ I thought as I sank into the darkness.

‘Are you feeling better?’ ‘Is that my mother’s voice?’ I mused, opening my eyes. I was lying on a bed of grass, while Wei Men was crouching beside me. ‘Thankfully, you fainted on the shallow waters of the river bank. Therefore, I was able to tug you to the shore without getting drowned.’ She recollected. Without warning, Wei Men took hold of my hand. ‘I really wanted to thank you for your help and support in my mission, especially when we were nearly caught by the enemies. At first, I was also uncertain whether I could really perform this mission successfully as a girl. However, after seeing you biting the bullet, I was determined that I can do this too!’ She said breathlessly. We smiled. ‘Take this and flip its pages, a portal will then transport you back to the present.’ She continued, handing me back the book. ‘Do I need to accompany you to the camp?’ ‘No need. I will do it alone. Now go!’ ‘Wait, why did you call me?’ I yelled. ‘Haven’t I told you?’ A teasing voice rang in mind as I was transported back to the present.

That night, as I was packing my schoolbag, I found a tattered book in my bag. Curious, I gazed at the title. It was ‘the New Tales of Shanghai’! Turning over the pages rapidly, I found a story of my adventures with Wei Men. My heart lurched. For some unknown reason, I thought of the teacher’s words. I grinned. Shanghai is indeed a place for a myriad of tales.

The Seed of Happiness

St. Paul's Convent School, Webb, Stephanie – 12

It was called 'The Seed of Happiness'. A spherical object with intricate patterns made of pure gold woven together to cover the first fruit that had grown in Shanghai. During the last decades of Ming Dynasty, Shanghai was plagued with civil unrest and invasions by Japanese pirates. The emperor entrusted a powerful sorcerer to cast a spell on the fruit to protect the people of Shanghai by ridding them of evil.

Somehow, word of this magical object spread to outsiders. Bandits frequently infiltrated the land, trying to steal the sacred object. The government decided to bury it and build a wall around Shanghai to keep out the intruders. Over the years, 'The Seed' had become a myth, but the truth was far from that....

1912

I was born into a poor family, forced to leave school early to help make ends meet.

In 1912, I was working on demolishing the wall surrounding Shanghai. Toiling day and night, I worked extra shifts to ensure we had enough food on the table.

One day, as I swung my shovel hard to remove a strong part of the wall, the earth beneath me suddenly collapsed. Gravity pulled me down like a pair of malicious hands as I was swallowed into darkness, tumbling and screaming.

I finally landed with a thud. I groaned as I glanced at my surroundings. I found myself drowned in darkness. Way above me, I could see dust churning in the weak light beams that filtered through a small hole.

That's where I fell through. That means I am now underneath the wall. I didn't know anything existed here. I rummaged through my pocket. *Ah-ha, a matchbox!*

With the flickering light from the match, I could see a dark tunnel which seemed to stretch on forever. Since the hole was so far up, the only option for me was to head down the path. Strangely, when my match burnt out, I could see some faint light ahead.

The light grew stronger and stronger as I moved forward, with the sound of my footsteps as my constant companion. Suddenly, I could hear what sounded like gears turning on the wall. Burning arrows darted out of nowhere. My heart skipped a beat. I immediately ducked. A few arrows narrowly missed me.

What is this place? Why are there fire arrows?!

As I stumbled along, my head started spinning, I couldn't focus. Then came the familiar sound of gyrating gears again.

A huge wrecking ball fell from the ceiling. Miraculously, I dodged it without having my head decapitated. Just as I thought things couldn't get much worse, daggers flew out all around me. *Flying daggers??* I darted away as fast as I could.

Then, I felt a sharp pain in my leg. I grimaced as it spread through my body. A dagger had stabbed my thigh. Warm blood was oozing out of the wound incessantly. I gripped my leg in agony.

Inhaling deeply, I steadied my arm and pulled out the dagger as swiftly as I could. This motion only caused even more blood to pour out. Through gritted teeth, I ripped off a piece of cloth from my shirt and tied it tightly around the wound.

Drops of sweat rolled down my forehead. I leaned my back against the wall for support and slowly slid down until I was lying on the cold hard floor.

My eyelids felt heavy, my arms and legs ached. A line of tears dripped down my face. I fell asleep with the thought of never seeing my family again.

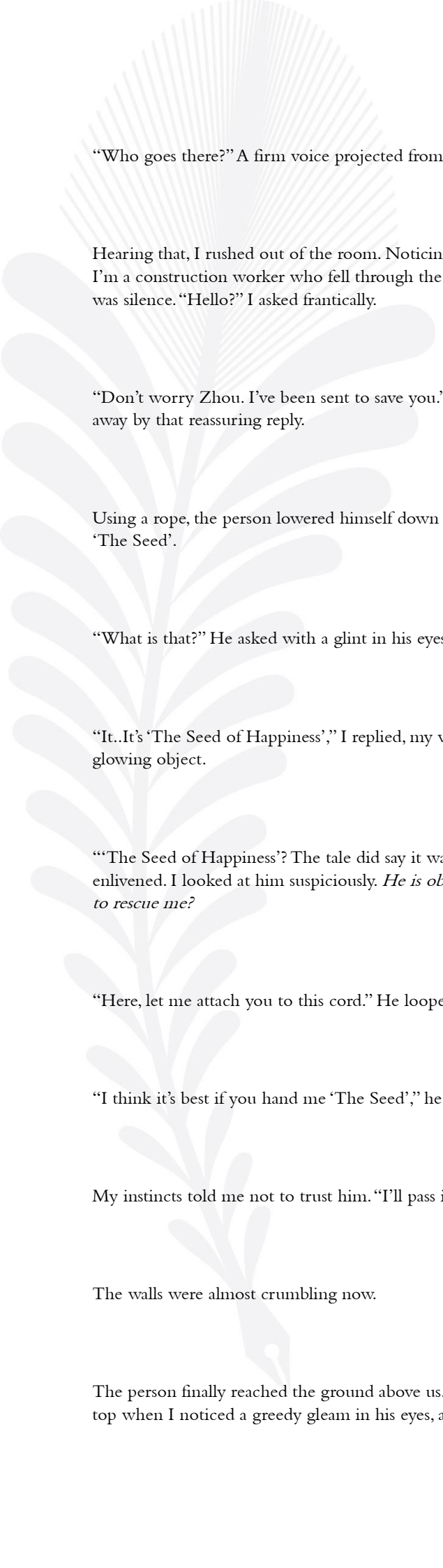
When I came to, the blood on my leg had clotted although the wound still throbbed. That was when I realised there was a pile of debris that seemed to be glowing in front of me. I walked cautiously to the pile. As I got closer, I could hear a strange humming sound.

Gingerly, I removed the debris piece by piece, clearing the way to an entrance to a tiny room. In the middle of the room, there was a golden stand with ornate decorations. On it was a spherical golden object which was glowing ten times brighter. *That's where the mesmerising sound is emanating from!*

I slowly approached it, careful not to trigger any traps. It was even more beautiful up close. There was a tint of red tracing the edges of gold. It looked like a golden apple. Then, something clicked – my grandma used to tell me about 'The Seed of Happiness'. I remember dreaming of the endless possibilities if I were ever to find it. As I grew older, I dismissed it as folklore like "The Cowherd and The Weaver Girl".

The realisation that I had actually found 'The Seed' seemed surreal. This was a national treasure. I must surrender it to the authorities. Proud that I had just unearthed a precious artifact, I eagerly scooped it up.

POW! As I touched 'The Seed', the walls started shaking. I could see cracks forming on the ceiling. *I have to get out of here quick!*



“Who goes there?” A firm voice projected from a distance.

Hearing that, I rushed out of the room. Noticing the light beam from a newly—opened hole, I yelled, “Help! My name is Zhou, I’m a construction worker who fell through the city wall. This structure is about to collapse, please help me!” I exclaimed. There was silence. “Hello?” I asked frantically.

“Don’t worry Zhou. I’ve been sent to save you.” The person replied. I exhaled, feeling relieved. My despair was instantly washed away by that reassuring reply.

Using a rope, the person lowered himself down to my level. He then looked me over from head to toe, his eyes lingering on ‘The Seed’.

“What is that?” He asked with a glint in his eyes.

“It..It’s ‘The Seed of Happiness’,” I replied, my voice shaky. Strangely, he appeared indifferent. He just stared blankly at the glowing object.

“‘The Seed of Happiness’? The tale did say it was buried in the lair of the sorcerer who cast the spell.” He suddenly appeared enlivened. I looked at him suspiciously. *He is obviously acting. But why would anyone be under the city wall? Surely he is here to rescue me?*

“Here, let me attach you to this cord.” He looped a rope around me.

“I think it’s best if you hand me ‘The Seed’,” he suggested, “It will be more secure with me.”

My instincts told me not to trust him. “I’ll pass it to you once we get up there.”

The walls were almost crumbling now.

The person finally reached the ground above us. “Here, let me help you,” he said, extending his hand to me. I was almost at the top when I noticed a greedy gleam in his eyes, accompanied by a wicked grin.

He leaned in close and snatched 'The Seed' from me, "Sorry, but treasures like this don't belong in a museum." With that, he let go.

"Nooo!" I yelled as I fell. I caught one last glimpse of his evil smile. Then the bricks around me collapsed. The last thing I saw was a ray of sunlight from the hole above me. I hit the ground and darkness engulfed me.

"He's down here!" I heard someone exclaim. A bright light shone in my eyes. The world around me was spinning. I felt a pair of strong hands securing something around my back. I couldn't make out any faces but heard muffled voices before I fainted again.

The "Rescuer's" Perspective

After devoting my life looking for 'The Seed', I finally managed to snatch it from the fool who had stumbled upon it. Legend has it that the owner who cracks it open would not only find happiness, but he would also wield tremendous power.

With great care, I pulled the sphere apart. Unexpectedly, a piece of yellow paper fell out. My heart was pumping fast as I held it in my shaking hands, ready to read out my fortune.

On one side, the ancient calligraphy read "true happiness". Puzzled, I turned it over. Instead of instructions, the writing here was simply "what goes around comes around". *What?! You have found "true happiness" – literally! There was no magic spell!*

1917

Five years have passed since my "adventure" in the tunnel. The person who had claimed to be part of the rescue team turned out to be a bandit. The authorities caught up with him and he is now serving a life sentence for stealing a national treasure.

As for me, apart from becoming famous for unearthing a relic, my family no longer lives in poverty as I am now a guide for the underground maze.

While there may have not been an actual spell, there is certainly much truth in "what goes around comes around". I decided to propagate this philosophy by telling my story and asking everyone to do good deeds.

Indeed, I have attained "true happiness" as I can see people paying forward their kind deeds everywhere.

THE END

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Li Zhen's Journey

St. Paul's Convent School, Wong, Ingrid Zoe – 12

“Li Zhen!” Father said. “Come down, I have something to announce.” As obedient as I am, I quickly jumped down the stairs and listened to what my father had to say. “Son, our family is in a poor situation struggling with our expenses.... My old friend’s son as you know, Daniel is working at a retail company ran by some French people in the Chinese city. The salary is enough to give your siblings an education and to pay for our family’s expenses. This job can lead our family to a better future!!!! It’s up to you Li Zhen, you’re the only one we can depend on.”

At that moment I felt a huge responsibility, I was afraid but I knew I had to do it for the sake of my family. In no time, I responded certainly, “Yes father, let me work at the Chinese city.”

“That’s my big boy!” My mother uttered as tears streamed down her face. Everyone rushed towards me and gave me a big hug as I put on my fuzzy coat, held my bags and headed out the door with a heart-throbbing expression on my face. Minutes later I arrived at a rusty pier at my village. DINGG!!! The boat has arrived!

Through the misty fog, eye-catching lamp poles glowed along the moat of the defensive wall, they are hinting me that the passengers on the boat and I are close. I was very pumped. For my whole life, I have never been to the Chinese city, the urban core of Shanghai. When we have arrived, the atmosphere was flattering, it was filled with people, buildings, never-before-seen transportations, and aureate lights. I acted like a trapped frog being set free. I quickly took out my scrappy map and looked for the retail company. Hundreds of street names, company names, restaurant names, question marks did not stop appearing in my mind. Fortunately, a retail company finally appeared after a few walks. I immediately wiped off the dust on my changshan, made sure I looked presentable, and rang the doorbell. Suddenly, a well-dressed man came out with perfect hair, a velvet jacket, a pair of beige trousers, and all along with his pair of brown knee-high boots. “Welcome!” he said in a heavy French accent.

“You must be Daniel’s friend? Oh right Li Zhen! I’m Pierre, the boss of the company.”

“Hello Mr. Pierre, it’s an honour to meet you. I came here to...” “To look for a job, child I exactly know why you came,” he interrupted. “Come on in.”

“Michael!” Mr. Pierre called.

“This is my assistant, who will be guiding you next week, he’ll teach you everything you need to know . I’m in a hurry, so I’d better leave.” After he left, Michael then toured me around this breath-taking company.

After an endless night of instructions, Michael led me to a little hostel reserved only for workers. I quickly went to my bunk and settled down.

The strong sunlight shone through and woke me up straight away. I got dressed in my new uniform as a retailer and helped other workers prepare the goods for the opening of the store. TOCK! “It’s 9 o’clock, time to open the main doors,” Michael said. Customers and visitors started coming in, and we all welcomed every customer like they were.

In all these months, everyone worked whole-heartedly. Our company flourished, I sent money back to my family, and they were back to being balanced with their expenses, Daniel and I made a good partner in our company, everything just went smooth.

On a Tuesday, Mr. Pierre showed up unexpectedly in the office with an announcement, "My dear workers," in his heavy French accent. "I'm pleased to announce that this has been an amazing ride for all of us. The Chinese officials of Shanghai have held a banquet as a celebration. Great job everyone!" A round of applause echoed around in the main hall of our company.

The hour of closing had come again, but Daniel and I decided to stay and clean up the mess customers have made because we were bored. While we were fooling around, a voice shouted, "WHEN ARE WE KILLING THEM THEN?" Killing who, Daniel and I both wondered.

"SHH Raphael. We're killing the officials in the banquet."

"Oh no is that Mr. Pierre?" Daniel whispered. Although I couldn't believe it as well, I had no way of denying it, so I nodded. Abruptly, Pierre and other French men came out from the store room, Daniel and I had no choice but to dock beneath the cupboards of goods, with fear in our hearts, they left not knowing the two stalkers underneath the wooden cupboards in their company.

Daniel and I hurried our way back to our bunks and discussed about this. "How can this possibly happen?," said Daniel in shockness. "Well it just did. We have to tell the other workers."

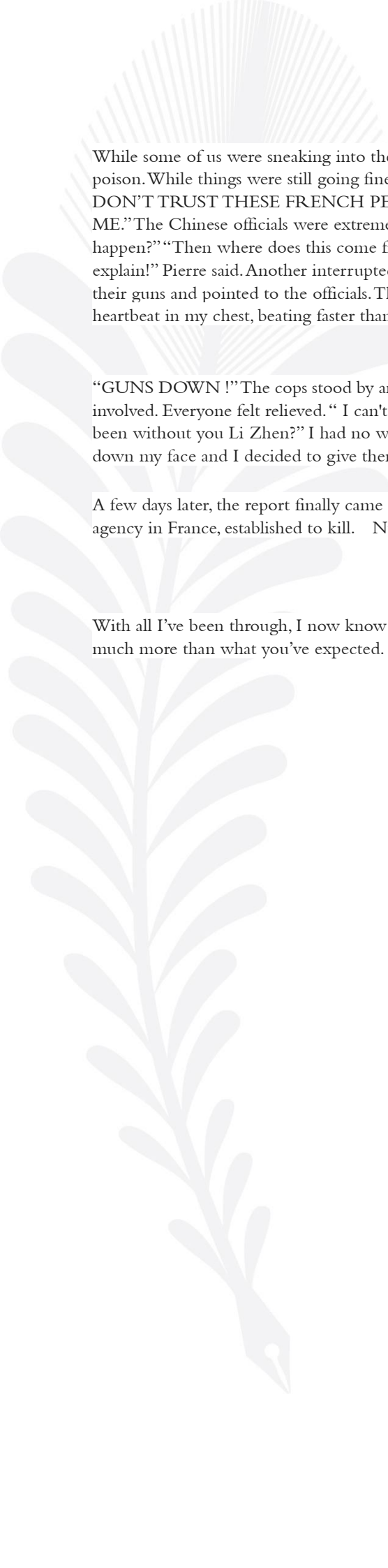
It's just a typical day after work, but just when all the workers were preparing to leave. Daniel and I shouted and caught their attention. "I know you all have to leave, but trust me it's worth the time." Daniel started speaking softly to guarantee no other French men hears it, "Last night, Li Zhen and I heard Pierre and other French men in the store room, discussing about the murder of the Chinese officials, they said they are going to do it in the banquet!!!!" Workers who were listening all freaked out in an instant, one of them interrupted, "I doubt. Mr. Pierre has always been very considerate." Others started questioning our words. "We saw them with our own eyes! There's no way that it's not true." "We're taking them down. We can't let French people kill our country's officials. We need them and besides we can save lives." "There's only one way to find out, are you with us?" To my surprise, more workers joined to unite a stronger power. I was lucky to have such supporting colleagues, but at the same time I felt more pressure.

Days have passed but nothing has stopped us from stalking Pierre. The French people held another secret meeting. This time I brought more workers to eavesdrop as we have to prove to them that we're not liars.

"Poisonous wine! Perfect" Goosebumps appeared all over our bodies, we knew we had to do something.

The next night, we all gathered up in our bunks and thought of a plan. "Kill them with knives!" "NO! Call the cops!" "We have to think of a real plan," I said trying to unite their diversities. "Why don't we secretly change the poisonous wines in the banquet? Well of course we'll need to call the cops standby in case anything happens." Daniel raised his opinion. "Great idea, but we definitely have to sort our jobs for this." We were so devoted that our brains could not stop functioning! Our unity have already told me that these French people are going down.

It's the day of the banquet and everyone is ready to 'celebrate' our success.



While some of us were sneaking into the kitchen, one of the French men recognized us, and left right away with his packet of poison. While things were still going fine, I seized the opportunity and stood up on the platform in the middle of the hall, “DON’T TRUST THESE FRENCH PEOPLE. THEY’RE JUST TRYING TO MURDER YOU. YOU HAVE TO TRUST ME.” The Chinese officials were extremely confused, but the French people denied, “That’s ridiculous, why would that happen?” “Then where does this come from,” Daniel said confidently holding out a bag of poison from the kitchen. “I can explain!” Pierre said. Another interrupted, “FINE , WE ADMIT IT BUT WE’LL NEVER SURRENDER.” They took out their guns and pointed to the officials. The Chinese officials shivered in tears, their bodies were covered in sweat. I can hear my heartbeat in my chest, beating faster than I could ever imagine.

“GUNS DOWN !” The cops stood by and made sure no one made a move. They cleared the area and caught all the French men involved. Everyone felt relieved. “ I can't believe we succeeded!” one of my colleagues shouted. “Indeed. What would this have been without you Li Zhen?” I had no words to say. I felt moved, successful, relieved, all of it at the same time. A tear brimmed down my face and I decided to give them the biggest hug to show my gratefulness to them.

A few days later, the report finally came out. It turned out that Pierre and his colleagues were actually working for a secret agency in France, established to kill. Numerous unsolved murder cases were also completed by them.

With all I’ve been through, I now know we should take risks in life. Do new things and challenge yourself, you’ll accomplish so much more than what you’ve expected.

The Little Shanghainese Dressmaker

St. Paul's Convent School, Wong, Kristie – 13

In the year of 1913, the northern winds howled outside, and snowflakes flew around in Shanghai. Everyone hurried home to avoid the bone-chilling night. Not a single person could be found on the street – except for a small figure who was sitting on the doorstep of a rundown wooden house that trembled in the wind.

Wenxue sat frozen stiff, gazing blankly into the distance. She saw a Dragon's Dress Tailor Company store in the distance, but quickly turned away as she knew she could never afford the dresses. She had only a thin, cotton sweater to keep her warm, and as the wind mercilessly lashed at her red cheeks, she could not stop shuddering. She did not cry, for this was the least of her sufferings. She often had to wait for hours on end before her father returned home, as she was not allowed to keep the key.

“You have no right to keep the key,” her father had said.

Though she disagreed, she never argued, because her father firmly upheld the Chinese belief that females had a much lower status than males. If she talked back, she would be slapped for disobedience.

After waiting for another agonizing hour, Wenxue finally glimpsed her father's outline in the distance. As he approached her, she saw that he was in a foul mood again, perhaps because he had been unfairly treated at work. “Hello, Papa!” she greeted him, wary that he might take out his frustration on her, as he habitually did whenever he was feeling upset. Thankfully, he simply ignored her presence and entered the house.

Once inside the house, Wenxue was about to enter her bedroom when her father started yelling at her. “You stupid, useless girl! Can't you see that I'm exhausted? You're such an ungrateful daughter! Why didn't you make me some tea?”

Wenxue scurried to make a cup of tea. Just when she was about to reach for a cup, her father yelled again. “How many times have I told you that I dislike this cup! Won't you ever obey my wishes?”

“Papa...the other cup hasn't been washed...” she stuttered. “I don't care! It's your fault that you didn't wash it!” he hollered. “I...I was out doing errands for the whole day, Papa! I'm so sorry!” She tried to explain, but to no avail. He went on yelling at her, using all sorts of profanities, and even slapped her across her tear-streaked face before he sent Wenxue to her room.

Wenxue cried until her eyes stung. She felt as if she could no longer take the daily verbal abuses from her father. He regularly scolded her for trivial matters. He even said that he wished her mother, who died at childbirth, had bore him a son instead. She felt trapped, as she could not survive without the measly sum her father provided for her meals. The agony in her heart was far harder to bear than her stinging cheek and ringing ears. No amount of consolation could heal the cuts her father had made in her heart, because the cruel insults that he hurled at her on a daily basis had scarred her forever. Nobody knew how she suffered at home, for she always pretended to be happy. She had nobody to talk to, and drawing was the only thing that



calmed her. *Surely I will die of depression before reaching adulthood*, she thought to herself. Yet what could she do? He was her father, so she had to accept whatever treatment she received; there was no hope for her, and crying was useless.

Wiping away her tears, Wenxue sat down on the floor and took out her colour pencils, which she had secretly skipped many meals in order to buy. She loved designing dresses, and she dreamed of having them made according to her designs. As she had done for many nights in a row, she designed yet another dress. It had a flawless fusion of traditional Chinese and Manchurian *qipao* style, making it elegant and unique. Just as she was adding the final touches, her father barged into her room.

She froze in shock, unable to utter a single word. Upon seeing the colour pencils and design of the dress, her father was enraged. “How dare you waste money on colour pencils! You must have stolen money to buy them!” he boomed.

“No, Papa, I used my lunch money! Please don’t punish me!”

Her father’s face turned beet red. “I gave you part of my precious salary just to keep you alive, not for you to waste on stupid colour pencils! How many times have I told you that I forbid you from drawing!” Wenxue hung her head, pleading silently for mercy with her eyes.

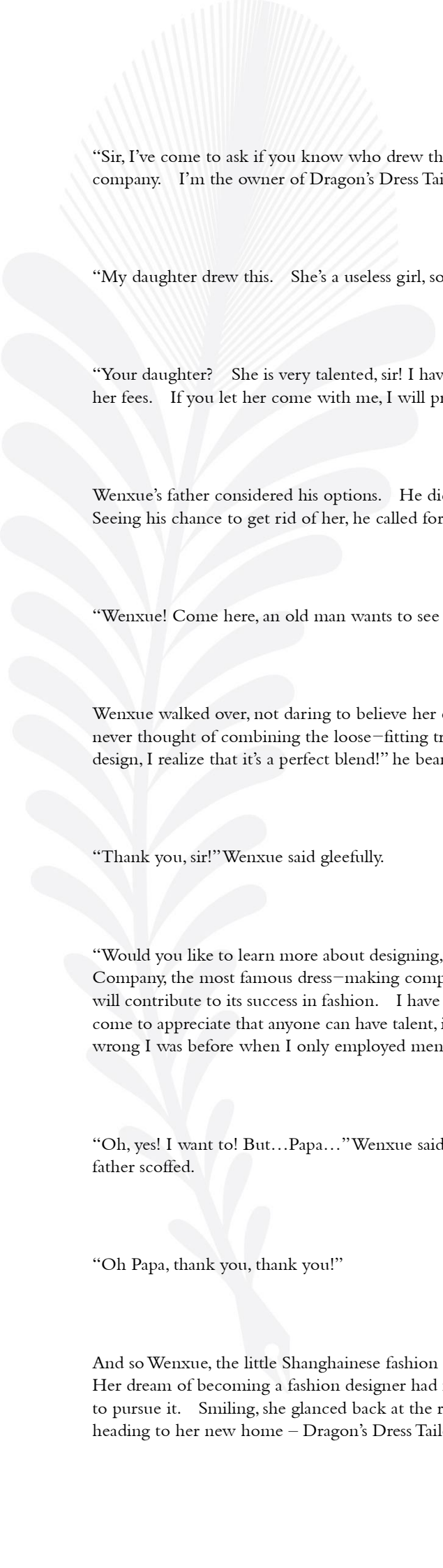
Completely ignoring her, her father snatched the design of the dress, threw open the window, and let go of the paper. It swirled in the wind and disappeared in no time. Then he snapped each colour pencil in half, and burned them in the fireplace. Without looking at Wenxue, he stalked out of the room.

Wenxue cried a river. Tears poured down as she mourned the loss of her precious colour pencils. She remembered the design of the dress, she could draw it again, but now that she had no more colour pencils, what could she draw with? Hopelessly, she lay down on her hard bed and cried herself to sleep, convinced that her dreams had been shattered.

Little did she know that her design had not been lost. An old man, who was the owner of a well-known dress-making company in Shanghai, had been walking on the street at that precise moment, as he spotted a piece of paper on the ground. Out of curiosity, he picked it up and saw the intricate design of a dress. Amazed by the designer’s talent, he was determined to find the designer. “Such talent should be nurtured,” he thought.

Judging by the spot he saw the piece of paper on, he deduced that the designer’s home must be nearby. He knocked on every door, but none of the residents could tell him who might have drawn it. When he came to Wenxue’s house, he hesitated, because he thought that a poor family could not nurture such a talented designer. Nevertheless, he knocked on the frail, wooden door, and out came Wenxue’s father.

“What’s the matter, old man? Don’t bother me with nonsense – I’ve got no patience!”



“Sir, I’ve come to ask if you know who drew this design. The designer is very talented, and I’d like to recruit him to my company. I’m the owner of Dragon’s Dress Tailor Company,” the old man said.

“My daughter drew this. She’s a useless girl, so don’t bother wasting your time on her,” Wenxue’s father said.

“Your daughter? She is very talented, sir! I have never come across such a talented young lady! Don’t worry about paying for her fees. If you let her come with me, I will provide for her every need,” the old man promised.

Wenxue’s father considered his options. He did not want to pay for Wenxue’s expenses anymore, and he did not love her. Seeing his chance to get rid of her, he called for her.

“Wenxue! Come here, an old man wants to see you. He saw your stupid dress design, and he thinks you are talented.”

Wenxue walked over, not daring to believe her ears. “Hello, Wenxue. You are young, but your talent is amazing. I have never thought of combining the loose-fitting traditional Chinese style with the Manchurian *qipao*. Now that I’ve seen your design, I realize that it’s a perfect blend!” he beamed at her.

“Thank you, sir!” Wenxue said gleefully.

“Would you like to learn more about designing, and eventually work for me? I’m the owner of the famous Dragon’s Dress Tailor Company, the most famous dress-making company in all of Shanghai. Shanghai is a fashionable city, and I have faith that you will contribute to its success in fashion. I have never had female designers in my company, so you shall be the first one. I have come to appreciate that anyone can have talent, if given the chance to show their creativity. Thank you for helping me see how wrong I was before when I only employed men from rich families,” he said gently.

“Oh, yes! I want to! But...Papa...” Wenxue said sadly, glancing at her father. “By all means, go! You’re a burden to me,” her father scoffed.

“Oh Papa, thank you, thank you!”

And so Wenxue, the little Shanghainese fashion designer, left her home, the place where she had endured countless miseries. Her dream of becoming a fashion designer had finally come true. A bright future lay ahead of her, and she was only too eager to pursue it. Smiling, she glanced back at the rundown wooden house for the last time before turning her back on it for good, heading to her new home – Dragon’s Dress Tailor Company.

Boundless

St. Paul's Convent School, Yeung, Tivona – 14

1857

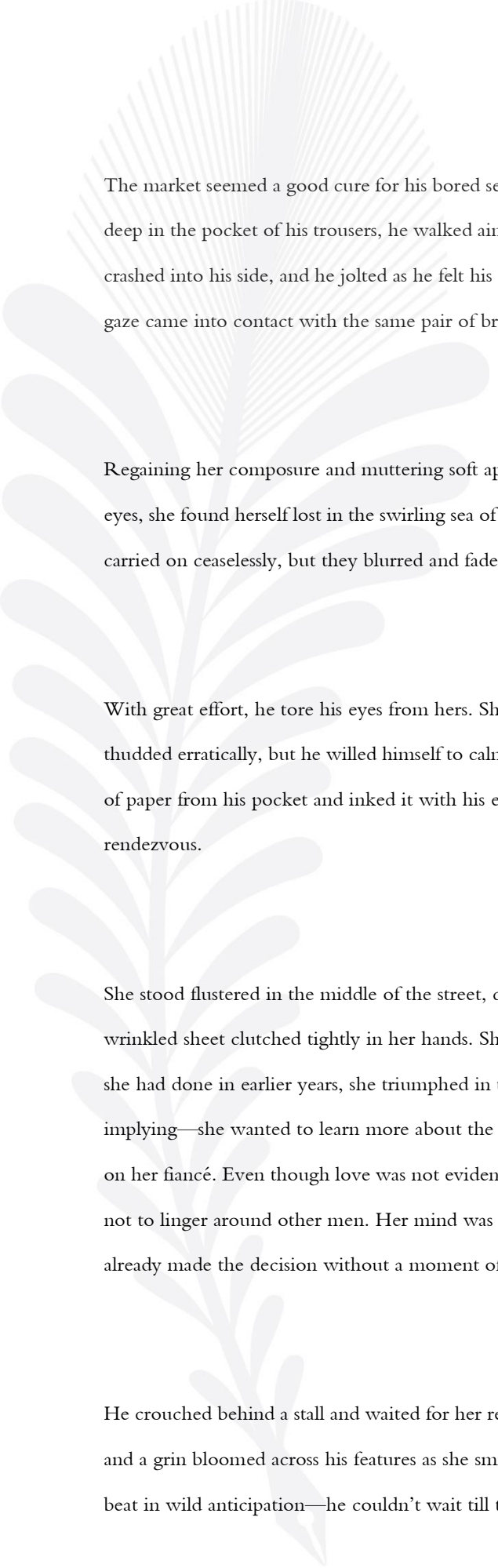
Her petite figure, clad in a fiery red cheongsam, caught his wandering forest green eyes. Her luscious jet black hair was pulled back by the salty seaside wind as she turned her head, as if sensing a stare—then she shrugged, and was gone.

Yet the picture she painted in his mind he couldn't seem to erase; she crossed his path in a scarlet flash and his mind worked in overdrive as it strived to remember every single detail—the intricate golden designs on the exquisite fabric, the dark brown entrancing eyes she possessed, the slim and shapely legs that graced the earth she trod on. He desperately wished they would meet again.

She made her way down the busy road, the exhaustion from the day lingering in her veins. The skin-tight cheongsam she donned felt restricting, but she wasn't far from her fiancé's family home. Her thoughts turned to the upcoming lavish wedding—her arranged marriage to the only heir to the Wong's Family Enterprises was a big deal in town. She was unbeknownst to the new admirer she had gained herself.

He was to set off three days after, but the violent storm the night before had severely damaged his sail. The staff at the local repairs shop had held up two fingers, telling him in poor English that it would be at least two months before his ship would be fit for travel again. His lips delivered displeasure, stating his desire to return to England, but inwardly his heart was leaping in joy—he had two more months to win his Shanghainese beauty.

She strolled through the colourful market, a light blue figure amidst the shouting and bargaining. Her eyes were seeing the overpriced goods the hawkers were offering and her nose was scenting the tempting aroma of sweet and sour delights, but her mind was elsewhere. For a girl brought up in a traditional patriarchal Chinese household, she had been a surprising exception—thoughts deeper than her soul, dreaming to find something more in life than merely going through the motions. She often wondered how events would take a turn if she were to choose her own destiny, yet the works of her imagination felt the farthest from reality as she drifted through an effervescent dream of flickering hope and longing.



The market seemed a good cure for his bored self, so he walked the short distance to the mass of sights and sounds. Hands shoved deep in the pocket of his trousers, he walked aimlessly around, basking in the rush of the bustling people. Then a light blue figure crashed into his side, and he jolted as he felt his arm come alive with sparks. Reaching out and casting a glance at the intruder, his gaze came into contact with the same pair of brown eyes that was so painfully embedded in the depths of his memory.

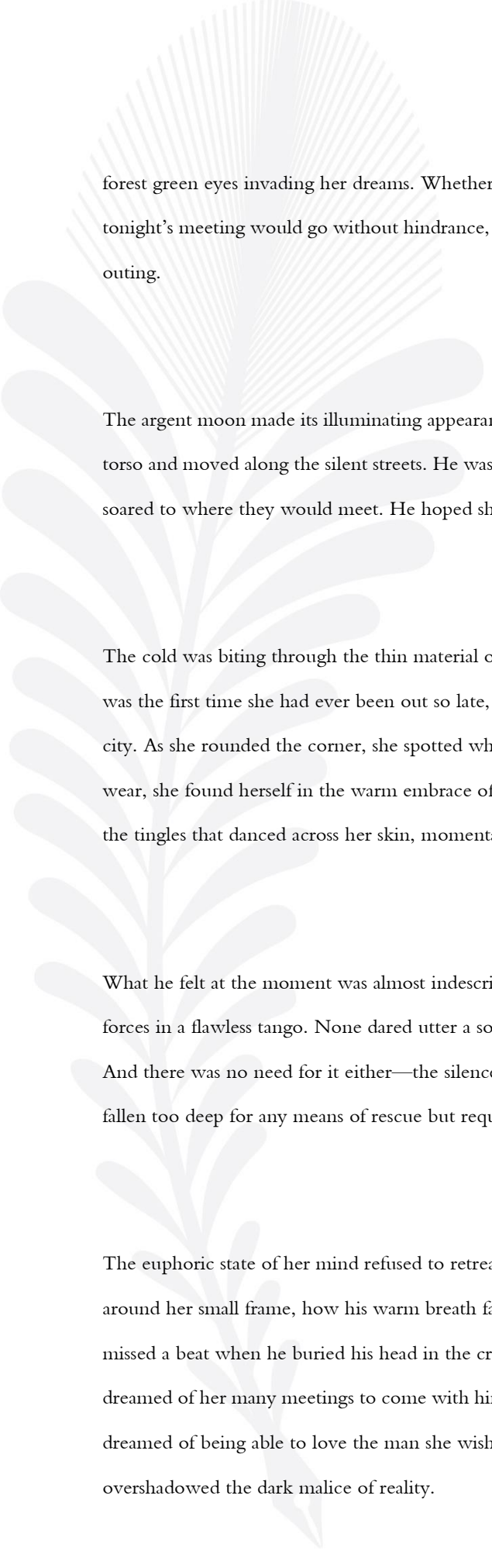
Regaining her composure and muttering soft apologies for her clumsiness, she silently cursed at the pushing crowd. Lifting her eyes, she found herself lost in the swirling sea of forest green orbs that were already staring into her bare soul. The hectic activity carried on ceaselessly, but they blurred and faded away in the presence of this mysterious yet captivating man.

With great effort, he tore his eyes from hers. She looked dazed, but to him a breathtakingly beautiful specimen. His heart thudded erratically, but he willed himself to calm down. British tongue was not commonplace, so he retrieved a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket and inked it with his elegant cursive, letters twirling and combining to form a simple plea for a rendezvous.

She stood flustered in the middle of the street, complete with a rapidly beating heart, a tinted blush across her cheeks and a wrinkled sheet clutched tightly in her hands. She scanned the contents—it took her a while, but owing to the homeschooling she had done in earlier years, she triumphed in translating the phrases. She gasped when her mind registered what the note was implying—she wanted to learn more about the stranger whom she felt powerless under, yet this felt no different than cheating on her fiancé. Even though love was not evident in their relationship, she still felt an obligation to respect their engagement and not to linger around other men. Her mind was turning the matter over and over, but deep down she knew her heart had already made the decision without a moment of hesitation—tomorrow midnight, she would meet him at Nanking Road.

He crouched behind a stall and waited for her reaction with bated breath. He saw her initial shock, then his lips turned upwards and a grin bloomed across his features as she smiled and looked as if she had made a decision that favoured the Brit. His heart beat in wild anticipation—he couldn't wait till tomorrow's promising nightfall.

After a restless night of twisting, turning and thinking, she was antsy throughout the day, failing to concentrate on her work of delicate embroidery. Sighing, she left the piece of art on a table and laid in bed, closing her eyes shut—only to find a pair of



forest green eyes invading her dreams. Whether she welcomed or despised it, even she herself did not know. She only hoped tonight's meeting would go without hindrance, and that she would return safely without anyone knowing of her little late night outing.

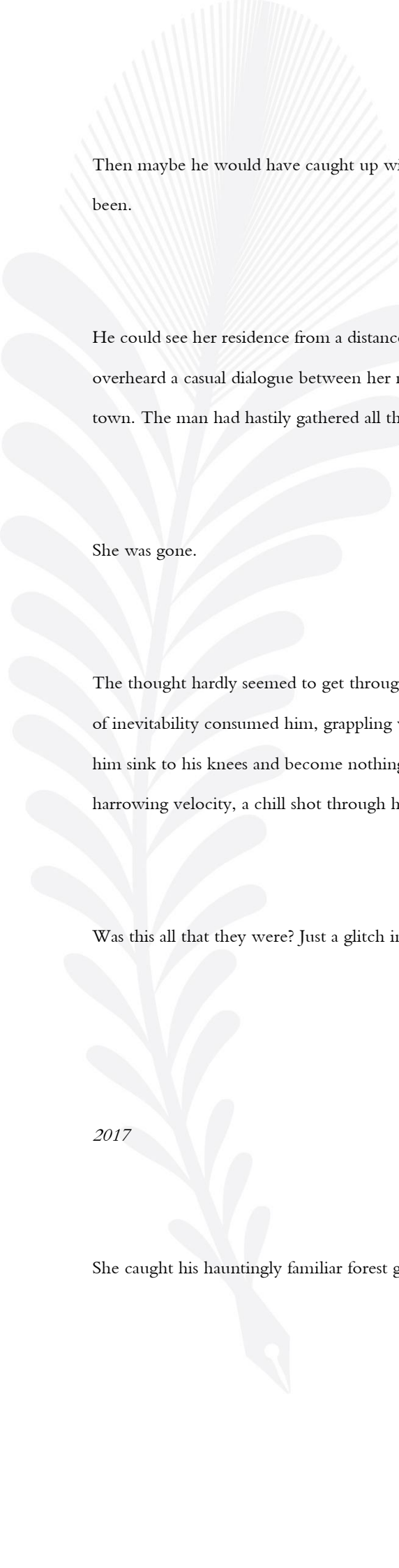
The argent moon made its illuminating appearance in the dull black sky. In hurried steps, he wrapped his coat tightly around his torso and moved along the silent streets. He was carrying his body across the hushed northern town, but his heart had long since soared to where they would meet. He hoped she would not let him down.

The cold was biting through the thin material of her cheongsam—in her haste, she had forgotten to put on an overcoat. This was the first time she had ever been out so late, so she gazed in amazement at the darkened buildings and the resting southern city. As she rounded the corner, she spotted who she had been looking for. Running as quickly as she could with her tight wear, she found herself in the warm embrace of the man with green eyes. She relished the cosy confinements of his arms and the tingles that danced across her skin, momentarily forgetting all taboos and conventions of her judgmental society.

What he felt at the moment was almost indescribable—it was as if joy, excitement, hope and perhaps even love had joined forces in a flawless tango. None dared utter a sound, for fear of ruining the delicate moment of perfect peace and happiness. And there was no need for it either—the silence spoke volumes. He knew then, that there was no going back for him. He had fallen too deep for any means of rescue but requited love.

The euphoric state of her mind refused to retreat long after they had parted. She could not forget how his strong arms wrapped around her small frame, how his warm breath fanned across her features, thawing any doubt or uncertainty, how her heart missed a beat when he buried his head in the crook of her neck. Lying on her bed, the girl who dreamed broke to surface. She dreamed of her many meetings to come with him; She dreamed of one day abandoning this godforsaken arranged marriage; She dreamed of being able to love the man she wished to without restraint. She dreamed because in dreams, her hopeful desires overshadowed the dark malice of reality.

Yet he was alone the following midnight, holding up his end of the promise while the other end shattered. He dared not risk exposing his identity at this hour of the night, choosing instead to wait until morning to investigate. How he wish he hadn't.



Then maybe he would have caught up with her just in time to bid one last farewell, no matter how sorrowful it would have been.

He could see her residence from a distance, splashed in innumerable specks of the morning sun. He had almost arrived when he overheard a casual dialogue between her neighbours: her father had received news on Caucasians planning to invade their town. The man had hastily gathered all that the family had and fled with the Wong's.

She was gone.

The thought hardly seemed to get through as he struggled to stay afloat the crosscurrents of his emotions. The bittersweet taste of inevitability consumed him, grappling with his anguished self for control. Neither were favourable—each wanted to watch him sink to his knees and become nothing more than a wrecked havoc of the man he used to be. Heart hammering with harrowing velocity, a chill shot through his spine, piercing his body and soul.

Was this all that they were? Just a glitch in the carefully patched fabric of fate?

2017

She caught his hauntingly familiar forest green eyes, seared on her memory though they had never met.

New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Ho, Cheuk Yan Grace – 12

Mass hysteria swept through crowds as the newspapers holler out the news at top volume, in Shanghai, in China, in Asia, all over the world.

The Old Shanghai City Times

24th Nov, 1980

Breaking News!

6 children kidnapped by ghosts!

7-year-old Chen Xin's father is a construction worker on a job aiming to reconstruct the last part of the old Shanghai city wall into high-rise residential buildings. His daughter, Chen Xin was found to be missing at 12pm. Her parents heard screaming from their daughter and rushed into her room, only to find a piece of paper on which were written these words:

'We are holding your child hostage for the wall--she is the price to pay for disturbing our haunts.'

Other workers on the project have had similar situations at the witching hour: screaming, then their children's disappearance and the note. The removal project was postponed as a result.

"So far, there are six cases of these kidnappings, of children from ages three to nine," says a police officer, "and of which the parents are construction workers or architects participating in removing the old Shanghai city wall."

The police force has searched for these so-called ghosts for three days in vain.

The city is worried: What will become of the kidnapped boys and girls?

Eton Carter, young daring detective, paused from reading his newspaper and took a sip of his coffee. His assistant, Sandra Lin, looked up from her pile of papers, "Need a refill?"

"Nope, But book two air tickets tomorrow all the way to Shanghai and hotel rooms near the old city of Shanghai."

Sandra gaped at him, "Why are we going around half the globe?"

Eton rolled his eyes sarcastically, "Yeah, I need a vacation." He passed her his newspaper.

Instantly, Sandra paled. Then, she sighed. "I guess I have to face this eventually."

Eton put his feet up onto the table and continued reading his newspaper. He secretly watched his assistant get up and leave. Then he turned in his chair and sighed. How could he fight the urge to investigate?

“At last, we’re here!” Eton stretched his legs as he walked, with Sandra trudging behind reluctantly. They had just arrived at the airport, and then spent the rest of the morning cramped up in a taxicab. Sandra still hadn’t recovered from her jet lag and was in a foul mood, unlike Eton. He hummed a tune as he jogged into the hotel Sandra had booked.

Even Eton, who had been in many a beautiful hotel, was impressed by the room. The ceiling and the walls were painted in Chinese style, and an antique carpet lay tidily on the floor. There was a four poster bed in the middle with carved oak posts. Meanwhile, in her room, Sandra could not suppress a smile. Her bed looked comfy. She dumped her luggage in a corner and flopped onto her bed. Eton could swear he could hear her snoring through the wall. Poking his head in, he tried waking her up. Sandra snored on.

“Are you coming with me or not?” he demanded. When she didn’t reply, Eton returned to his room in failure. As he lay in his bed, he murmured to himself, “I guess I can wait.” With that, he fell asleep.

The next day, Eton woke to a timid knock on his door. “Wait a bit,” he yawned and dressed himself. Straightening his tie, he opened the door. Sandra was standing there, with an old woman and a young child about twelve behind her.

“Come in! Don’t just stand there and do nothing,” Eton ushered them into his room.

“Mr. Carter, this is my mother and niece, Mei. They have something to talk to you about...about the city wall, I mean.” Sandra fidgeted in a chair Eton had pulled out for her as she spoke.

Her mother, on the other hand, was very talkative. “Our family holds a secret no one knows. My great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather Yip On was one of the architects who designed the old city wall. Bad thing, he did not live to see it finished. Before he died, he stated in his will that he wished to become part of the wall he contributed to so much and defend the city. They say nowadays, it was nonsense, but his ashes were scattered into the bricks and mortar of the wall. Speak up, Mei.” She turned sharply to her granddaughter.

Her granddaughter turned a raspberry shade of red.

“Mrs. Lin, how about you tell me more about it?” Eton suggested.

“Fine, if you won’t speak. Anyway, this ancestor of our built this secret chamber. The two exits are hidden really well; you would never find either unless you marked them or something. But don’t you worry, ‘cos one was lost. All he ever said about it, as my grandfather that is, was ‘*to look in the direction fewest people look*.’ The other one collapsed when that ungrateful man Chen Qimei, took down our ancestors’ hard work. Course, he wasn’t born here, didn’t have any sense at all, but never mind him. So anyhow, someone may have found the second exit or something like that. Me, I don’t believe in ghosts, never even heard they’d take children. People these days just do whatever they like, like Mei’s father funding the project to remove our ancestors’ hard work...” she scoffed.

Did he imagine Mei had turned an even deeper scarlet? Eton wondered, but he did not voice his suspicions as he escorted Mrs. Lin and Mei to the door.

Left alone with his assistant, he turned to face her. “What is Mei usually like?” he questioned.

Sandra replied hesitantly, “Quite energetic and easygoing, in fact. But everyone gets nervous around my mother.”

“True, but why blush when your grandmother talks about the kidnappings? She must have done or know of something. I must gather more research on this wall and your family. Also, I want to hear it from you. I’ve got a feeling this could be important. I’ll interview the victims’ families in the afternoon.”

Eton and Sandra were both thoroughly exhausted by the end of the day. As they finally reached their hotel, Sandra’s phone rang. “Yes, I’m Miss Sandra Lin...” she paled. Her voice was strained as she replied, “Thank you for informing me.” Then, she cut the line. When she looked up into Eton’s concerned gaze, her eyes were brimmed with tears. “There’s been a new kidnapping. Mei is gone!”

“I’m only doing this for free for you, because you’re my assistant.” Eton grumbled as he inspected every inch of dust. They were searching around the old city wall. Eton concentrated on a stone block. It had a deep line scratched on it. As his gaze travelled slowly upward, he found that there were similar etchings on the stone bricks going up the wall. He let his fingers run up the wall to the topmost mark, at his height and found a loose block. Quickly, he called for Sandra. Together they managed to pry the slab of stone out of its clever hiding place. “Mrs. Lin’s ancestor meant ‘up’— *‘the direction fewest people look.’*” he murmured. He reached his hand in and felt a lever, which he pulled. With a creak, a square of blocks slid open. Safely inside were seven small figures, curled up and asleep next to a lamp.

“What?” Sandra exclaimed as she took in what she saw. The six missing children looked fully fed and their cheeks were flushed with warmth as they curled up in their sleeping bags. In a corner, Mei stirred at the noise, and then looked groggily at her aunt. She started to explain, “I...”

“What were you all thinking of? Are you crazy? What will all the parents say?” Sandra couldn’t stop the tide of worries bursting forth.

“But Auntie, I can explain...”

“No buts. Everyone is worried about you. We knew about this ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD!!!” Sandra paused, catching her breath. The others were starting to wake from the commotion. Mei took this as an opportunity to explain.

“I met all of these children when Dad was having this meeting with the construction company. We didn’t really want the remaining bit of the city wall to be demolished. We all agreed to do this; otherwise, how would Dad and the others listen? So we faked the notes and one by one I took them here. I did take food and water to them, I assure you.”

Sandra opened her mouth, and then closed it again like a fish.

Eton shook his head. He had never seen Sandra so angry. “What’s done is done. All we can do is to help them. Surely you don’t want this place to be wrecked?”

That night, the children were all sleeping safely in their own homes. Eton wrote a letter to the government to turn it into a museum. And as you know, this part of the wall has survived to the present.

A New Story from Old Shanghai

Stewards Pooi Kei College, Lam, Enoch – 13

In my history lesson, the teacher is talking about the Second Sino–Japanese war. Almost all of my classmates loudly blame the Japanese in a malicious way. Except for me, I keep quiet. Why? Because I'm Japanese. However, I'm not angry when I remember what my great grandfather did, when I remember the new story from Old Shanghai.

In 1935, the evening sun in Old Shanghai was blazing. The Dong Hai was completely azure, as blue as the ineffably beautiful sky. Beside the sea, people were selling things inside the small shops. They yelled and shouted towards the people on the streets, trying to attract them. Beside these small shops, you could also find a pier. But it was probably not a good place to go. There, you could always see the coolies fighting for the heaviest things to carry.

A man took out a Chinese flute and played. Gentle breezes blew onshore. And the mellifluous sound of the flute wafted over the scene.

Children ran beside the sea boisterously, yelling and screaming energetically. Women talked loudly. But Lin, didn't hear any of these voices as he was concentrating on thinking of a plan. His head was bowed down, his forehead crinkled. His brain span as fast as a windmill. He paced along the shore, back and forth, back and forth..... As night fell, he was still pacing and thinking.

A Chinese woman obscured by the dark, tapped on Lin's back. Lin looked behind him. "I'm here to bring you some good news," said Yang. Excitement shone on her face. "What good news?"

"I'm pregnant!" said Lin's wife excitedly. For a moment, he was stunned and then jumped up and down like a happy child. He was over the moon.

In 1936, the baby was born. Lin was happy but his work did not decrease, even a bit. He was still often to be found finalizing his plans beside the sea. Sometimes, he would even pretend to be a Chinese worker and sneak into the Chinese military campus.

But what job needed him to sneak into the Chinese military campus? And also, what was he actually planning? Well! Let me tell you.

Lin was an agent working for the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA). His duty was to start a battle in Shanghai and to complete in depth research into the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese troops. He and his wife were both Japanese and he was also my great grandfather.

By April, 1937, everything was ready. Lin gave a big yawn, stretched and went out into the streets of Old Shanghai for a walk. He looked at the buildings. He looked at the small shops inside the city. He looked at the crowds inside the market. Everything seemed to be bright and beautiful. Lin had already lived there for three years. He really loved the ancient atmosphere of Old Shanghai.

He slowly started to realize that if his plan succeeded, the Old Shanghai he had grown to love, might still be there, damaged, but that many people would be killed. But what would happen if he didn't submit his plan? He would be treated as a traitor and killed.

He didn't want Old Shanghai to be destroyed, but he didn't want to die either!

He trembled. He struggled. He hesitated. And at last, he decided to put himself first; he decided to sacrifice a million Chinese people's lives so that he would live.

He gave his plans to the Imperial Japanese Army.

The IJA started to use Lin's plans in the August of 1936. The Oyama Incident was created. According to Lin's plan, Lieutenant Isao Oyama stormed into the Hongqiao Military Airport. The Chinese guards then shot him to death. Because of that, the Japanese government had an excuse to attack Shanghai. Therefore, they started to attack a few days after the Oyama Incident happened.

Lin was the one who had planned the whole thing. He knew when the war would start. Therefore, he bought enough food for four months and hid inside an underground room with his family one day before the war began.

The Japanese occupied Shanghai for just three months.

Lin knew from the radio that the Japanese were in power, so he and his wife Yang, decided to go outside and take a look. But, what they didn't know was that this was a fatal decision.

Let me explain. At that time, the Japanese orders were to kill any Chinese person they saw on the streets.

Lin looked at the bloodshed all round him. He looked at the collapsed buildings. He saw the mess that he had conspired to create and started to feel guilty when he saw the dead bodies on the street. If he could go back to the past, he began to feel that he should have chosen death for himself.

He gave a deep bow to a dead Chinese body. "All of this was caused by me. I brought violence to this city." Lin sighed. "Violence always begets penalty. I wonder how all of this will end."

The Japanese troops didn't know that he was Japanese when they saw him. Lin tried to explain that he was Japanese, but before he could finish, his tongue was cut-off. They raped Yang in front of him and then killed them both. Only their son, who had been left sleeping in their room inside the underground, survived.

Violence always begets violence.

The bodies of Lin and Yang were thrown into the Dong Hang like all the other Chinese.

The sky was covered with black clouds and The Dong Hai was reddened by the blood of millions of bodies covering the sea bed. The breezes blew onto the shore, bringing the smell of blood into the desolate city.

The Japanese tried to conquer China. They killed many Chinese people. But in the end they also suffered enormously. The atomic bombs were eventually dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When the Japanese suffer from the condemnation of international society, we never try to talk back because it is a kind of penalty.

Many people know about the Battle of Shanghai and the Oyama Incident, but no one, apart from my family members know that it was my great grandfather who was the one who planned the whole thing. Maybe, if I have a chance in the future, I will represent my great grandfather and apologize to the Chinese people and tell them the story.....I would call it a new story.....The new story of old Shanghai.

The Battle of Shanghai

Stewards Pooi Kei College, Wong, Jocast – 13

The clinking sound of falling bullets echoed everywhere as Chinese soldiers entered the city for the Battle of Shanghai. Bodies were strewn all over the streets. The sound of gunfire and exploding bombs was deafening. One by one, the Chinese soldiers hit the dust as the Japanese soldiers fired their guns and their tanks. Silent ambushes came from the Japanese air force, whose bullets could tear a soldier into smithereens. But there was still hope for the Chinese.

Austin ducked behind a bunch of sandbags as he loaded and fired, scoring two Japanese soldiers in one as they were sent flying. “Nice one, Austin!” his comrades cheered as they defended their base. “Watch out!” Austin ducked under the sandbags as a Japanese aircraft approached, unloading its deadly ammo. After the shower of the deadly rain, Austin emerged from the sandbags, only to find many of his soldiers dead, their bodies peppered with holes. One of the wounded stammered out “Help me!” as he clutched his bleeding shoulder and crawled towards Austin.

Austin knelt by the soldier’s side and inspected the wound. Fortunately, the bullet had just scratched the elbow and was bleeding uncontrollably. Knowing a bit of first aid, he pulled out a bottle of disinfection alcohol and sterilized the wound as the soldier grimaced with pain. “Thanks.” the soldier whispered. “Glad to help!” Austin replied. “By the way, what’s your name?” “My name is Henry.” “I’m Austin.”

“Let’s eradicate those Japanese scumbags!” Henry shouted. “Blast them!” Austin replied while shooting Japanese soldiers one by one. “Behind you!” Henry warned. He intercepted a Japanese soldier, who had attempted to stab him. “Thanks for the reminder!” “I’m out of ammo!” Henry cried. “Take my gun!” Austin shouted to him, while he prepared to toss his gun. But it was too late. Austin watched with horror, as the Japanese soldiers surrounded Henry, pinning him to the ground, and dragged him away to their base.

“What news?” The general asked an exhausted Austin. “All dead. Henry’s been taken by the Japanese.” Austin replied. “That makes another 23 men lost. Thanks for the news. You are dismissed.”

Back in his cabin, Austin was regretting his decision to abandon Henry. “Why did I run away? I should have gone after them!” But he couldn’t change history. Exhausted from the battle, he lay down and rested.

He woke up the next day and prepared for battle. He had thought of a decision to save Henry from the Japanese. What he was thinking is to reunite with Henry.

Before the battle started, he made a speech for the remaining soldiers. “This battle decides the fate of Shanghai. I want you all to avenge my captured friend Henry. He served as a rightful soldier of the Chinese. I want you all to be like him. If you are shot, keep standing! If you are captured, use all your might to struggle for freedom. Fight for Henry! Fight for our country! TO WAR! TO VICTORY!” He cried. The last two words echoed all around the battlefield.

“CHARGE!” He ordered. The Chinese surged towards the Japanese like advancing waves while firing their guns with deadly precision. One by one, the Japanese soldiers were shot down, their blood spilling on the streets of Shanghai. “Wow!” exclaimed Austin as the Chinese troops gained control of a Japanese tank which was now firing at the Japanese aircraft. He then looked at the horizon, searching for the Japanese base. There it was, not far away. “Cover me!” He shouted, as he ran towards it.

The tank was a formidable weapon, blasting everything to dust as it rolled along, pulverizing any wounded soldier who was unlucky enough to be in its way. “Nearly there!” he shouted. Two guards were flanking the entrance. Before they realized what was going on, they had already been shot dead. “Now, I want-----” Before he could finish his sentence, the tank suddenly exploded, sending his comrades to their deaths as the ground became littered with burning corpses. “I will avenge their deaths!” Austin screamed as he blasted the door open and ventured inside.

He reloaded and fired at any Japanese soldier that was in his way, while shouting, “This is for Shanghai!” He spared no one, even the wounded as he investigated the rooms, looking for Henry. Finally there he was! Bound with ropes and thrown in the medical room.

“I’m so glad that you survived!” Austin exclaimed as he loosened the ropes. “Thank you!” Henry hugged Austin. “I came here to get you. We may not survive on the way out, but we will go together! We will——” But before he could finish the sentence, the sound of gunfire erupted and a bullet passed through him and into Henry. They fell, lifeless. Together.



The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Jaqueline – 11

My fingers graze against the velvet carpet on the wall as I walk into the torn down shop. Examining the wooden boards, moving my attention from one crack in the floor to another, letting nothing around me going untouched and unseen.

Then it hit me, as I looked up at the dust coated mysterious lump on the wall, I don't know what, landed on me. I collapsed onto the ground. Will I ever get back up?

"Let it go YingYing," a familiar voice shouted. "Your mother probably just died from a heart attack

But I knew better. It has already been a month since I have last seen my mother and I have heard no word from her during that period of time. I found a hidden gadget in my mother's jacket which was all that the police had saved from the incident. It was ridiculous, when my father gave me the jacket, he said that the police didn't even bother to tell them where this room was located. This tape caught her last few moments "on the grid". At least I choose to believe she is not dead. I have watched it over and over again. She was looking for something. Something important. My mother had some object hurled at her causing her to pass out and could not be saved in time. When the gadget turned back on, there was a blur of a man standing in front of her, then it cut. No more footage after that. That man had something she wanted and did everything in his power to prevent her from obtaining it. But I swear I will do whatever it takes to get my vengeance on that man.

Once I got home from school, I plopped on my bed, staring at the ceiling. 14 years old, and I have nothing. I dropped out of school around a year ago, my mother is lost.

"Remember, you have wushu practice today." My father, Ba said as he strolled into the room.

Oh come on. My martial arts teacher, whose name nobody knows (let's just call him Tao for now), is quite odd to be honest. Always being very careful about where he steps and just being extremely conscious about the stupidest things. But I have nothing else going for me so might as well go. We are not a rich family so I have to walk everywhere I go so that's just great. Around half an hour later, there I was, standing in front of the large mansion about to ring the doorbell. How did such an "economically unstable" man afford all these things. I took a deep breath and cringed as I heard the sounds of unpleasant violinist he loved to listen to on a record player. He hadn't even turned around and looked at me before he greeted me. It was as if he sensed my presence.

When Tao went for his usual bathroom break, I decided to sneak a peek at a small trap door with a "KEEP OUT" sign on it. You could say I am not the smartest dumpling out there. Another large room with couches draped in fancy silk. I plopped myself onto a nearby chair and began to look around.

No. Way.

As I looked up, I did not see a fancy glass window. What I did see though was a wall coming down at me. If I didn't react soon who knows what could have happened. Fortunately, I bolted to a nearby door, opened it and threw myself out of that monstrous room. But I did not enter the the same room as before. I looked around at the torn down shop. Or so that is what it seems. Wait. One.

Moment. The colour of these walls, the gloominess of a shop that has never seen the light of day, all of this looked familiar. And as I looked up at the grey bump above my head, I froze. I frantically looked around for an exit. I knew I was in danger. I was trapped. The door would not budge, and the wooden boards would not pop open.

“Hello,” a voice boomed, “Looks like you don’t know how to read signs! You were warned dearest.” He said in a mocking tone. “You should not have come here.”

“Where is my mother?” I asked, trying to sound fierce and demanding. Although all that came out was the sound of a scared looking girl whining to try and get her mother back. He responded with a sneer. He has my mother. The thought of this infuriated me. I clenched my fist and turned around, ready to strike. I could not believe my eyes.

I wake up. I am unconscious and lying in my bed back at home. How did I get here? I could not remember a thing. My head was throbbing like there was a little man inside my head banging my forehead every second.

“You okay?” Ba waltzed into the room. “Been out cold for a few hours now. Do you remember anything from the incident?”

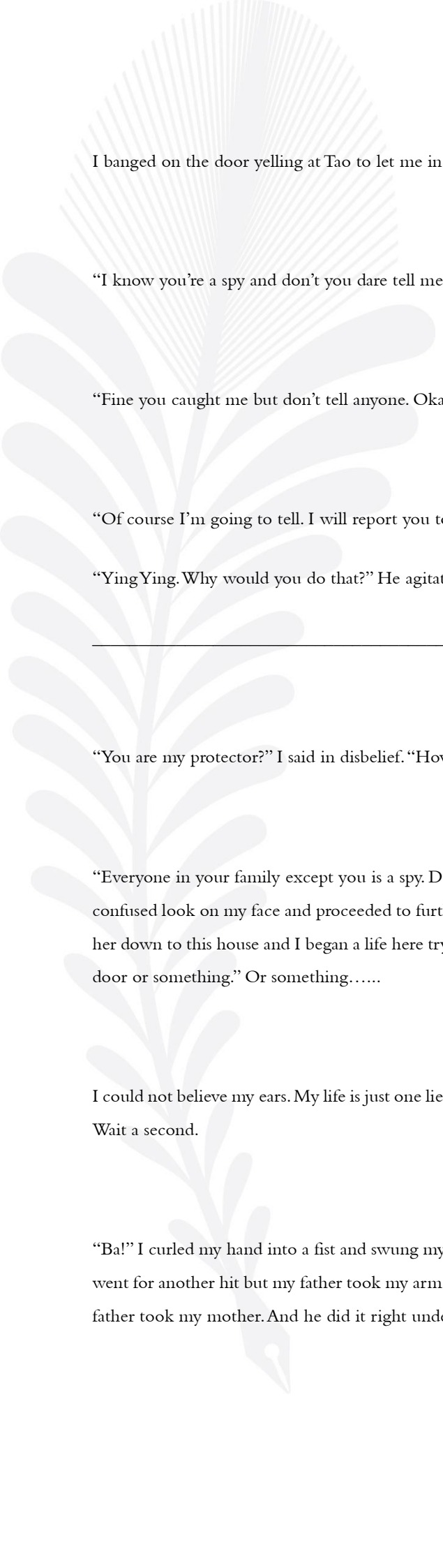
“Do you know what happened?” I asked suspiciously. Everyone is guilty until proven innocent. I think that’s how the saying goes.

“You were muttering weird things in your sleep about some man in a dark suit. Must have just been a bad dream.”

I don’t think so. I am creative and all but I would never be able to think of such detail like this. But who was that man. I saw his face I just don’t remember him anymore. Come on Ying Ying THINK. I may not remember but I can guess. Who was the only person in that gigantic mansion other than me?

No. Way.

It must be Tao! I pleaded Ba to let me go back, but seeing as how last time played out, he was reluctant to let me leave. But nothing could stop me from getting my vengeance.



I banged on the door yelling at Tao to let me in. I bet he is some kind of spy or undercover bad guy or something.

“I know you’re a spy and don’t you dare tell me you’re not!” I screamed.

“Fine you caught me but don’t tell anyone. Okay?” He said soothingly. But I was not about to be tricked by his games.

“Of course I’m going to tell. I will report you to the police and I just realized I probably shouldn’t have said that.”

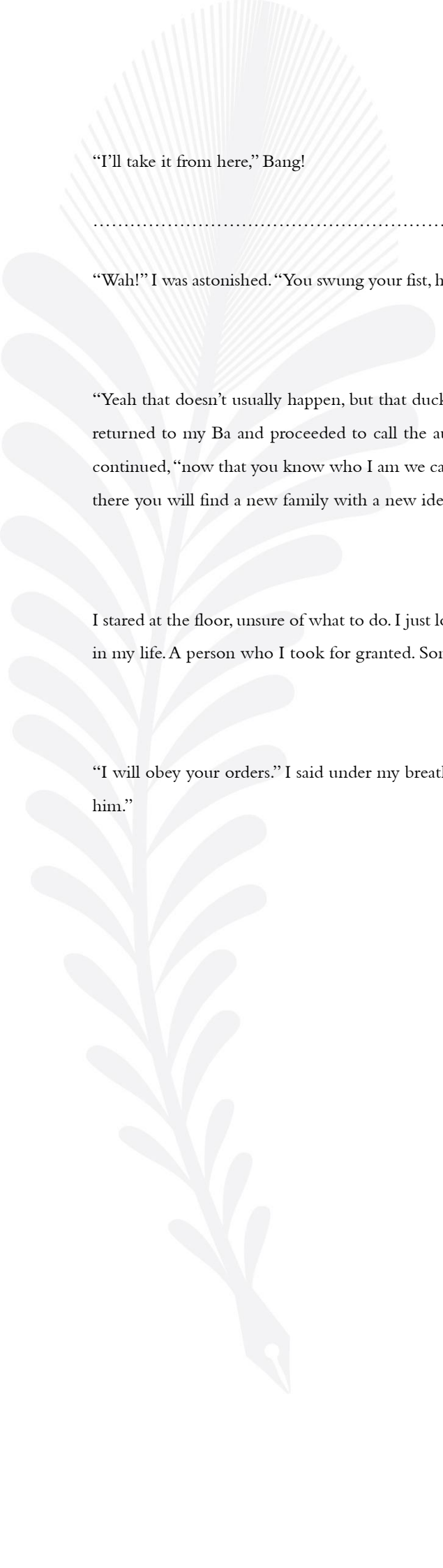
“YingYing. Why would you do that?” He agitatedly asked. “I am your protector.”

“You are my protector?” I said in disbelief. “How?”

“Everyone in your family except you is a spy. Do you know how dangerous that could be for a little girl like you?” Tao saw the confused look on my face and proceeded to further explaining himself. “When your mother died, she was on a mission, I tracked her down to this house and I began a life here trying to solve the mystery of where she was. You must have entered this secret trap door or something.” Or something.....

I could not believe my ears. My life is just one lie. I looked into the mirror. That person staring back at me is not who I know I am. Wait a second.

“Ba!” I curled my hand into a fist and swung my hand as fast as possible. I kicked his backside and made him fall to the ground. I went for another hit but my father took my arm and swung me around. I fell onto the ground, exhausted. How could this be. My father took my mother. And he did it right under my nose.



“I’ll take it from here,” Bang!

.....

“Wah!” I was astonished. “You swung your fist, he ducked, he kicked you in the shin, you ducked, and then an actual duck came!”

“Yeah that doesn’t usually happen, but that duck knocked your father out so we will have to thank it.” Scratching his head, Tao returned to my Ba and proceeded to call the authorities and drag my father out of the room. “It was nice knowing you,” He continued, “now that you know who I am we can never speak again. You shall go to the west part of Shanghai, under a restaurant, there you will find a new family with a new identity for you. Grow and soon forget about me, don’t dwell in your past.”

I stared at the floor, unsure of what to do. I just lost Ba whom I thought I could trust, and now I was about to lose another person in my life. A person who I took for granted. Someone that I thought was a pain and just a chore to visit, was about to leave me.

“I will obey your orders.” I said under my breath. “But you must promise that in 20 years time, you will tell my father, I forgive him.”

Dolls

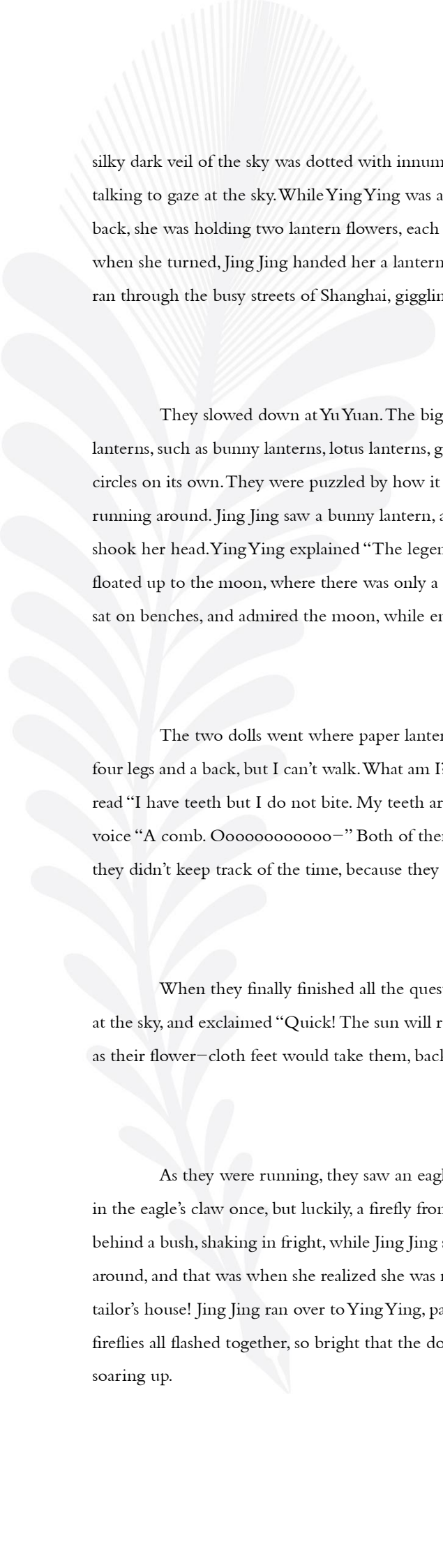
The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Pui Pui – 12

“Scrape scrape scrape. Snip Snip Snip. Hum—”. Under a yellow lamp, a man who was about 40 years old was rushing to finish a qipao. He was an outstanding tailor in Shanghai, who made qipaos for noble ladies and rich families. He made the best qipaos, with the softest silk, and intricate embroidery, showing even the smallest of details. Everyone liked to go to his shop, which was tiny, but half packed full of rolls of fabric, half-finished or completed qipaos, thick stacks of notepads with orders and piles paper patterns, but just enough room for sewing and customers waiting. The tailor had a daughter named Hei Li, who had two fabric dolls, named Jing Jing and Ying Ying. Jing Jing had short hair with a fringe, small, squinty eyes, apple red cheeks, a daintily small nose and a tiny mouth as red as a cherry. Her expression was slightly mischievous. Ying Ying had long, wavy hair with a straight fringe, large eyes with long eyelashes, pale pink cheeks, a small nose and a slightly longer, thinner mouth in fuschia. Ying Ying was timid and shy, but she was quite curious too. Every time the tailor made a qipao, Hei Li would make two small versions for her dolls.

One night with a full moon, which happened to be the Mid-Autumn lantern festival, Hei Li, though tired, finished sewing two extravagant new qipaos for her dolls. They were made of silk, with cream flowers embroidered on the hem, pink silk buttons and a section of lavender lace draped on the back, from one shoulder to another. Jing Jing’s was bright orange, while Ying Ying’s was a rich, rosy pink. She slipped her dolls into the new qipaos, and because she was so tired, she left the dolls on the desk, and went to sleep.

Moonlight shone from the open window, in a tiny silver patch. When it shone onto the desk, Jing Jing’s fingers started moving slightly, and her head began to move left and right. She slowly sat up, and moved her legs. She tapped Ying Ying’s shoulder. The dolls stood up, picked up the tiny fabric handbags from the table, and tiptoed to the windowsill. Jing Jing whispered excitedly “Let’s go down!” Ying Ying muttered “If we go down, will we be able to come back up in time?” Jing Jing announced confidently “We can.” She held the vine that grew on the windowsill, and slowly climbed down, Ying Ying slowly, uncertainly following behind, frightened. When they reached the ground, Jing Jing leapt off the vine, while Ying Ying slid down very slowly.

Jing Jing exclaimed “It’s the Mid-Autumn lantern festival tonight! Look at those beautiful lanterns over there! That’s Yu Yuan, the most famous garden in Shanghai! Tonight, there is a carnival, so people can guess riddles on lanterns! That’s an activity I find quite fun!” Jing Jing pointed excitedly, jumping up and down in excitement. Ying Ying marveled “Look at the rainbow of lanterns on the street! They look like a colorful snake of cheer yet they are also a sea of people.” Jing Jing added “The delicious smell of freshly baked mooncakes is coming from a nearby bakery! Look! Street vendors are hobbling on the roads, pushing their little rattling carts that are decorated with colorful swinging lanterns!” Above the hustle and bustle of the city, the



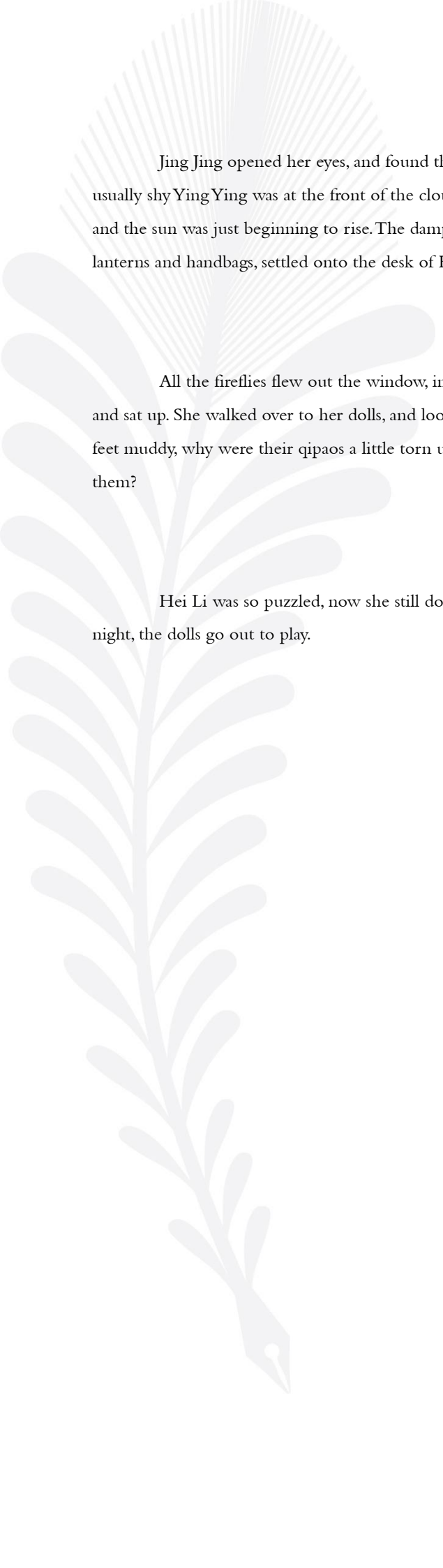
silky dark veil of the sky was dotted with innumerable stars, framing the moon, making it seem even brighter. YingYing stopped talking to gaze at the sky. While YingYing was admiring the scene, Jing Jing tiptoed away to a nearby shrub, and when she was back, she was holding two lantern flowers, each with a group of fireflies inside. Jing Jing shouted “Hey!” behind YingYing, and when she turned, Jing Jing handed her a lantern. YingYing giggled, as her face glowed with happiness. Jing Jing and YingYing ran through the busy streets of Shanghai, giggling and cheering as they went.

They slowed down at Yu Yuan. The big, round moon in the sky was reflected in a shiny pond. They saw all sorts of lanterns, such as bunny lanterns, lotus lanterns, goldfish lanterns, starfruit lanterns, and their favourite one was a kind that spun in circles on its own. They were puzzled by how it turned. There were a lot of little kids everywhere, carrying glowing lanterns and running around. Jing Jing saw a bunny lantern, and YingYing asked “Do you know the legend of the bunny lantern?” Jing Jing shook her head. YingYing explained “The legend says that once there was a young girl, who stole magical immortal pills, and floated up to the moon, where there was only a bunny rabbit, so that’s why they make bunny lanterns.” Jing Jing smiled. Families sat on benches, and admired the moon, while enjoying star fruit and refreshments they brought.

The two dolls went where paper lanterns with riddles were hung up. Jing Jing went up to a lantern, and read “I have four legs and a back, but I can’t walk. What am I?” YingYing answered giggling “A chair!” YingYing went to another lantern and read “I have teeth but I do not bite. My teeth are good for your hair. What am I?” Jing Jing answered in a mysterious, whispery voice “A comb. Oooooooooooooo—” Both of them burst out laughing, rolling on the ground. They guessed riddles all night, and they didn’t keep track of the time, because they were having too much fun.

When they finally finished all the questions, YingYing realized that the people were getting less and less, so she looked at the sky, and exclaimed “Quick! The sun will rise soon, and we need to get home before Hei Li wakes up!” The dolls ran as fast as their flower-cloth feet would take them, back along the street.

As they were running, they saw an eagle with golden-yellow eyes swoop towards them. Jing Jing got her qipao caught in the eagle’s claw once, but luckily, a firefly from her lantern had just flown out, and slid the claw off the silk. YingYing hid behind a bush, shaking in fright, while Jing Jing stared, mouth open in shock, as she backed into the same bush. YingYing looked around, and that was when she realized she was not inside any ordinary bush, but she was inside one of the wavy hedges near the tailor’s house! Jing Jing ran over to YingYing, panting. To their relief, the fireflies’ lights were not on. Suddenly, the lights of the fireflies all flashed together, so bright that the dolls squeezed their eyes shut tight, and the next thing they knew, they were soaring up.



Jing Jing opened her eyes, and found that millions of fireflies were under them, carrying them up. Surprisingly, the usually shy Ying Ying was at the front of the cloud of fireflies, telling them which way to go. The eagle was nowhere to be seen, and the sun was just beginning to rise. The damp smell of early morning spread through the streets, as the dolls, along with their lanterns and handbags, settled onto the desk of Hei Li's room.

All the fireflies flew out the window, including the ones in the lanterns, just as Hei Li rolled over. She stirred, blinked and sat up. She walked over to her dolls, and looked puzzled as she saw the dolls. Why were their hair so messy, why were their feet muddy, why were their qipaos a little torn up and dirty, and most importantly, why were there two lantern flowers next to them?

Hei Li was so puzzled, now she still doesn't know why the dolls were different. Every Mid-Autumn lantern festival night, the dolls go out to play.

The Golden Pocket Watch

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chen, Evan – 14

It was the 1920s, and I was resting on the side of the bun-shop, watching people, old and young, walk by the road, just strolling about. I hear the swishing of the river to the east, and the chilly breeze coming from the mountains of the west. It was a somewhat cloudy day, and as peaceful, as ever.

Now it's the 2010s, and I stand inside my small apartment on the 5th floor, watching large groups of tourists and foreign jumping and bumping into other people, causing disruption. I see the old men, who all are my friends, eyeing the tourists in disgust. Once a tourist group leaves, the next one comes. Sure, these groups bring more international people to our city, but is it really worth it, to abandon the old traditional ways of Shanghai?

I walk out of my apartment, and make my way down the squeaky stairs and rush past the tourists to get to the other side of the street. There stands my neighbor and friend Jin-Zhong. We greet happily, he makes a cup of tea and urges me to sit down with him. Jin-Zhong and I were friends since high school, and have never left our city. We've seen the old ways, we've seen the revolution, and now we see the new ways and how much Shanghai has changed in the past hundred years. We like to talk about the 1920s, back when we were young, and when we were carefree. We talk about old Shanghai and the old traditions that people used to follow. We also talk about what great food old Shanghai had, and sometimes even attempt to remake it! It never becomes successful, though. Today he comes with a small wooden box that I haven't seen before. He hastily opens it, and as it creaks open, I see what the box contains: a golden pocket watch.

I stare at the watch, unable to find any connection with anything. Jin-Zhong sees my confusion. "This is an old pocket watch from the 1920s" Then I make a gasp of recognition, this watch meant a lot to a man. The watch does not only tell the time, but also shows the status of a man, and his taste. The prices of these watches were different according to their status and ranks, and this is no ordinary Rolex that you wear to work every day. "Where did you acquire this watch?" I ask excitedly. "It was handed down for many centuries in my family. I refurbished it in the 1920s to give it a newer and a better look, but I can still say that this watch has been alive and ticking for hundreds of years. I am simply fascinated, I reel in towards the box and take a look. "Oh sure, you can try it out" Jin-Zhong says. I slowly take the golden watch out of the box and pin it onto my shirt. The watch has no straps, but one single golden chain with a sharp and pointy end that you can pin on your shirt. "How about this"

Jin-Zhong starts “One of us wears this watch, and we’ll walk with the tourists but in the opposite direction so they see us. The tourists are walking down the street, so we’ll walk up the street. The other one of us will listen for anything those wretched tourists say.” I think that it’s a good idea “It’ll be nice to see their reactions of seeing a watch that’s practically ancient.”

We’re at the very bottom of the street, and we start to walk up. “Here goes” I hear Jin-Zhong mutter. We see some old men, who point and give a nice wave and a smile. We return the smile. Then in front of the us the tourists from the western world come. I take the watch out of my shirt-pocket and reveal it. The first few tourists don’t notice anything, but one child, not older than eight, points at me and says, rather loudly “Dad, why is his watch on his shirt, not on his hand?” The dad hushes him and tells him not to be rude. “Oh that’s quite alright” Jin-Zhong moves forward and puts a hand on the child’s shoulder. “This watch has been in my family for hundreds of years, and it shows a man’s status and taste.” The child is immediately fascinated “So even watches can show a person’s rank and how important they are?” “That’s right” says Jin-Zhong, as the child with the tourist group walks away. We continue walking down the street, and a couple more people point and whisper. One tourist even comes and holds the watch for a while before hurrying down the street. Both of us look at the tourist amusingly and as we arrive back at Jin-Zhong’s place, we both burst into laughter. “That kid was so cute!” Jin-Zhong shouts with tears in his eyes. “Did you see the tourist who held the watch and looked at it without permission?” We both are hysterical and overcome with joy. It’s hilarious seeing how the modern world reacts to the olden days, and how one watch can fascinate so many people. “Well, I guess it’s time to go, the sun is about to set” Jin-Zhong says, and he’s right. The sun is almost at the ocean, erupting entire rays of different colors in all directions, creating light. If you squint and look closely, you can even see the smoke from the water as the sun touches down. I thank him for hosting me, and walk back to my place for a quiet dinner.

What an exciting day, I say to myself. Isn’t it great, that these people are my friends? I think as I have my own peaceful dinner. Why did the tourists react that way? How should we react to their technology, whatever they call an I-flown or Sam-sings with their gadgets and gizmos. It does bring the human race a step forward, but it also abandons traditions that were once common and encouraged. I finish my buns, and throw the wrapper into the trash bag. I stare out to the empty street as I do every night, and I find Jin-Zhong’s house. Now I realize, that Jin-Zhong’s name means “golden watch” exactly in Chinese, which I find very interesting. But if you peer into his house, through the glass door. You can just make out:

The reflection of the golden pocket watch.

The Descendent

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Cheng, Miriam – 12

“How’s it so early already, I didn’t sleep enough,” Dan muttered as his wife shook him.

“What’s gotten into you? You’re setting a bad example for your son,” his wife pulled him up and whispered into his ear, “Breakfast is egg and goat milk, your favourite.”

Dan got up to go to eat. Breakfast was his favourite, so he quickly devoured it.

His wife walked with him past the streets of Shanghai with his fishing net and sun hat. On the streets were all his friends setting up their stalls. One of his friends was an acrobat, and he was really good at it. Dan watches him balance bowls, sticks and a chair on his head. As he slowly puts on a second chair, his wife pulled him down the streets, “Stay on task,” she reminded. They reached the river, where his boat bobbed with the waves. Dan kissed his wife goodbye and got onto his boat, lay down the net, and then took his fishing rod out. His wife helped push him deeper into the river. “Wish me a good day,” Dan shouted, and with that he took the oars and started to row.

He took his rod to fish, but then put it down again. He was still sleepy after the goat milk. Was it just him, or did the milk taste funny? He felt a little drowsy and dizzy, in fact he was a little seasick for the first time in his life. If only he could sleep a bit more. He laid his head against the boat and felt his boat spinning in circles, slowly to very very quickly. Surely he was just hallucinating. Quickly, he drifted to sleep.

“Where is he? How could he just disappear like that?” Dan’s wife cried to the emergency river rescue department man, “I sent him away yesterday, he was fine.”

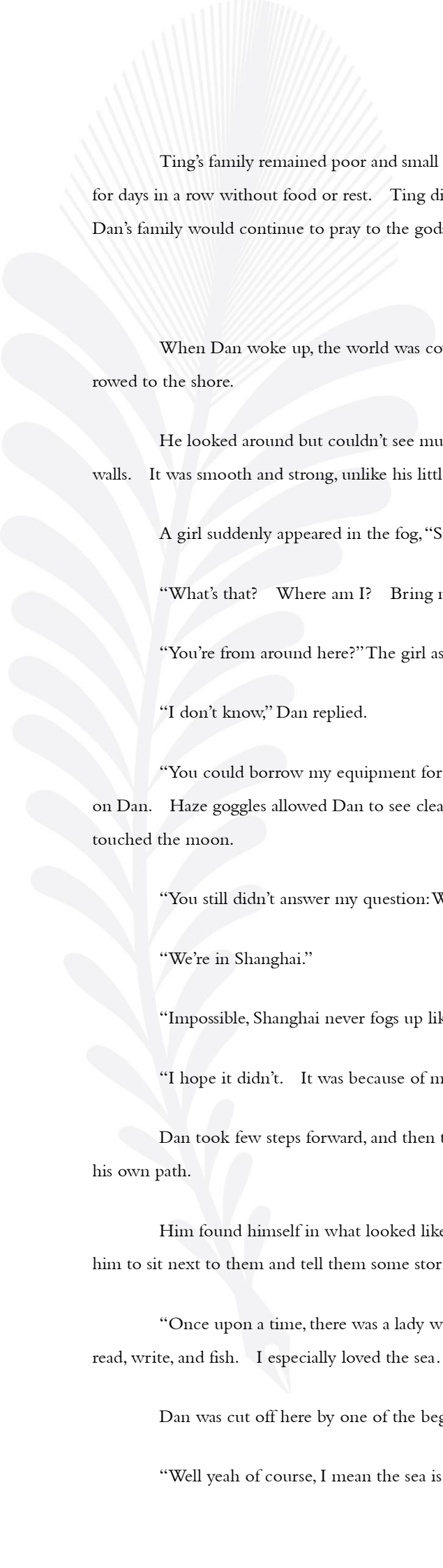
“We couldn’t find him on the river, he might be gone already.” The man replied.

“Gone?” Dan’s wife was crying, “He was with me this morning! How would he have be gone on a calm day?”

“Maybe he’s just caught a lot of fish and wants to stay on the lake. No matter what, we have men across the lake. If they don’t find him, he’s gone.”

Dan’s wife died very soon after this incident. Her son, called Ting, grew up himself. When Ting grew older, he married a poor girl. Together they went to a Divinator. The divinator told him:

“A curse has landed on your family, that’ll make you poor for centuries. You must find your father, but till then, everyday you have to pray to the god in the afternoon. It’ll make sure your family won’t die out before that happens. Your dad will be found by one of your descendent.”



Ting's family remained poor and small for years. He worked in Mr. Tam's family as a slave. Mr. Tam made Ting work for days in a row without food or rest. Ting died soon because of the hard work, but was soon replaced by his son. Everyday, Dan's family would continue to pray to the gods. It was a tradition passed on for many generations.

When Dan woke up, the world was covered in thick fog. The air didn't smell fresh, more like burning coal. He rowed to the shore.

He looked around but couldn't see much. "Where am I?" he muttered to himself. Blinded by the fog, he touched a wall. It was smooth and strong, unlike his little wood house. "This is a dream," he said loudly to himself.

A girl suddenly appeared in the fog, "Sir, you look lost. Did you forget to your haze glasses, oxygen mask and GPS?"

"What's that? Where am I? Bring me home."

"You're from around here?" The girl asked while searching her bag.

"I don't know," Dan replied.

"You could borrow my equipment for now, I have an extra set," the girl sympathetically said. She put the equipment on Dan. Haze goggles allowed Dan to see clearly through the pollution. Dan looks around, staring at the buildings that touched the moon.

"You still didn't answer my question: Where am I?" Dan asked.

"We're in Shanghai."

"Impossible, Shanghai never fogs up like this," Dan replied.

"I hope it didn't. It was because of my grandfather. Now I have to go, goodbye." The girl left.

Dan took few steps forward, and then the "GPS" started beeping randomly. He decided to throw the GPS and walk his own path.

Him found himself in what looked like a little street. It was almost empty, except for two beggars. The beggars told him to sit next to them and tell them some stories. And so Dan started to speak for very long about his life.

"Once upon a time, there was a lady who gave birth to a boy called Dan, and that boy is me. My parents taught me to read, write, and fish. I especially loved the sea....."

Dan was cut off here by one of the beggars called Tam. "The sea? You have seen the sea before?"

"Well yeah of course, I mean the sea is everywhere."

The other beggar, called Tian responded, "You must be really old to have seen the sea."

"I'm only 35," Dan replied.

"Well that's certainly a mystery," both beggars stated. Tian said, "Anyway continue with your story. You have a very funny accent I've never heard before."

Dan said, "What? This is a very typical Shanghai accent. Anyways, I loved the sea. I would go out to watch his parents fish everyday. I also loved the streets. Everyone on the streets were talented one way or another. They were all really kind and would donate to the poor."

"Never heard of this kingdom," Tam shook his head.

"I was 20 when I married Qi. She gave birth to a boy. I was a fisherman. One day, I was on a ship. I fell asleep, and then woke up in fog and reached the shore, where I found..... Well here."

"Extraordinary," Tian said, "You should have stayed in your world. It's a lot better there."

"Tell me more," said Dan.

"Well, there was this professor, called Thomas Wong. He claimed that we could use nuclear energy to run our society, and he created a machine, which failed, causing two nuclear power plants blew up, one in North Shanghai, the other in the South. It destroyed our ozone and caused the Haze, and then made our world to enter an extreme global warming that evaporated our oceans," explained Tian, "I'll tell you more tomorrow. Go to sleep now."

The next day, Dan was talking about fishing. He talked about his hallucinations and the spinning boat when a man stepped out and said, "I have notified some local scientists. They all believe that you have come from the past and come here after passing light speed in your spinning boat. We want to bring you to the lab to study you."

Dan carefully looked around the waiting room. The walls were all white. There was a sign that said "waiting room". Dan fiddled with the doorknob for a few minutes before someone opened it from inside.

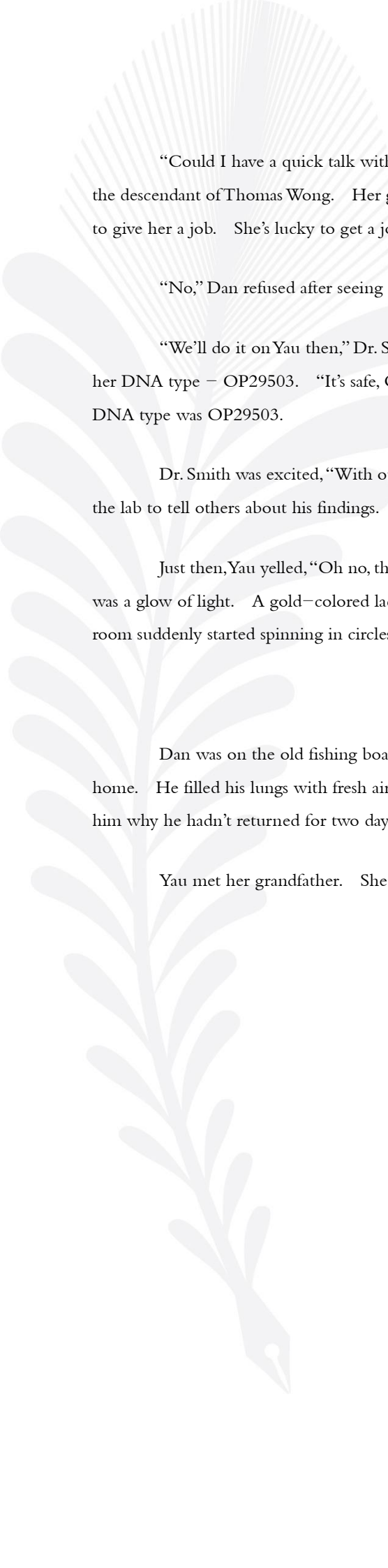
The man was wearing all white too, and seemed to blend into the walls. He spoke politely, "I'm assuming you're Dan. Nice to meet you, my name is Dr. Smith." He stuck his hand out for Dan to shake it.

Dan shook his hand and noticed a woman sweeping the floor. "Who is she?" Dan asked.

"Oh, that's Mrs. Yau Wong. She's our janitor."

"My last name is Wong too. You were the one I met two days ago when I first came."

Yau replied, "Yes that's me," and then continued to sweep.



“Could I have a quick talk with you,” Dr. Smith said, as he pulled Dan out of the lab. He whispered in his ear, “She’s the descendant of Thomas Wong. Her grandfather was given too much money to work with, and you know. So no one trusts to give her a job. She’s lucky to get a job here, don’t ruin it.” Dr. Smith brought him back to the lab to do a DNA tests.

“No,” Dan refused after seeing the complex machine, “How do I know this isn’t a trick?”

“We’ll do it on Yau then,” Dr. Smith said, and took a strand of hair from Yau. He put it into a machine that showed her DNA type – OP29503. “It’s safe, OK?” And then Dr. Smith took a strand of hair from Dan, and then inserted it. The DNA type was OP29503.

Dr. Smith was excited, “With our population of 9 billion, it’s almost impossible to have the exact same DNA!” He left the lab to tell others about his findings.

Just then, Yau yelled, “Oh no, the prophecy,” and then she prayed to the gods like all her ancestors had. Suddenly, there was a glow of light. A gold-colored lady floated down. She pointed to a glass of milk, which the two quickly drank. The room suddenly started spinning in circles faster and faster, just like the boat Dan travelled on.

Dan was on the old fishing boat and had filled his net with fish. He picked up the bucket and headed back to his home. He filled his lungs with fresh air, then headed home to meet his wife. His wife gave him a big hug, anxiously asking him why he hadn’t returned for two days.

Yau met her grandfather. She quickly stopped the plan he was having and helped to make the family rich again.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chu, Tongfèi – 12

Soft wind rustled outside on the streets. My name is Xiao Mi, and I am 78 years old, but I dye my hair so I look like I am still very young because I like being young. I have wrinkles on my face and hands, and I wear sunglasses to protect my eyes. I live on the gloomy street called Rich Street, which is weird because I am a poor man. I live in a bungalow. There is a number 57 over our wooden door and a steel window near it so burglars can't come in.

My family is currently sitting outside on the pavement and making the most annoying sounds you can ever think of. I am currently reading a book called *wo de shi jie*, but my wife just keeps on bothering me by trying to brush my shoe. My clothes are hanging right above my house and is drying. My son and I go to oriental pearl tower (Which looks exactly like the CN tower in Canada) to collect the delicious lip smacking, soft taste of the Dumplings. Otherwise, called "Xiao Long Bao", the delicate hot skin and the oily shrimps wrapped inside... Sorry, I'm not trying to make you hungry.

Every day, after I eat breakfast, I would usually be working in a drum factory, but I got fired by my awful and ungrateful boss. Now, I work in a doll factory, and I promise you, it is not a good experience. Those dolls we are instructed to make are scary, their eyes are wide open and stare at you every night. Every time, I make a new doll, I have to close my eyes and squint at it so I won't get scared by the "little harmless doll." Today is special, I get a day off because today is China national day. I feel so hao. It is very hao to have a day off, because the boss treats me bu hao and harshly. That is why we are relaxing outside on the pavement in the sun.

Sadly, the peace and the relaxation didn't last for long. My son got hyperthermia the day after. He was tired and exhausted, and felt cold and hot the same time. I don't have enough money to buy all these kinds of medicine for my son. The only way to cure him, is probably to go to the public town hospital, which is miles away from my small bungalow, and I don't have any transportation at all, so the only solution is to carry my son. Soon, I grew tired. Every step feels like being tangled in the vine and mud. Although there is still light, it feels like it has been hours carrying him up and down the paved streets of Shanghai. Soon, I collapsed onto the icy, hard floor. Now, I feel very bu hao and I want food.

Fortunately, my son still had enough energy to support his own body. Now it is his turn to carry me to the hospital. It wasn't far away now. I can see the dim lights of the residential buildings up ahead. The town hospital was a huge, place. Living in it must be very creepy because of all the empty space in the top of the roof. The small cracks on the roof display an old and painful path. The doctors, who are old, back hunched man, sat in a row waiting for people to be cured. The doctors had pale face, a red nose, and are all wearing white robes. The grumpy look on their faces didn't make me feel any better. My son dragged me onto the nearest bench and dumped me there.

The strange old doctors required money for the medicine, but I don't have a cent in my pockets. I feel bu hao, because I traded away my favourite necklaces, which have been first owned by my great great grandfather. It was made of pure gold and a diamond in the centre. Unwillingly, I traded it away. The doctors have reported my son and I both got Gan Mao. They said I have to eat a little white pill twice every day. A ripple of worrying look came across my son's face when I told him that. The doctors fed my son and I some bitter orange liquid in a small container. That instantly made me feel better.

Going back home was much easier than coming to the hospital. When I approached to my bed, I lay down, and instantly fell asleep. It was simply the best sleep I had in my life. The long night of rest, the surge of energy returning to my body. The golden necklaces is gone, forever.

It wasn't until the next week I found myself perfectly fine. I continued to work in the doll factory. Amazingly, I am not scared of the dolls anymore, since my encounter with the strange doctors. My son had been hopping around Rich Street playing with the other boys. Sometimes, a sacrifice has to be made, for the best.

Her Memories

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chung , Candace – 14

Amongst the sea of sky scraping glass towers, rain drops slowly drip down the roof of a petite dusty brick hut. Some raindrops drizzle into the shack through the tiny crevices on the roof. In the old house a woman calmly resides beside the window. Age has left it's mark on her, wrinkles and creases on her dry cracked skin, long silver hair draping down her shoulders, plaited into an unkempt braid. She looks out the window, as her memories replay in the reflections of the glass.

The straight concrete streets outside the window morphing into winding ochre dirt paths; bright street lights transforming into clusters of oak trees; the sea of people fading into jade rice fields. It was Spring, rain soaking the earth, blending in with the water canals stretching across the vast farmlands. A young girl wears her trademark disheveled braid, raven hair flowing in the wind. She prances in the fields, singing her favorite song, voice blending in with the rain. Other farmers also sing the same song, chattering amongst each other, motivating themselves to continue with their work, refusing to let the rain dampen their mood. The girl wore a wide smile on her face.

The scene dissolved once again. Grand buildings formed around the now neat stone pavement. A woman calmly strides with other pedestrians, her dark locks starting to have hints of gray. Noise was blaring everywhere, whether it was the noisy chatter, or shop owner's advertising their own products. She glances up, seeing serrated spears pointing all around, fanning out of walls. It was a beautiful creation indeed, from the sheen of the metal to the symmetry of the semicircle. It is a shame, how the seemingly artsy structure haughtily displays humanity's lack of trust.

The rain continued to drip down the window now displaying wide streets, herds of passerbys crossing the streets, vehicles crowding around, the familiar dusty suffocating smog filling the air. People roam the streets, heads bowed down, looking at the luminous screens contrasting the murky skies. The old woman's pale hair continued to flow in the wind, her unheard sigh adrift in the wind. Isn't it ironic how people can be so close yet so far?

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Dyer, Violet – 11

Of the seven billion people in the world, the ten million people who lived in Shanghai and the fifty people who happened to be on the same street on which she was walking, God had apparently chosen her.

Trams are a popular means of transport in Shanghai. The city is crowded with busy people keen to get to some destination and the trams carry large numbers to destinations relatively quickly on fixed lines. They are safe and it helps to gather everyone on one vehicle in crowded cities. Swiftly, they travel day and night. When the stars shine brightly upon the still streets, the only thing to be seen moving are the trams, silently and safely carrying workers home. No ding dings here. I used to like trams, but not anymore.

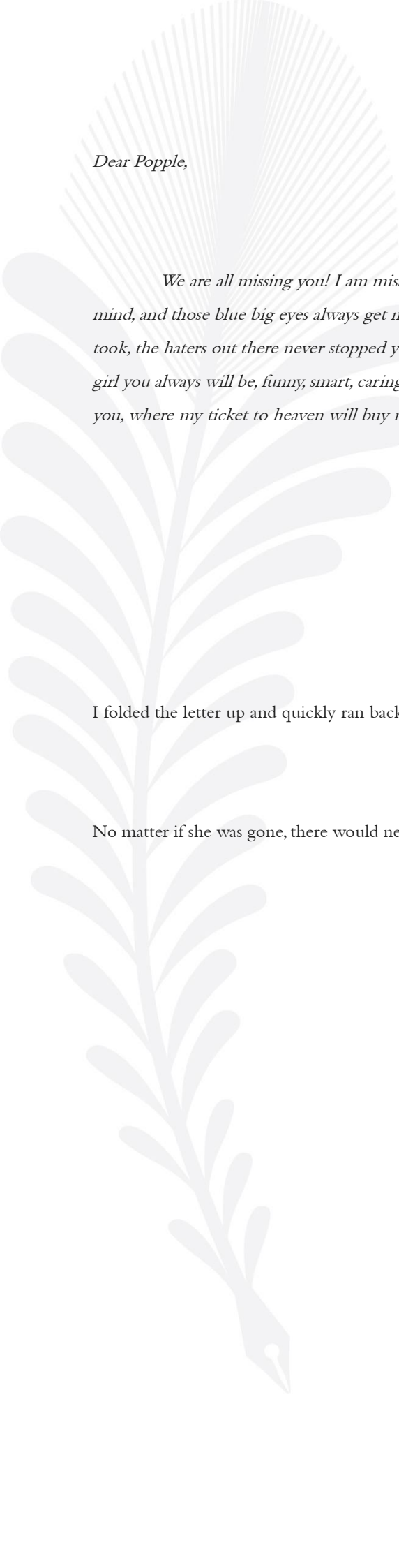
I used to be so interested on why there were lines and strings on the top and bottom, but now it doesn't really matter. Nothing really matters. The only reason that I got out of bed every morning was to be happy ... with Poppy.

Our Bucket List was so long, the top of the paper nearly reached my bottom eyelashes. There were so many bizarre events to accomplish. Climb the Great Wall of China, Ride an elephant, swim in a river and I could go on forever and ever. None of the boxes happened to be ticked though, she just left too soon.

It's been a week days now, since the accident. I still dream about her every day, the smile she gave me when we were together. The laugh she expressed when I was grumpy and tired. The support she would give me each and every day. I loved her so much. My family and poppy's all gathered in the graveyard and surrounded the grey stone. I popped a little photo of us next to a huge bunch of flowers, red roses, what she would've wanted. We then slowly made it back home after all the little things that everyone said.

We got home.

I quickly dashed up into my bedroom and wrote a letter, that I would place on her grave.



Dear Popple,

We are all missing you! I am missing you! It has been a tough week. That beautiful smile you had is always stuck in my mind, and those blue big eyes always get me through. You are the best friend I could ever have. You never regret the chances you took, the haters out there never stopped you from flying high and taking risks. You will achieve great things up there, and be the girl you always will be, funny, smart, caring. I know that one day, we'll meet again, in heaven where you belong. I can't wait to see you, where my ticket to heaven will buy me your company.

Love from,

Apple

I folded the letter up and quickly ran back to the grave.

No matter if she was gone, there would never be a day that I wouldn't miss those stunning blue eyes that sparkled in the sunlight.

Hell In Heaven

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Kwok, Yuet Yee Kleio – 11

A man is slumped against the prison bars, his eyes desolate and bleak as he stares blankly at some ghostly apparition only he can see. He sighs. Time is a foreign concept here in the dungeons. It feels like forever, but it might as well have been a few days. There is no way of knowing: the dungeons are bathed in perpetual gloom all day, and the guards are no help. The vague outline of a prison guard marches toward him, and a bunch of heavy, iron keys jingle from his hip. The man watches it with haunted eyes. *If only he could reach it...* The figure turns right, and disappears from his view.

That is how he spends the hours: hoping for something he will never have. All this mess over a petty misunderstanding. He never stops wishing, though. He fiddles with the rough hem of his shirt. He hates the dark.

March 15th, 1823, Bei Shi, Old Shanghai

It is a crisp spring morning in the Northern City. A young man in tattered rags steps through the tall gate, and leaves a trail of dirt in his wake. The guard wrinkles his nose and mutters something obscene under his breath. The young man feels his face heat up, but he doesn't retort. He's just a poor, young Chinese boy. Nobody will listen to him, nor will they care. He weaves through the throng of people, and heads towards a shed where he stores his rickshaw. A loud honk blasts out from behind him and he moves instantly, spurring his feet into motion. All around him, the crowd scatters like seeds in the wind. He barely manages to get out of the way before a shiny black car speeds in. He feels the rush of the wind on his skin as the car grazes past him, and lets out a sigh of relief. They must be in a hurry to attend some fancy elite party, he thinks with a tinge of bitterness and longing.

A cry of pain jolts him out of his daydream and he turns toward the source of the sound. An old beggar clutches his foot in pain, and the young man catches a glimpse of tyre marks embedded into his flesh. "Help me! Jiu ming ah!" he wails, and it reminds the young man of a siren. He freezes in horror, but nobody else seems to notice. The world continues to tick past as if nothing just happened. People swarm past him, unaware of the old man and his crushed foot. He swallows down the bile rising his throat, and hurries to the little shed, leaving the old man's mournful wails behind.

As he wanders down the cobblestone streets, his rickshaw trails behind him, and it kicks up small puffs of dust. The aroma of dumplings steaming in a teahouse reaches his nose, and his stomach grumbles. Breakfast is a foreign concept to him. There is simply no money to spare. His last meal was a bowl of watery gruel a day ago, a long forgotten memory that he holds onto tightly in the past few cold, winter months. A plaque catches his attention, and the words: "dogs and Chinese are forbidden to enter" are emblazoned onto the shiny metal. A wave of shame and anger threatens to overwhelm him. Red spots dance at the edge of his vision, and he tries to stamp the anger down, to bury it in the back of his mind. He might have the same social status as a dog, but he still has pride. He thinks of his baby sister. She was always so proud -- too proud, their mother used to say with a wry smile. He tries to conjure up her face from the depths of his memory: the arch of her brow, her dark eyes, her the way she smiled. Nobody smiles much back at his home, in the Old City. He shakes his head in frustration. What use is it to dwell on the past? He slips an obedient mask over his face. One day, he will get rid of all this pretense. One day, he vows to stand up and get the life he deserves. Sometimes he wonders if those days will actually come.

It is late afternoon and the Bund is surprisingly empty. The young man hunches up on the street, and he wipes away the sweat on his face. He glimpses his reflection in a muddy puddle on the ground, and he stifles a gasp. The face that peers back up at him is lean and gaunt. His eyes are sunken pits with black smudges underneath. His limbs are skeletal, and his clothes are

a patchwork of old rags roughly sewn together. A single drop rolls down his face and splashes into the still pool, and creates ripples in the still water. His face is oddly distorted, like some type of inhumane monster. A *guai shou*. It reminds him of the Old City. In his mind's eye, he sees young orphans huddled on the steps, their hands outstretched in a silent plea. It is such a big contrast to the beautiful, ornate mansions that the rich live in. A tall man in a tailored suit steps out from one of the gigantic mansions and waves his hand imperiously at him. "Rickshaw! You, come here." The young man glances up at him with wide, startled eyes. Bowing slightly, the young man hurries towards him, and the tall man gets on the rickshaw. He notices his customer discreet glances at his expensive golden pocket watch. Noticing the signal, the young man quickens his pace, and in no time they are at the racecourse.

The man gets off the rickshaw, and dusts off his new clothes before quickly disappearing into the crowd. He turns around, and the young man realizes that his customer has left his pocket watch on the rickshaw seat. His eyes grow as large and he gapes at his newfound treasure. If he sold that, he could live off that money for ages. He'd never have to work anymore. If he was caught, though... he didn't want to think about the consequences. His mind struggled between the two: doing the right thing, or money. He sits there, blanketed by the noise of the roaring crowd. His hands move numbly, drifting over and slipping the watch into his pocket. He leaves the rickshaw at the side of the road, and doesn't look back.

He is dragged back to reality by the pain in his chest, and he doubles over, coughing hard. He reaches up to wipe the blood from his mouth. Even the smallest of actions hurt so much. He knows that his days are numbered, and counting down fast. Tears drip down his cheeks, and he tries to hold on, to slow down the clock. Time is another element in his life, like luck, that was never in his control. They have never been on his side, he thinks bitterly. "Why does it have to end like this? Why does I have to rot and die in a lonely cell?" he yells at the wall. He distantly remembers waking up here, his whole body throbbing and aching. The watch was too good to be true. It was a test, and he failed. He remembers the pawn shop, the loud voice of the angry customer with a horde of policemen on his tail, and desperately trying to escape. It was wrong, but he was just trying to survive, like everybody else.

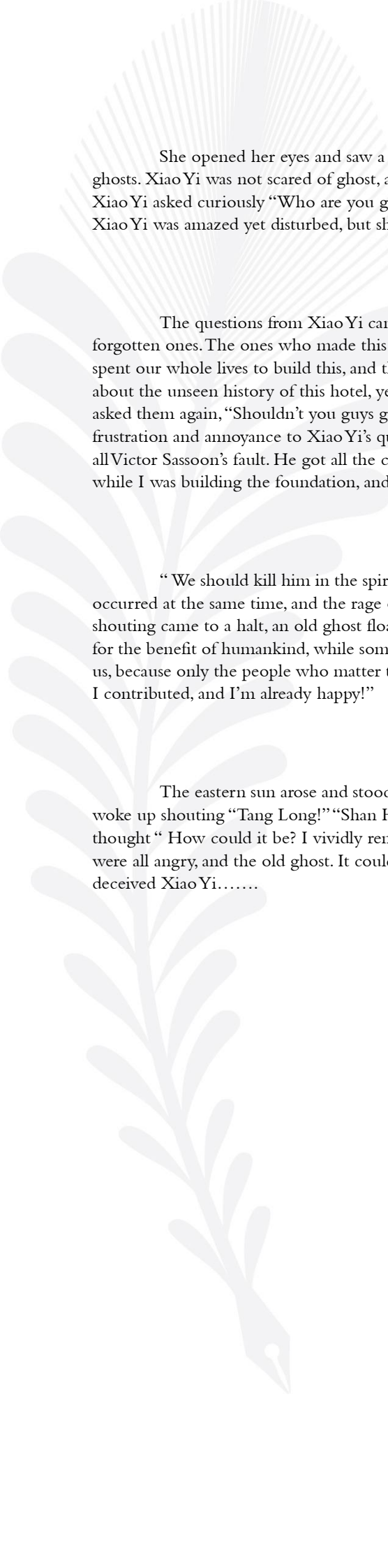
He thinks back to the first time he stepped foot into the Northern City. It was like heaven. It was a surreal experience. If someone told him that there was somewhere in this perfect city exactly like the Old City, he would never have believed it. Diseases always spread like wildfire in these places. Now he's going to die here, in this hell. Hell in heaven -- isn't that ironic? As his life flash past him, he wonders what it would be like if he was rich. How different everything would be. Maybe in another life, he would get to experience these luxuries. Maybe in another life, luck would be on his side. The world dims, and he sees his mother and little sister happily skipping towards him. As the ground beneath him vanishes and his eyes close, he thinks, *who will inhabit this cell after I'm gone?*

The Ghosts of Peace Hotel

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Kwong, Codi -14

"Mm! What a delicacy" Xiao Yi took small sips of Oolong tea and nibbled on the deep fried buns elegantly placed on a bakery basket, as she overlooks the ravishing night view of the Huangpu River from the cafe of the Peace Hotel. Xiao Yi thought to herself, "Who is such a genius and built this hotel." Suddenly, several voices said, "I DID!" Xiao Yi was shocked, so shocked that she dropped her bun on the ground which took a waiter to pick it up. Her eyes didn't blink and her mouth was opened so big you can fit those deep fried buns easily. After Xiao Yi collected herself, she came to a conclusion that she was too tired, and needed a good night sleep.

In the midnight, thunder started to roar and heavy rain hit her window like thousands of hooves pounding on the ground. Xiao Yi started hearing voices saying "I did it!" The voices filled her head. They just like the ones in the cafe. She was irritated by the voices and tried to shake it off by shaking her head, but the voice just got bigger and then boom! Xiao Yi was traumatised by the voices and woke up, only to know she had some guest awaiting her.



She opened her eyes and saw a bunch cloudy marshmallows surrounding her, she looks closer and found out they are ghosts. Xiao Yi was not scared of ghost, as Chinese believed ghost are just spirits who wander around and should be respected. Xiao Yi asked curiously “Who are you guys?” The ghost’s respond in unison “ We are the builders who built the Peace Hotel.” Xiao Yi was amazed yet disturbed, but she can’t content her excitement of asking questions on how the hotel was built.

The questions from Xiao Yi came in like a series of waves hitting the ghost’s full powered right in the face. “ We are the forgotten ones. The ones who made this hotel, and every brick and marble was collected and built by us. We were the ones who spent our whole lives to build this, and this is our home.” said one of the ghost called Tang Long. Xiao Yi was stunned to learn about the unseen history of this hotel, yet sentimental that the workers were never remembered from what they done. Xiao Yi asked them again, “Shouldn’t you guys get credit for what you done.” All the ghost frowned at her, and their eye brows shown frustration and annoyance to Xiao Yi’s question. All of a sudden, a young ghost called Shan Huo hopped up and gruffed “ It was all Victor Sassoon’s fault. He got all the credit, while the people who actually built it were not even mentioned. I died age 32 while I was building the foundation, and he didn’t even show any respect to me!”

“ We should kill him in the spirit world.” “ I hate Victor Sassoon, he’s a nincompoop!” Several grumbling and protesting occurred at the same time, and the rage of the ghosts can be felt in every corner of Xiao Yi’s room. Suddenly, “ Shush!” The shouting came to a halt, an old ghost floated out the crowd. “ In this world, there are people who sacrifice their blood and sweat for the benefit of humankind, while some just stand aside and take all the credit. However, we don’t need everyone to remember us, because only the people who matter to us, should remember what we done. My family and friends was proud of me for what I contributed, and I’m already happy!”

The eastern sun arose and stood high on the sky, as it illuminated the shimmering water of the Huangpu River. Xiao Yi woke up shouting “Tang Long!” “Shan Huo!” “Old ghost!”. She checked every corner of her room, but there’s nothing. Xiao Yi thought “ How could it be? I vividly remember my house was bombarded with ghost. Victor Sassoon took all the credit, they were all angry, and the old ghost. It couldn’t been just a dream.” And yes it was just a dream, a dream so legitimate that it deceived Xiao Yi.....

Diary of Brian Lee

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Mallet, Jenelle – 14

October 20th 1899,

Today was indeed a very strange day filled with many peculiar events. It all started with a “Click” on my finely carved wooden panel camera as my wife and I posed for our first wedding photo. I could just about make out the outline of the cameraman’s smug face as the piercing white light of the flash blinded my eyes.

I fainted.

Date: October 20th 2016

“Click”, I opened my eyes, finding myself staring straight into a metal box. It made the exact same clicking noise as the camera we had at home but this there wasn’t any light coming out of it. I wonder what is was? I averted my eyes from the metal box and found myself staring at the owner of it. She was a young girl, maybe in her late teens or early twenties. Her attire was absurd, it had no resemblance to the Qipao everyone girl in Shanghai is obligated to wear whenever they go out. Ah poor girl, it seems as though she didn’t have enough money to pay her taylor since none of her clothes fit her. Unlike the qipao, where the one piece silk dress embroidered with intricate patterns and a high mandarin collar, covering all of a woman’s body except for her head, hands and toes. The only 2 materials this girl had on was a shirt that looked way too tight on her, not covering her stomach and shorts that were up way too high. Looking at her, I was disgusted but I also took pity on her. I thought I was doing the right thing when I said I would buy her a some new clothes but all she did was look at me weirdly and slapped me, and started ranting in a different language.

2

October 21th, 1899

I woke up bewild and outraged, it took a while before the initial shock wore off and found myself tucked in bed. My wife said that I caught the flu and I needed to take some time off and not go to work for a few days. I had nothing else to do but potter around the house. My house is like every other house in my neighborhood. There are 3 story structures distinguished by high brick walls enclosing a narrow front yard. Every house down my street is shikumen style and it seems so ordinary. I’m trying to save up money to buy a new house for my wife and I to move into on our anniversary. As I walked onto my porch to take a quick breath of crisp fresh air, all of a sudden I felt nauseous and I started seeing stars.

Oh no, this won’t be good.

Date: I don't know

I was back, standing at the exact same place, opposite that rude narcissistic girl. Last time I was too focused on the girl to actually realise what was around me. *Wait, this doesn't look like shanghai? Where's my home?* In Front of me, where my home use to be, is a massive THING. I don't even know what it is. I've never come across anything like this in my life. It was massive, looking up, it definitely reaches the sky. The thing was made out of glass which twinkled in the sunlight, the exterior of it read "shanghai tower." I don't know what happened or who did this, but i'm definitely digging the looks of my new house, and the names got a real ring to it as well. The building was much nicer than my old shikumen style house which is a win win situation for me. I don't even need to buy my wife a new house since one is literally right before my eyes! Right before I stepped inside to take a look at my new house, blinding light overcame my visions, enabling me to see anything, I heard distant yelling as I slowly drifted back to consciousness.

Date: October 20th 1899

"Honey, honey, wake up, it's our big wedding photo day and I know you wouldn't want to look sloppy in it would you?" I groaned, rubbed my eyes, scratched my hair, got halfway up and flopped back down. Frustratingly, I grabbed a pillow shoved it on my face "That was all a dream?"

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Myers, Hayley – 11

I stepped into the capsule decorated with golden paint and beautiful patterns. It was cold. I looked up and saw the shining white rock, The Crescent Rock placed carefully into a small hole, carved for that particular stone. It gleamed like pretty diamonds. When I was inside the glass door slid shut. I pressed a few buttons and I heard the sound of my machine tinker inside. Suddenly there was a blinding light and a bang and I disappeared from the time machine.

When my eyes cleared I saw where I was. Strangely I saw beautiful streets and cafes. At first, I thought I was in France, but as I saw the locals walking around I realised that I was not in France, but in the French quarter of Shanghai. I walked to a local newspaper stand and picked up a newspaper. I looked up and saw the date, April 17, 1942 it read. I dropped the newspaper and shouted with joy. The locals there thought I was a lunatic, but I was so happy that I didn't even care.

When I finally calmed down I decided to sit in a cafe and feel proud of what I have achieved. Then I realised that I didn't know what to do next. I reached into my pocket and took out a blue gumball size pearl. I looked at it, admiring the inside of the pearl. It looked like the Aurora Borealis that paints the northern sky with beautiful colours. As I sat there wondering I saw some policemen walking my way, at least I think they were policemen, I thought nothing about it at first but as they slowly closed in I sat up straighter and asked,

'I'm sorry, but have I done something wrong?'

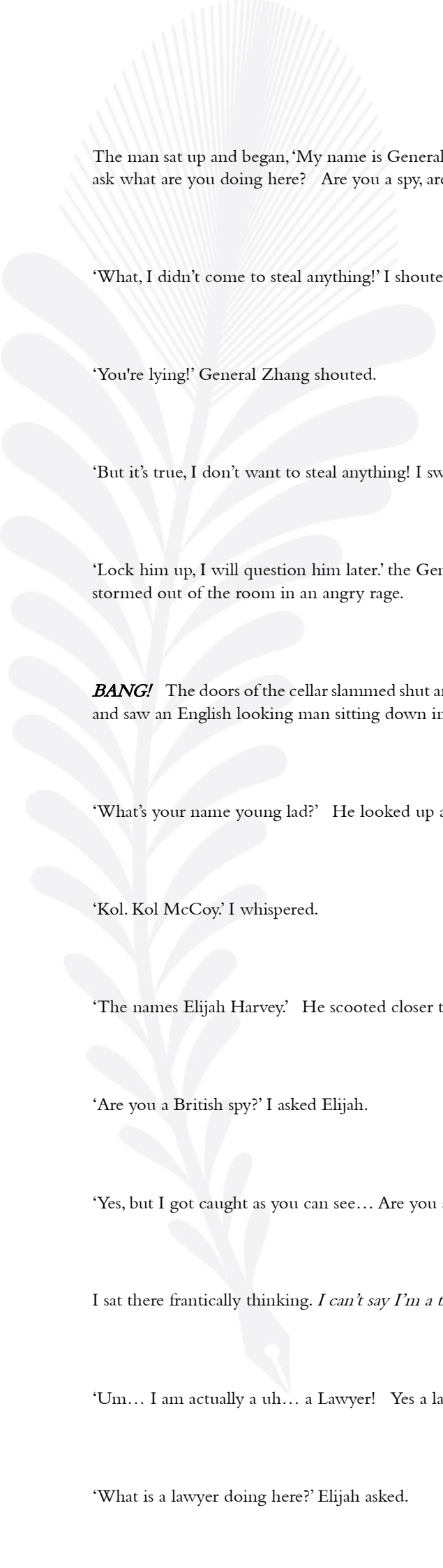
One of the policemen grabbed my left arm while another grabbed the right. I tried to twist my way out but their grip was strong. They threw me into a car and we left.

It was quite a long ride and the windows in the car were covered, so I couldn't see where we were going. Once we arrived at our destination the two policemen dragged me down a dirt road. We crossed the dirt road and I saw flat land and what looked like a military compound. I saw a building that I suppose was the headquarters. As we slowly got closer to the building I saw a man wearing military clothes and who had a stern look on his face. When I faced him the policemen dumped me onto the ground and the man punched me in the face, knocking me out!

'Wake up!' I heard a calm manly voice say.

My eyes slowly began to open letting in the blinding light. When my eyes started to focus I saw the same man that punched me in the face sitting across from me. He crossed his arms and looked at me.

'Wha— what— where am I?' I stuttered.



The man sat up and began, ‘My name is General Zhang. I am from the Shanghai military and you, you are a foreigner. So may I ask what are you doing here? Are you a spy, are you here to steal classified information?!’

‘What, I didn’t come to steal anything!’ I shouted, surprised.

‘You’re lying!’ General Zhang shouted.

‘But it’s true, I don’t want to steal anything! I swear!’ I struggled in my handcuffs.

‘Lock him up, I will question him later.’ the General said to one of his soldiers. ‘And you better tell me the truth!’ Then he stormed out of the room in an angry rage.

BANG! The doors of the cellar slammed shut and I was left there sitting down on the cold, hard stone floor. I looked to my right and saw an English looking man sitting down in his cellar playing with a piece of wire.

‘What’s your name young lad?’ He looked up and asked.

‘Kol. Kol McCoy.’ I whispered.

‘The names Elijah Harvey.’ He scooted closer to the bars on the right and stuck out his left hand. I shook it.

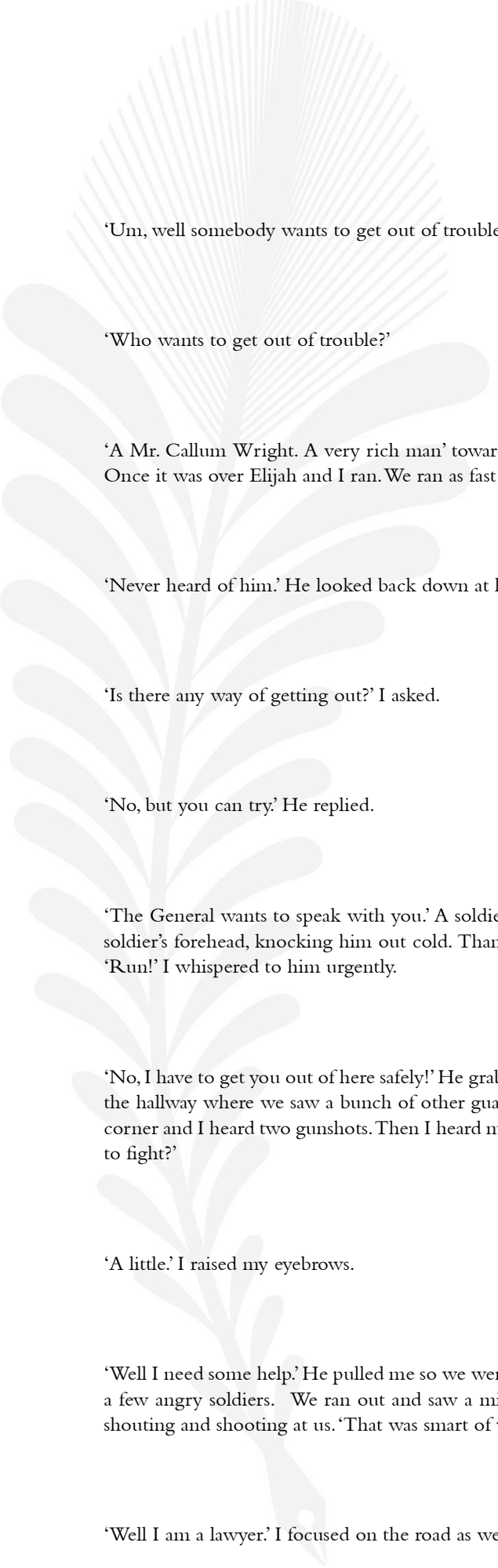
‘Are you a British spy?’ I asked Elijah.

‘Yes, but I got caught as you can see... Are you a spy too?’

I sat there frantically thinking. *I can’t say I’m a time traveler* I thought.

‘Um... I am actually a uh... a Lawyer! Yes a lawyer.’ I nodded my head.

‘What is a lawyer doing here?’ Elijah asked.



‘Um, well somebody wants to get out of trouble and I am their lawyer.’ I laughed a nervously.

‘Who wants to get out of trouble?’

‘A Mr. Callum Wright. A very rich man’ towards one of them and judo-flipped him, then I took his gun and began to shoot. Once it was over Elijah and I ran. We ran as fast as we could until we made it to the front door, obviously

‘Never heard of him.’ He looked back down at his wire.

‘Is there any way of getting out?’ I asked.

‘No, but you can try.’ He replied.

‘The General wants to speak with you.’ A soldier walked to my cellar and unlocked the door. I pushed the door and it hit the soldier’s forehead, knocking him out cold. Thankfully there was only one soldier. I grabbed the keys and unlocked Elijah’s cell. ‘Run!’ I whispered to him urgently.

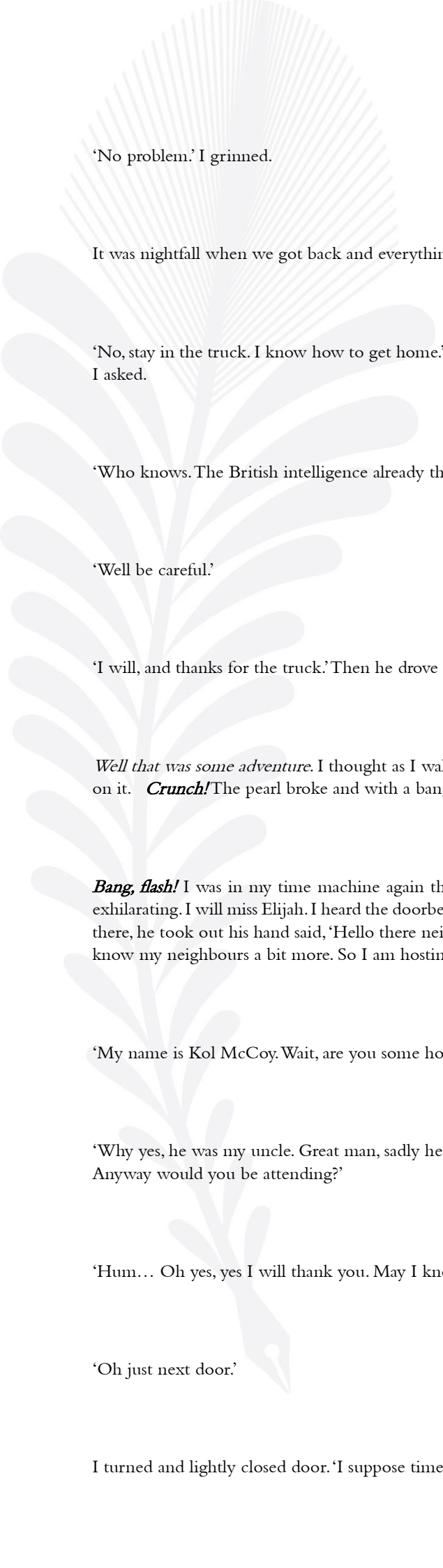
‘No, I have to get you out of here safely!’ He grabbed the gun in the soldiers holster and grabbed my arm. He dragged me towards the hallway where we saw a bunch of other guards walking between corridors. ‘Stay here.’ Elijah whispered to me. He turned a corner and I heard two gunshots. Then I heard more gunshots. He turned and was now next to me, he asked ‘Do you know how to fight?’

‘A little.’ I raised my eyebrows.

‘Well I need some help.’ He pulled me so we were facing the guards. They kept shooting and I kept dodging. I ran encountering a few angry soldiers. We ran out and saw a military truck parked outside, we grabbed it and drove off while the guards were shouting and shooting at us. ‘That was smart of you to hit that soldier on the head.’ Elijah praised.

‘Well I am a lawyer.’ I focused on the road as we drove away.

‘Thank you for getting me out of their. You don’t know how long I have been dreaming of this day.’ Elijah thanked me.



‘No problem.’ I grinned.

It was nightfall when we got back and everything was quiet. ‘Thanks again.’ Elijah said as he got off the truck.

‘No, stay in the truck. I know how to get home.’ I slid off the seat and stood next to the truck. ‘Where are you going to go now?’ I asked.

‘Who knows. The British intelligence already think I’m dead. Maybe I will go to Fiji, always wanted to go there.’

‘Well be careful.’

‘I will, and thanks for the truck.’ Then he drove of.

Well that was some adventure. I thought as I walked in an alleyway. I carefully placed the blue pearl on the floor then I stepped on it. **Crunch!** The pearl broke and with a bang and flash of light I was gone.

Bang, flash! I was in my time machine again the doors slid open and I stepped out of the capsule and sighed. ‘That was very exhilarating. I will miss Elijah. I heard the doorbell ring and walked towards it. I opened the door and I saw a young man standing there, he took out his hand said, ‘Hello there neighbor my name is Nicholas Harvey I just moved here and I would like to get to know my neighbours a bit more. So I am hosting a garden party at my estate and hope that you can join.’

‘My name is Kol McCoy. Wait, are you some how related to Elijah Harvey?’ I asked.

‘Why yes, he was my uncle. Great man, sadly he died at 39 because someone killed him. I don’t know much about it though. Anyway would you be attending?’

‘Hum... Oh yes, yes I will thank you. May I know where you live?’

‘Oh just next door.’

I turned and lightly closed door. ‘I suppose time traveling has a very interesting effect on the future.’ I said to myself.

Change is Hard

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Ng, Eugenie – 14

I began my day by taking a deep breath to calm down. Cars were revving and banter was distinct in the background. This new atmosphere is so bustling, so overwhelming..... Yet so refreshing. I don't know how I got here, nor how long I will stay in this vessel, but I want it to last. My life has been like this, all day everyday, as a restless, unbound spirit, floating through the skies like a cloud. Everyday I wake up, unsure of where to go or who to talk to, or even what language to speak, but that's the exciting part of this process; you don't stop to question anything and live in the moment while you can.

Today, I wake up with an intense pounding to my head. I open my eyes only to find myself in a new body of a schoolboy. It took a while to find my bearings. As I inspect the room for any clue of what city, town I am in, or even what hemisphere I currently live in. I once woke up inside of an igloo in Serbia with wolves howling outside. That was not an enjoyable day. But I am relieved to find that this room is well furnished, with a slightly warm but pleasant breeze blowing through the ajar window. I can distinctly hear chatter in the streets, but it's not clear enough for me to decipher what language it is of. I regard the room once more to learn more about the owner, and quickly find out from numerous medals, trophies and certificates that the life I have taken over for a day originally belonged to one Carlos Lee. I quickly memorize that name and quickly walk towards the window to draw the shades Carlos clearly neglected to do so last night. I suddenly stagger backwards, not from the blinding sunlight, but because the feeling of déjà vu of this reminiscent skyline has overcome me, as if this skyline I'm observing had once been my home.

It was the feeling of familiarity within unfamiliarity, like meeting a once close friend after a long duration of separation. And it finally dawned on me that I have seen this scenery before, but only from a different time period; The infamous Shanghai tower towered over the mall in which a high school once stood. My high school. The cherry blossom tree near my apartment building which stood tall and sweet-smelling is now surrounded by a lush park. The Shanghai I knew from eons ago, when my body was my own, was filled with short squat buildings between a canopy of clotheslines, bordering the jade green Huangpu river. Crowded temples and teahouses were deemed special and local landmarks, unlike this new world where skyscrapers and billboards dominate every inch of space.

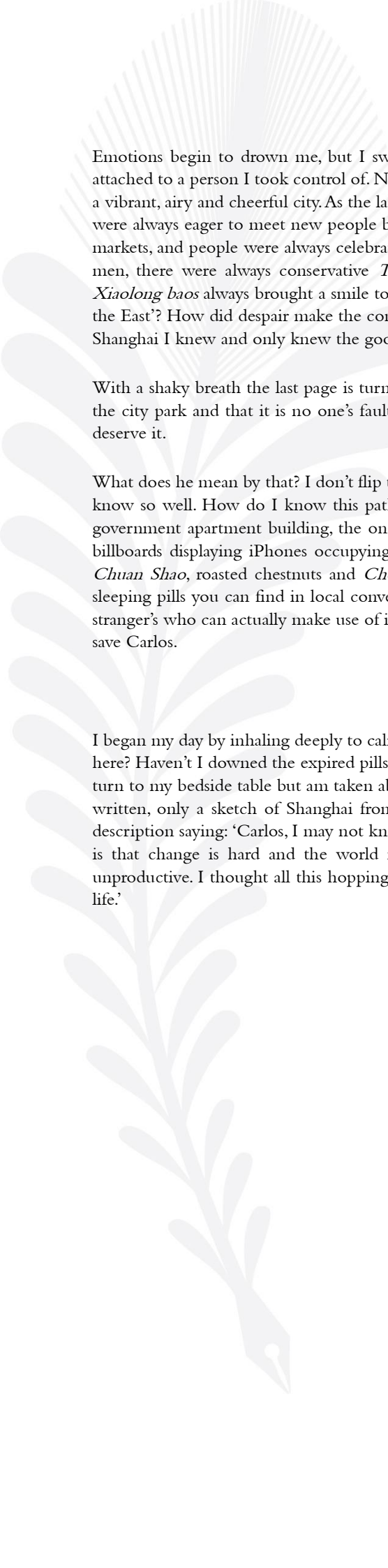
Because I haven't been brought back to live once more for ages, I'm completely taken aback by how strange it is to see the hometown I've known utterly transformed. I haven't inquired about Shanghai ever since my plane crashed near the coast of Madagascar, ending my old life ended and starting a new one, where I would imitate someone everyday.

All nostalgia aside, I have to focus on my agenda, which is the same for every day I take away from each inhabitant: to find out their schedule as subtly as possible, to live the day normally and keep any complications to a minimum.

Set myself the task of analyzing the contents in Carlos' room to learn his daily life and his relations with everyone so I can act accordingly. I see an open book on his desk, a diary. I hadn't thought anyone still wrote in those but judging from the cover imprinted with a school crest it was probably mandatory to keep one for schooling purposes. I flipped it open, ready to interpret the words into whatever personality I have to take on. This process has toughened up my tolerance over the years as in many instances I've had to stand up for timid and shy people in moments when superiors bully them, and I've learnt from countless times that sometimes justice isn't brought upon, and right isn't always right.

I skimmed through the pages in a matter of minutes, managing to read entries discussing him and his friends going out to parties, how finals were stressing him out, how he adored the chocolates on Nanjing Street, all mundane events in daily life, constructed with the simplicity and compassion of a regular schoolboy mind.

But October 13th was the day the sugary sweet entries turned sour. He began each sentence with 'Dearest Diary' outlined thicker as the days went by, and had stopped talking about the events that went on during the day. He talked more about his mother, how she regularly woke up after mid-day, how she consistently forgot significant dates like her conference meetings and her mother's birthday, how her eyes were always watery. Carlos noted that the bruises on her arms that were no loving hugs from her husband; He had frantically written and rewritten 'what do I do what do I do' under his entries. Weeks afterwards, he no longer had to worry about his mother's well being, and his mother no longer had to worry about forgetting important dates, as for once she managed to be on time for her own funeral. Afterwards, the what do i do's became why didn't i's. His entries became shorter and more depressing. On an emotional scale, his journal resembled a grayscale turning darker. Few pages were left free of water stains and crinkles. His writing has become incomprehensible and shaky. The mind can only imagine so much of what can happen to a person.



Emotions begin to drown me, but I swallow the urge to cry. What is this that I am feeling? Never have I once gotten this attached to a person I took control of. Never have I seen such sadness take place in ink. Thinking back, Shanghai has always been a vibrant, airy and cheerful city. As the largest city in China, their imports are plentiful, and everyone in our village of Zhujiajiao were always eager to meet new people bursting with adventurous tales. Nights were always spent under winking lights of night markets, and people were always celebrating a new wedding or a birth in embroidered *Cheongsam*, pearls and jade, and for the men, there were always conservative *Tang Zhuang*, and everyone had bright smiles on their faces. The aroma of savoury *Xiaolong baos* always brought a smile to children and elders alike. What had changed in the past century I had left the 'Paris of the East'? How did despair make the confident angry and the weak weaker? Or had I been too blindsided during the era of the Shanghai I knew and only knew the good parts?

With a shaky breath the last page is turned and a note is revealed. There is not much written, only that Carlos can be found in the city park and that it is no one's fault, he simply cannot stand living in a world where justice isn't righted upon those who deserve it.

What does he mean by that? I don't flip to the next page to find out. Instead I take off flying to the park down the gravel path I know so well. How do I know this path? I've lived here before haven't I? This apartment complex is standing on where my government apartment building, the one with the creaky but strong steel lobby door, used to stand. I catch glimpses of large billboards displaying iPhones occupying the space which would've been occupied by a row of food vendors selling smoked *Chuan Shao*, roasted chestnuts and *Chow Mein*. I finally reach the park and find on a bench, an empty sleeping packet of sleeping pills you can find in local convenience stores stamped with his name. Trading the life I've lived in vain in return for a stranger's who can actually make use of it. There are so many questions I lack the answers to, but one thing I know is that I must save Carlos.

I began my day by inhaling deeply to calm down. Cars were revving and banter was distinct in the background. What am I doing here? Haven't I downed the expired pills in the park, left a note explaining how I'm done with this life without Mom's justice? I turn to my bedside table but am taken aback by a note written in neat, careful handwriting I've seldom seen. There is not much written, only a sketch of Shanghai from the 1700s that I recognise as the infamously ancient Zhujiajiao village and a short description saying: 'Carlos, I may not know you well, and I am not one to judge another's life choices, but one thing I do know is that change is hard and the world is overwhelming, but you must endure it. Any life is worth living no matter how unproductive. I thought all this hopping from one destination to another was meaningless, but lead to me changing someone's life.'

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Ng, Nicolas – 11

I was sat in my chair eating my Shanghai noodles, when I saw a strange Chinese man dash into an alley. He was wearing a jacket which had the words dragon on it, I tried to peek at his face but I couldn't see it. So I assumed he was any other person. I went back to my delicious noodles. BANG! The loud sound ringed inside my ears. It was a gunshot! I saw the creepy man run down the street. I ran down to the alley, leaving my noodles on the bench. There I saw a body on the ground, covered with blood, was a man, with a bullet straight through his head. I immediately called the police.

I explained exactly what happened to the police. They said they would take me to the headquarters for a proper investigation. The chief came up and told me that they will hear me but that I still may be a suspect, so I had to put some handcuffs. They sat me in the middle of the car between two other officers, one carried a gun, the other had a bat. Through the window, I saw two other people being loaded into a car, probably witnesses too. It wasn't a far drive, about 10 minutes. My house was only a ten-minute walk from here. As I arrived at the station, the officer beside got up, but three more came. They took me to the main information counter,

'Sit, for now. We will call you when we are ready.' An officer told me.

I saw one witness being taken to a room. There were two guards in the room, one worked at the counter, another stood at the doorway, Both heavily armed. The handcuffs were heavy and bulky. I could not stop thinking about the horror I saw. After 30 minutes, an officer opened the interrogation room. He had the mark of a chief, So I trusted him.

'Mr. Li?' he looked at me

'Yes, sir.' I replied

'Come with me, I want to talk to you. Can you be trusted without those?' He looked at my handcuffs.

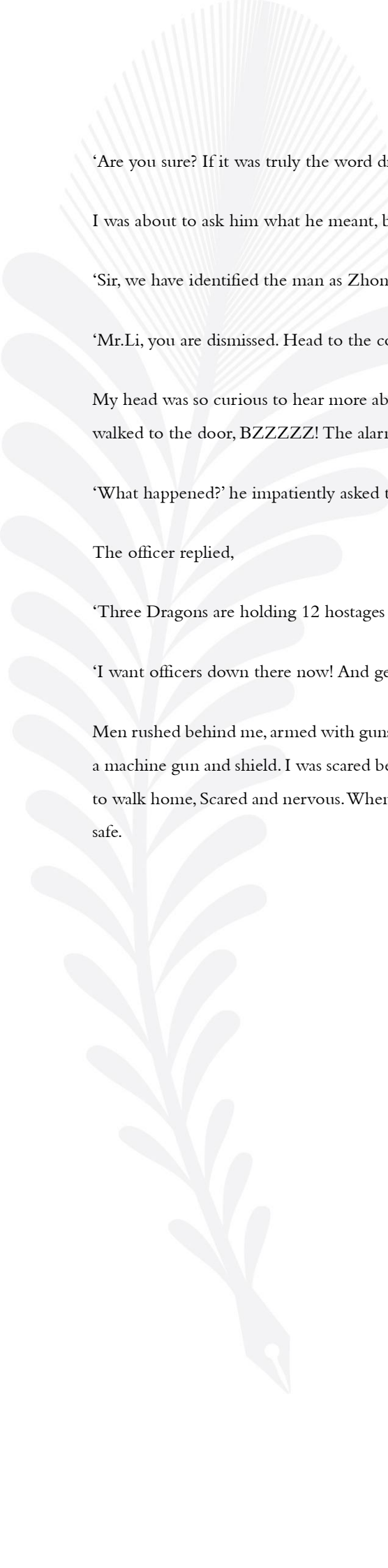
'Yes Sir.'

He nodded to an officer and he took off my cuffs.

I followed The chief into the room, he had a gun in his side pocket and some pepper spray in his belt. He told me to take a seat, and he did too.

'I know what you saw was quite terrifying, can you tell me exactly what you saw?' He asked.

'I saw a man turning into the Tiger's alley while I ate my noodles, he wore sunglasses and a black leather jacket which had the Chinese words, Dragon. Then I heard a bang, the man ran away, I and two others came to see. There, I saw a dead man.' I Answered.



‘Are you sure? If it was truly the word dragon on his jacket, then we have a big problem.’

I was about to ask him what he meant, but then the door opened and an officer came in.

‘Sir, we have identified the man as Zhong Wu, local market worker.’ he said.

‘Mr.Li, you are dismissed. Head to the counter and sign a few papers, and you should be able to leave.’ he said.

My head was so curious to hear more about, who were the dragons? Who was Zhong Wu? But unfortunately, I had to leave. As I walked to the door, BZZZZZ! The alarm went off. The chief ran to the counter.

‘What happened?’ he impatiently asked the counter.

The officer replied,

‘Three Dragons are holding 12 hostages and demand 5000 Renminbi, at the market.’

‘I want officers down there now! And get me Captain Zhong.’

Men rushed behind me, armed with guns and batons. One carried a sniper rifle, another had a shotgun, there even was a guy with a machine gun and shield. I was scared because I knew the market was close to my house. The Chief told me to leave. So I started to walk home, Scared and nervous. When I got to my house, I could hear loud gunshots and explosions, I hope the innocent were safe.

Saturday School

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Shen, Hannah – 12

It is a bright and sunny Saturday, January 16, 1937. I am sitting outside on my little wooden stool with a bowl of hot congee perched on my knee. Across from our home doorway is a woman feeding a child with sticky rice and down the street I can see Old Huang selling some fish. Despite the cold stones under my feet, I love sitting outside to read and eat as the streets are always lively and bustling with noise.

I'm Ling Hua and I am 10 years old. I am lucky to have an older sister named Ling Mei, who looks out for me. My father Zhong is away in the army and my mother Wen stays at home washing clothes and cooks food for us, whatever she can find. Since we don't have much money, we only eat rice and congee for all our meals, and can barely afford school fees and clothes. The door behind me creaks, and I turn around. It's my sister, Mei, clutching her jacket tight around her thin and frail body.

"It's time to go now to Saturday school" she says to me, handing over my torn and stained school bag.

I head back into the house and place my bowl into the sink. "Bye mama!" I call to my mother.

I follow Mei to the tram stop just around the corner from the street that we live on.

"What will we do for the New Year?" I ask Mei, realizing that I haven't seen him for a few days.

"Don't ask me," Mei replies with a sigh.

The tram comes down the railway and stops right in front of us. I hop on, and as Mei drops a couple of coins down the machine, I run to get a spot next to the window. The tram slowly lurches forward. A bunch of people are huddled around a corner of the tram, whispering worriedly to each other.

"What are we going to do?"

"Will we die?"

The tram driver rings a bell, and we jump down to the street, but my chirpy mood is gone, as the tense atmosphere and adults' whispering has made me feel anxious. This doesn't change as I see Chen Laoshi standing at the school gate holding a piece of paper. She looks over to me bleakly.

"Ling Hua, school is dismissed! Go home." Chen Laoshi announces, then she mutters, "Stay safe!"

When I return home with Mei, we sit together cuddled in a soft blanket trying to stay warm, and trying not to worry. The door opens again, letting in freezing wind, as my mom steps in the house, clasping a bag of rice. Suddenly, there is a huge bang outside, and then long, hysterical screams. I peer out and to my shock, there is fire everywhere, ash in the air, and crumpled homes. Are we being bombed? Mei grabs my hand and Mother grips my other. They pull me out of the house, where we dodge building rubble and dead bodies lying on the ground. Deafening rumbles and bangs are in the background as we run for the underground shop where my aunt Ai works in. We are taken into a basement where we all hide, fearful and cramped. Suddenly, the

ground shakes and the ceiling caves in on us. I try to see Mei and Mama but there is nothing but blackness in front of me. I can't move. It's agonising to breathe. My head hurts. I black out.

I open my eyes to bright light and I can't remember anything. What has happened? Why am I lying in this white room full of people in masks and caps staring down at me? There is a needle sticking out of my arm that is connected to a bag with some type of liquid in it. My arms and legs are wrapped up with some type of cloth and I can't move them. "She's awake!" Someone whispers,

A woman in a long white coat shuffles through the crowded room, and takes my hand.

"Do you remember anything? I'm Nancy." She asks in a gentle voice,

I stare back at her blankly. Then reply, "No."

"You were hiding from a bomb attack with your sister and mother. Thankfully, you all are alive and awake, however when your sister was trying to protect you, she banged her head hard in the process. She is in critical condition. She lost her consciousness and she is now still in coma. Now, how are you feeling? You will be alright though, but your left arm is broken and your right foot is twisted really badly."

I look down at all my bandages, to numb say anything. Then everything comes back to me. After a moment of silence, I muster the courage and finally ask, "Where is Mei?"

"Across the hall, but you can't see her right now."

"Oh."

It was a long day for me, and although I was being forced to rest, the thought that the most important person in my life was in critical danger did not let me fall asleep. I stayed awake, staring anxiously at the ceiling for hours, remembering. But in the end, my eyelids felt as heavy as boulders and I dropped into sleep.

The next day, Nancy comes in to check on me, her face serious.

"Hua, I can take you to see your mother. She has something to tell you."

A wave of sadness rolls over me "Wha---?" Somehow, I knew what was coming.

She wheeled me in a chair over to another room, where I saw my mother lying on a bed, hugging her pillow. As soon as she sees me, she crumples into tears. I awkwardly lean over and hug her, but I didn't need to be told anything.

My beautiful, caring sister, Mei, was gone. To the end, she looked out for me, cared for me with her whole being.

I gripped my mother's hand and sobbed, thinking only of my last Saturday School outing with Mei.

History Speaks

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tam, Julie – 14

Today is a day I've dreaded for a while now. There are butterflies in my stomach, not the nice kind that you feel when you're happy or excited, but this kind is more like a swarm of locusts that I read about on the news. Grandma passed away a few weeks ago, she had lung cancer for a while now, and it broke my heart watching her being eaten up by cancer. Grandmother was 92 years old, she is a history book, each page tells a different story. She would love to tell me stories about her past, like when the Japanese came when she was about my age, and they killed her father, separated her from her brothers and sisters and she had to hide. My favorite story she ever told me about is the story about her father, my great grandfather. Each time Grans tells me that story, it brings tears to her eyes. Oh, Grandma, I miss you so much, why can't you be here with me right now? "Jia Lin, we have to go now." Mother peeks her head out from behind the doorframe of my room.

Funeral music is playing, and relatives arrive one by one, all wearing black and weeping. I don't talk to any of them, I'm busy drowning in my own grief. Every time I close my eyes, I see grandma's ever smiling face looking back at me. "Jia Lin, you will learn, and grow. Be brave, my little one." Am I hallucinating? I thought I saw Grans next to me, holding my hand and talking to me. I must be going crazy.

The next few hours go by in a blur, I only remember being alert when Grandma's sister, Grandaunt is giving an eulogy which brings me into tears, some from laughter, stories about when they were younger, some from sadness, about how much she misses Grans. I remember there were mountains of used Kleenex on the pews. Next, I'm dragged from one relative to another, forced to mumble a "*Ni Hao*" and muster up some fake smiles. At the end of this, my facial muscles are aching. By the time I get home, peel off the stuffy black dress, and camp out in my room, like I have been since my dearest Grandmother passed away.

Just as I flopped onto my bed, my little sister Jia Ying barges into my room. "Get up lazy. Mommy wants you downstairs right now." "If it's about dinner, tell her I'm not hungry." I mumble back. "Just go downstairs. Mom wants you there now." I drag my body down the stairs. Mother is sitting on the couch, with a fat package in her hand. I plop next to her, and ask about the box. "It's for you, from Grans." "Where did you find it?" I ask. "I was cleaning out her room just now, and I found this. It says it's for you." "Thanks. I'm going upstairs to open it, if you don't mind."

I sit on my bed and tear open the package. Inside is another smaller box, and an envelope that says "read first". It says,

"To my favorite grandchild, Jia Lin. You are the kindest person I know. You have taken care of me, attending to my needs, giving me massages when my back aches, even just you smiling at me makes my heart warm and most of all, listened to me tell you stories that I hope you will never forget. Even as a little girl, you would beg me to tell you stories. I remember your favorite thing to do was to sit with me in my room, me telling you the story of my father, as a general during the battle against Japan. You loved looking at the little pocket watch that my father gave me, the last thing he said to me was "Don't miss me too much. Remember that if you count 120 hours on this pocketwatch, I will be home. I promise you. I love you." He broke his promise to me. I remember how devastated I was, when a young soldier came knocking on our door with a sorrowful look on his face, carrying bad news. I'm sure that's how you feel now. I want to give you something that was very precious to me, as a gift to you. My father, your great-grandfather's pocket watch. I cannot make a promise like my father has, to count down the hours until I get to see you again,



but I have something else to promise to you. That I love you forever, you are one of the best things that ever happened to me. Thank you. Jia Lin, you will learn, and grow. Be brave, my little one.”

I am crying my heart out at the end of the letter, touched by every single word. In the little box is the pocketwatch, the one that brought hope to little Grans. I do remember my favourite story. Grandmother’s family was a wealthy family, her father a general for the Chinese army. The Japanese invaded China, the battle in our hometown, Shanghai. Grandmother said the streets were bathed in blood, corpses strewn everywhere. During the battle, her father died, her mother was taken by the Japanese, her brothers recruited to join the army. Grandma was forced to live with her aunt, whom lived in a small village. Grans survived the war, but her mother, father and brothers didn’t. Granny loved to tell these stories, she wanted to let us know that these skyscrapers that populate Shanghai didn’t always use to be like that. There is history, it demands to be heard.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tsai, Max – 11

It was a fresh Sunday morning in old Shanghai. Birds chirped merrily while the sunlight reflected on the green leaves. Mr. Zhang sat outside his luxurious house on Fu Yuan Street, reading the daily newspaper as usual. Mr. Zhang's beautiful wife sat on an old fashioned, fancy wooden stool washing clothes as their two adorable daughters ran around catching dragonflies and butterflies.

Mr. Zhang was a kind, wealthy, hardworking local businessman who sold fresh vegetables and delicious food products. His business was originally owned by his wise parents, who lived in a mansion near Fu Yuan Street with highly trained guards protecting them. Despite they were both over eighty years old, they still practiced Tai Chi every day in order to remain healthy. They also gave Mr. Zhang some useful business tips when the economy was terrible at Shanghai.

Unlike Mr. Zhang, his cousin Mr. Lee was a terrible business man. He also sold vegetables and food, but most of them were either expired or conquered by bugs and disgusting insects. He was impatient and treated his customers like dirt. Most importantly, he was jealous that Mr. Zhang took all his business, so he spread terrible rumours about him. Thankfully, nobody ever believed him.

Mr. Zhang adored his wife Ling. She was an amazing chef who was well respected throughout Asia. She owned a local restaurant for barons and baronesses. His children were respectful, clever, and hardworking like their father. They were called Ning and Ding. Wanting them to be successful in the future, Mr. Zhang sent them to a worldwide famous local Primary school.

When Ning and Ding were almost graduating for Primary school, a fatal and deadly disease had erupted inside their school. Unfortunately, both Ning and Ding had caught the disease from an unhealthy classmate. Mr. Zhang and Ling were extremely terrified. They called the best doctor in China. Although Ning had survived, Ding had died because of lack of exercise and sports. Ding was a lovely girl with straight long hair and brown eyes. Mr. Chang cried for days and he buried her well in a private, safe cemetery.

After losing her twin sister, Ning studied extremely hard and became the star pupil in her class. Consequently, she easily attended the middle school where lots of famous celebrities studied. Mr. Zhang and Ling were dead proud, and they offered Ning a shiny, golden bracelet, which costed over a hundred thousand dollars. However, Ning rejected the award and believed that the beautiful, rare antique was entirely a waste of money.

Then came Mr. Zhang's second problem. One day, his wicked cousin strode down the street with two well-built men holding two long wooden batons. Mr. Zhang was terrified that Mr. Lee would beat him up, so he walked up and stammered "What do you want, sir?"

"Give me your business, or else!" Mr. Lee snapped impolitely, as he motioned his two strong, brutal men to walk forward. Fortunately, the guards noticed the problem and saved Mr. Zhang. Mr. Zhang discovered that his jealous cousin was hungry of his business, so he hired powerful bodyguards to protect his family from Mr. Lee.

The following week, the weather at old Shanghai became extremely horrible. The sky was covered with grey, gloomy clouds and heavy rain poured suddenly from the sky. Weather experts believed that a huge thunderstorm, following with a powerful typhoon was going to happen in the next three weeks. Luckily, Mr. Zhang's parents offered them to two luxurious rooms in their well-constructed mansion. Mr. Zhang happily accepted the offer and moved in with their daily essentials. He ordered his guards to protect his house and prevent Mr. Lee from entering.

The next day, it was raining cats and dogs, which made Mr. Zhang impossible to start his business. Days passed, Mr. Zhang did not sell food for weeks and the citizens were struggling to survive. The whole Zhang family went to a local temple, ignoring the pouring rain. Being rich, the Zhang family owned horses and carts, so it was easier for them to travel. After arriving at the temple, Mr. Zhang's parents brought out incenses and lit them up with matchsticks, while Mr. Zhang, Ling and Ning laid out fresh apples and oranges in front of the statue of God. They all knelt down and prayed, "Dear God, please let the terrible weather away from Shanghai, and please may Mr. Lee disappear from our peaceful, beautiful, little street."

However, the weather remained as bad as before. Ning cried "Why won't the thunderstorm go away? It scares me when I sleep." Ling replied calmly "According to Chinese culture, our dream will come true tomorrow." By golly, Ling was right! The weather was bright and sunny the next day, and Mr. Lee was nowhere to be seen in Fu Yuan street. "He was lost and stuck in the forest on the mountains," Mr. Zhang's neighbour answered.

From that day on, the residents of Fu Yuan Street had a peaceful, brilliant life, and the Zhang family was considered as a miracle. Mr. Zhang's birthday, September 3rd, was declared as "Zhang Day", and Fu Yuan street was later named Zhang Street. The day Mr. Zhang passed away, famous world class sculptors from China arrived at Shanghai in order to construct a detailed sculpture of the Zhang family members. Two months later, the amazing artwork was displayed at the middle of Zhang Street in order to remember the Zhang family.

Nowadays, celebrations like parades around Zhang Street and vegetable collecting competitions are held on Zhang Day. Actually, some descendants of Mr. Zhang still live in the old house and mansion that was owned by Mr. Zhang and his parents once upon a time.

Even now, in the year of 2017, residents of Zhang street still tell this old, traditional tale to their children, whom will sure continue to pass it to their descendants.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wang, Peter – 12

I am San Mao and I am known for the best adventures that I have been through. I was previously a cook. But now, I am retired and spend my time writing books. 1930 Shanghai is a far cry from the 1980s. This is a “short” extract from my diary.

The bright beam of the sunlight woke me up, as I lied on the prickly dry haystack. My name is San Mao, I cook for the exasperated workers from the French Concession organized by the French. We, the people of Shanghai, were colonized by the French, British, Russians and Japanese. HUSH! The workers are snoring like boars. I can now quietly prepare their breakfast whilst they sleep. I cook far from the camp, I don't want to get beaten up by Chi Ling, he's the strongest of all the workers.

OUCH! My pale face touched the steaming hot pot and it felt like a sauna. Trust me, cooking forty bowls of dumplings and noodles is tedious. Perhaps I can add a rat's tail to spice up breakfast. They wouldn't find out!

Just finished serving breakfast. Those impertinent workers didn't even say *Thank you, that's a damp squid*. The workers actually look like they are enjoying the meal. Maybe a rat's tail is delicious? I should add some to my meal, just joking! I wouldn't dare put a rat's tail in my meal!

We sat on our Pedicab. It's basically like a tricycle but with seats to put objects on. We traveled through the nongtang, a Shanghai lane. Some mischievous children ran across us playing with matches, with their mom chasing after them. Chi Ling rode his Pedicab and crashed into mine and raced to the cotton factory. There he collected all the cotton for the clothes and put it all at the back of the seat. What a show-off.

Smell the aroma of roses, we are on the Wai Bai Du Bridge. The Wai Bai Du Bridge is of course the most famous bridge in Shanghai. I had finished cooking the delicious noodles with chicken soup when all of a sudden, Chi Ling crashed into me and we both tumbled down to the edge of the bridge. I grabbed on to the edge and Chi Ling grabbed onto my noodles like a rope. My legs were dangling in the air as I held on for dear life. One wrong move could lead to the cause of my death! We were “stranded”...(Get it? Strand_of_noodle?) Chi Ling ate the end of the noodle and as he climbed higher and higher, he also ate the Wonton as it rained down from the sky, that fool was wasting my food! At the drop of a hat, we climbed back onto the bridge. Great! This is the safest trip ever!

While we were delivering the cotton back to the French Concession factory, three British people rushed down the street with a cup of tea and some sugar. A cup of tea isn't 'my cup of tea.' They rushed down the street so quickly, no one could react. They crashed into Ling Xiu, the 'leader'. The cup crashed onto the ground and broke into many pieces, and the tea spilled over onto Chi Ling's pants. "Why did you knock over my cup of tea, you nasty old man?", the English man angrily yelled, "not a spark of decency."

"Sorry, it was just an accident," Ling Xiu apologized with shame. The British were not satisfied: "Off with his head... Ooops! I went too far!" the man yelled. "Anyways, that cup was Queen Victoria's favorite teacup and saucer, it costs a fortune!"

"Well you wouldn't have broken it if you hadn't run down the street like a crazy barbarian!" I interrupted. The three men gave me a look from the corner of their eyes. The cotton weavers looking on could sense an argument was brewing, so they pushed us away from each other. I wish I could just go back to my 家(house) and be a couch potato and listen to the phonograph, a trumpet-like radio.

Without warning, the barbaric British kicked me in the stomach and I tumbled and fell onto the ground. Ling Xiu punched the man wearing a black shirt with gold buttons. Chi Ling jumped on the man after he had fallen onto the ground. Pushing and shouting started, all I saw was a blurry... dumpling? No, it was just an old man with hair as white as snow. He put out a hand and offered to raise me up. I kindly agreed and thanked him. I ran back towards the workers; they were all standing back with their eyes wide open.

"What?" I blurted out. One of the workers pointed at the back of me, and I slowly turned around. There was a chubby kid with short black hair: he was holding matches in his hands and one was lit. The chubby kid laughed and waved it all around. Unexpectedly, he threw the match towards a lantern with red and gold bamboos and papers. Like dominoes, all the other lanterns started burning and flame surrounded the nongtang. The chubby kid started crying, where was his mother? We were all breathless and started walking backwards. Immediately, a light bulb popped over my head! Why hadn't I thought of it?! Since I am a cook, I always keep water in my pedicab! And (un)fortunately, mine was the only pedicab that was surrounded in the fire.

"Here!" I yelled, throwing them every water bottle I possibly could. They all poured the water onto the fire, extinguishing it. Eventually, all of the fire vanished and became ashes. Whew! I'm definitely "fired" from my job...

We are three hours off schedule, and it's not my fault! Whose fault was it? Obviously the workers! Here's what happened: I led the workers to one of my favorite restaurants. Wang Bao had to pick up some dough for me to make some dumplings, again! Just when I was introducing the workers to the best chef in the restaurant, they all disappeared! Turns out they went off to admire the pretty ladies who had a lot of makeup on! In the olden days, every restaurant hired beautiful ladies to dance and impress the men. They each waved a fan and batted their long eyebrows as the workers moved closer and closer dripping saliva which flowed onto the table. I tried to pull them away, but they were as fit as bulldogs. After what seemed like a million years, the ladies finally left blowing kisses to the men! The workers stood there with their red cheeks and eyes wide open not moving an inch. It was pretty freaky.

On the way back to the factory, I cooked a delicious dish containing wonton, sweet pork and Peking roasted duck! We rode our pedicabs to the empty grassland and settled down. I gracefully cut the roasted duck into tiny pieces as the workers ate their portion. These workers are sure hungry; every day they eat at least five meals! Soon the sky turned inky, and we couldn't see anything. Straight away, a bunch of explosion sounds made us jump five inches from our seats! BAM! BOOM! Were they fireworks? They crackled into a million pieces forming the words Happy New Year followed with some red blasts! I just remembered, I hadn't returned home for 4 entire years! We all agreed to go back home, it had been a day and time flies by so quickly! Who cares about my job, I'm done! This opportunity can only happen once a year! Slowly, I drove my pedicab west where my house was.

The old house was still there, lights streaming out of the window making the place bright. I could instantly smell the aroma of home. I knocked on the door and entered as I was enveloped by a warm hug from kids, wife and family...

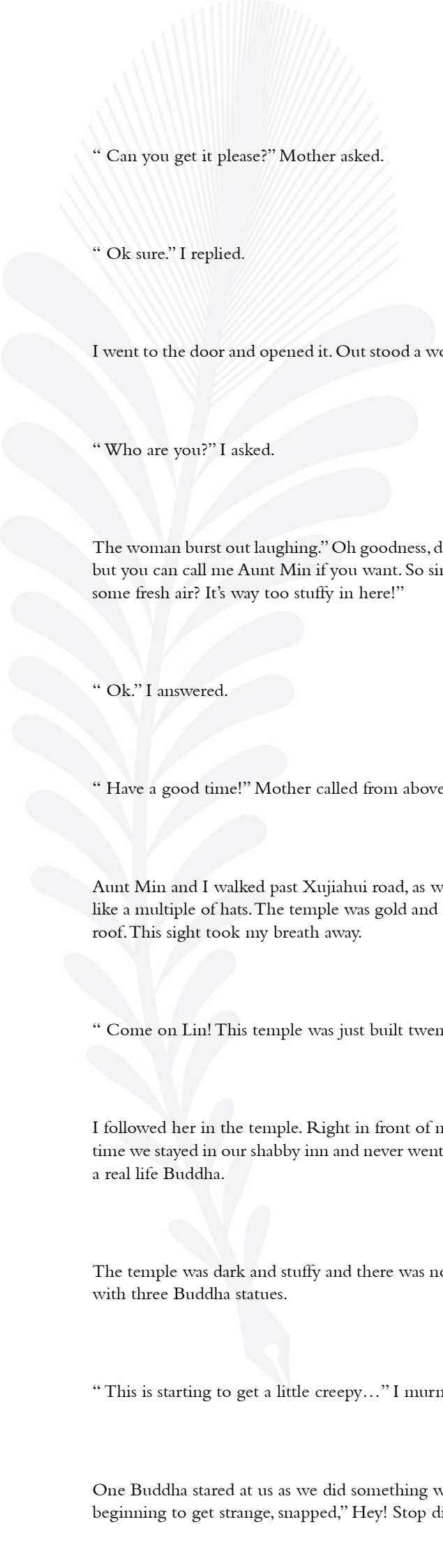
The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Carissa – 11

“Come on, Aunt Min is about to take you to Jing ‘an Temple!” My mother says as she puts on her newly bought dress. She treated it as it was all the money our family has. Obviously mother is going to watch a show. She watches it literally every weekend since everyone knows Shanghai was the most famous for its nightlife.

“Coming mother!” I called. I put on the dress my mother gave to me for my ninth birthday and ran down the stairs.

“Ding Dong!” The doorbell rang.



“ Can you get it please?” Mother asked.

“ Ok sure.” I replied.

I went to the door and opened it. Out stood a woman with blue eyes with curly hair. It didn’t look like she was a Shanghai citizen.

“ Who are you?” I asked.

The woman burst out laughing.” Oh goodness, didn’t your mom introduce you to me before? Of course, I am your Auntie Minnie but you can call me Aunt Min if you want. So since your mother is about to go to watch a show, do you want to go for a walk for some fresh air? It’s way too stuffy in here!”

“ Ok.” I answered.

“ Have a good time!” Mother called from above.

Aunt Min and I walked past Xujiahui road, as we turned around, we came face to face with the Jing’an Temple. The roof looked like a multiple of hats. The temple was gold and red, the gold gleamed in the sunlight reflecting like a thousand crystals up on the roof. This sight took my breath away.

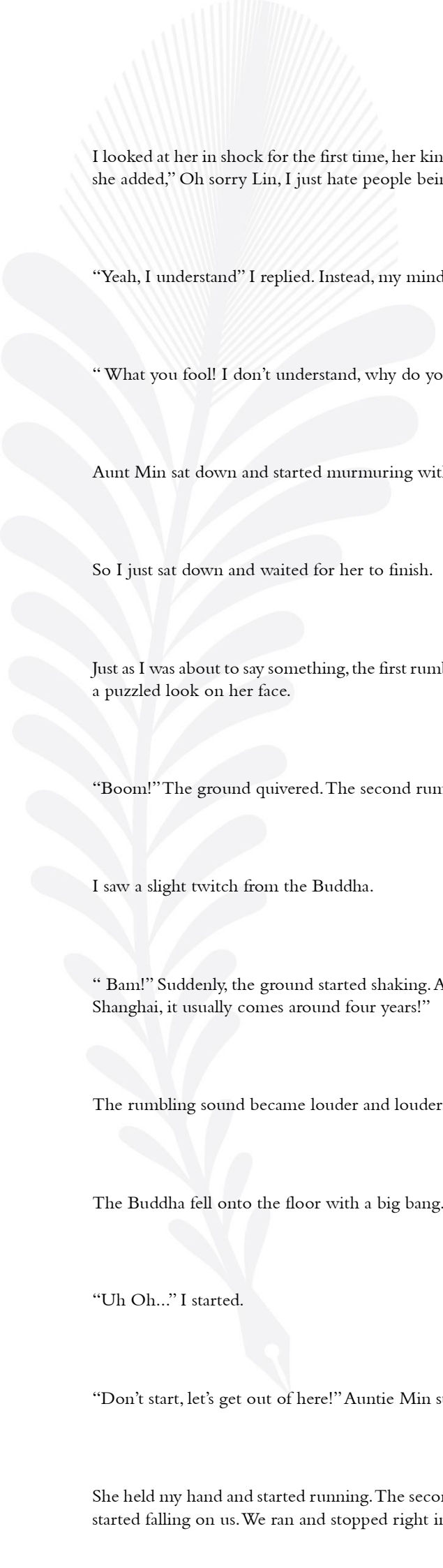
“ Come on Lin! This temple was just built twenty to thirty years ago and it is an amazing place!” Aunt Min called.

I followed her in the temple. Right in front of me sat a huge statue of a Buddha. I never seen a Buddha before since most of the time we stayed in our shabby inn and never went close to the city. Mother only showed me a picture of it, but it is surprising to see a real life Buddha.

The temple was dark and stuffy and there was nobody in there except for us. We turned around the corner and came face to face with three Buddha statues.

“ This is starting to get a little creepy...” I murmured.

One Buddha stared at us as we did something wrong. But of course, it wasn’t real. Aunt Min, who didn’t think anything was beginning to get strange, snapped,” Hey! Stop disrespecting the Buddha. Lean down!”



I looked at her in shock for the first time, her kind and calm face turned into disrespectful and rude. Quickly, realizing her mistake, she added, "Oh sorry Lin, I just hate people being disrespectful to the Buddha, you can understand that right?"

"Yeah, I understand" I replied. Instead, my mind argued.

"What you fool! I don't understand, why do you even have to be disrespectful to a Buddha?" My brain screamed.

Aunt Min sat down and started murmuring with her eyes closed. I didn't know what to do

So I just sat down and waited for her to finish.

Just as I was about to say something, the first rumble came. It came somewhere from underground. Aunt Min opened her eyes with a puzzled look on her face.

"Boom!" The ground quivered. The second rumble came.

I saw a slight twitch from the Buddha.

"Bam!" Suddenly, the ground started shaking. Auntie Min shouted, "What? I don't get this, there are never earthquakes in Old Shanghai, it usually comes around four years!"

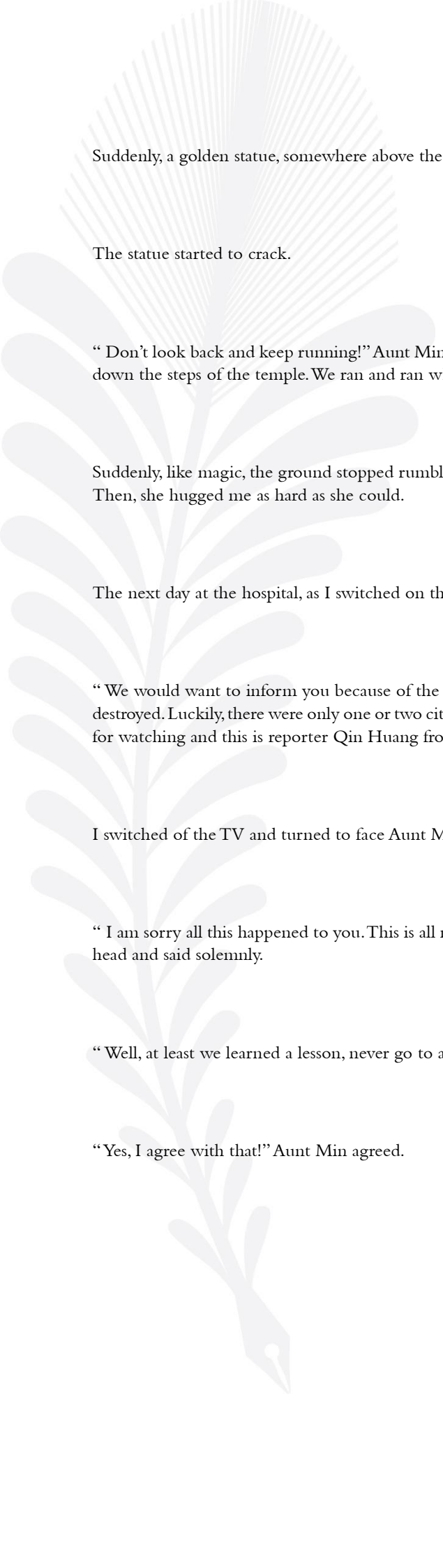
The rumbling sound became louder and louder. I shouted at Auntie Min, "This must be an earthquake, let's get out of here!"

The Buddha fell onto the floor with a big bang. The marble floors of the temple started to break.

"Uh Oh..." I started.

"Don't start, let's get out of here!" Auntie Min started screaming.

She held my hand and started running. The second Buddha fell on the floor, inches away from my feet. Bam! Debris from the roof started falling on us. We ran and stopped right in front of the Huge Buddha statue we saw as we entered in the temple.



Suddenly, a golden statue, somewhere above the roof fell through the roof and smashed right on the huge Buddha statue.

The statue started to crack.

“Don’t look back and keep running!” Aunt Min shouted at me. We ran through the Buddha statue which was breaking apart and down the steps of the temple. We ran and ran while behind us, we heard the cracks and sounds of the statues falling.

Suddenly, like magic, the ground stopped rumbling. Aunt Min slowly stopped, she turned around and whispered, “We’re safe.” Then, she hugged me as hard as she could.

The next day at the hospital, as I switched on the TV, I saw a reporter talking about the destruction of the temple.

“We would want to inform you because of the earthquake that occurred yesterday, the Jing’an Temple broke down and is destroyed. Luckily, there were only one or two citizens in there which escaped as soon as possible. None is killed or hurt. Thank you for watching and this is reporter Qin Huang from Old Shanghai Daily News.”

I switched of the TV and turned to face Aunt Min.

“I am sorry all this happened to you. This is all my fault and I should have known this was going to happen.” Aunt Min bent her head and said solemnly.

“Well, at least we learned a lesson, never go to a Temple when there is about to be an earthquake!” I replied.

“Yes, I agree with that!” Aunt Min agreed.

Threads of Friendship

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Charlotte – 12

I dry my tears, hoping that no one has seen me bawling into my sleeve.

My name is Lin Shao, I am currently studying at Shanghai Girls School, one of the most prestigious primary schools in central Shanghai. Though my grades are good, my teachers treating me as a favourite, I still have a big hollow hole in my heart. I long to have a friend. I long to have someone to talk to, someone to play with, someone that would always be there for me no matter what.

A few months ago, a new girl arrived at my school. Her name is Liu Yang. When she came, I helped her out. I showed her where her classes were, I showed her where the cafeteria was, I showed that I was there for her when she needed me. We should have been best friends.

Unfortunately, as I am the teachers' favourite, I have problems. My classmates would mock me, call me names behind my back and exclude me from activities. I have always felt dejected about this, but I held my head high, knowing that there was nothing I could do about it. I won't just give up my grades for them! With Liu Yang I recognized that there was someone I might count on to be my friend... well, that's what I thought at the time.

A few weeks after Liu Yang came, I told her I would meet her at the cafeteria. When I got there, I saw her huddled with those groups of girls, and I thought "Maybe they just want to get to know her. Oh no! What if they are tormenting her! She is the new girl, what would they do to her." I was just about to come to her rescue, when I was stopped dead in my tracks.

"Hey Yang, can I ask you a question and please be honest." Zhao Zhao, the leader of the group, quizzed.

"Ok?"

"Do you actually like Lin Shao?"

"Okay I guess. She can be a bit bossy sometimes though."

My face turned as red as a tomato. I felt like jumping off the building, as if anyone would care.

“Well we just want to warn you.” Zhang Yin, Zhao Zhao’s minion responded. “Lin Shao is a wannabe with teachers. She would do anything to be the teacher’s favourite, even if that means betraying you like using you to blame for something she did. That’s just Lin Shao, you have to be cautious.”

“Maybe, that is a side of her I have never seen. Yeah okay, I’ll watch my step. Thank for the advice girls, see you sometime. Bye!” Liu Yang agreed lightheartedly.

“Wait, Liu Yang, looks like there is someone behind you.” Zhao Zhao smirked.

Liu Yang’s eyes almost popped out as she turned and saw me. I cried with a shaky voice. “How could you? Thought we are friends!”

“I... I... I’m sorry, I didn’t mean what I said, I just didn’t want them to make fun of me.”

I glared at her. “So, we *were* friends ... well you can forget about me ever being there for you. I’m done with you, good bye.” I turned and ran, tears welling into my eyes.

I could hear Zhang Yin’s voice in the distance. “Don’t worry about her, you’re with us now.” But, I could see from the corner of my eye that Liu Yang was staring after me.

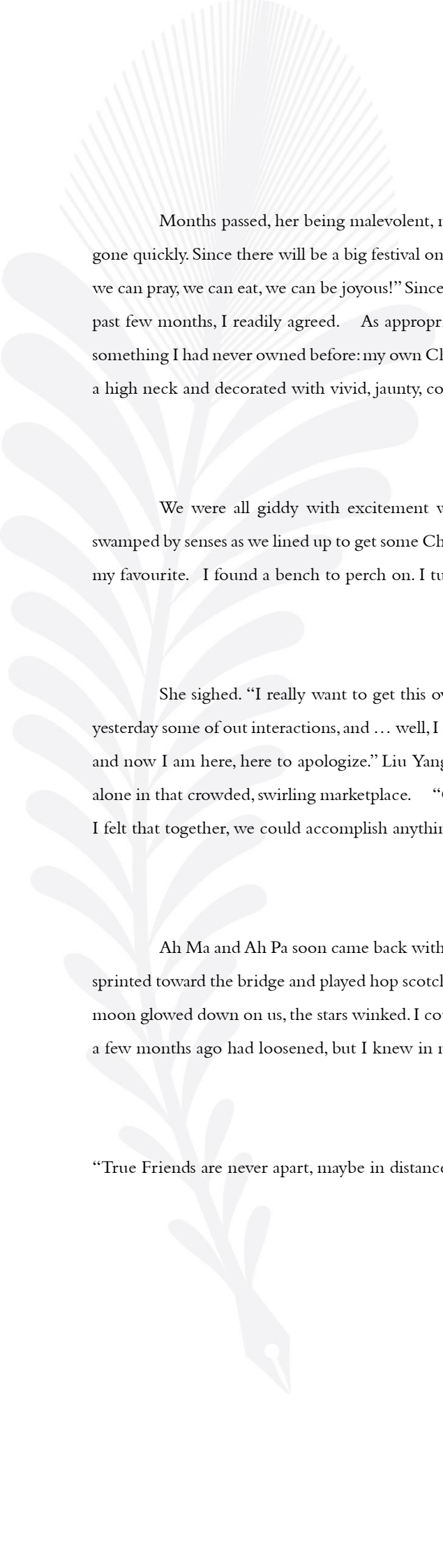
I could see from the teacher’s expression, Ms. Li, that she wanted to talk to me after class. After class, she questioned me with understanding eyes. “Would you like to talk to me or would you prefer not to.”

“Sorry but I would not want Ah Ma to worry about me when I get home late. Maybe some other time.” I replied, wiping my tears and shifting my gaze away from her intent one.

After school, it was the first time I have walked home for a few weeks. Families and friends were gathering for another festive mahjong dinner during the night again. I trudged home through the grimy, winding alleyways, thinking about how they seemed to be just like my life.

As the wind howled, I tossed and turned in my tiny bed. A heavy fog outside and in my mind prevents me from seeing the future. I have no idea what is going happen next.

That was days ago, and ever since then, I have been by myself. Liu Yang has been following Zhao Zhao and Zhang Yin around, developing her malicious, despicable side. She talked about me behind my back, called me names whenever I went past her in hallways, and once sarcastically exclaimed “Why hello Li Stalker, nice to see you! Oh sorry did I pronounce your name wrong, I apologize greatly.” She then gave me a curtsy and left, laughing and gossiping. I would have never imagined that this would be how it ends between us.



Months passed, her being malevolent, me being dismal. One day Ah Pa pronounced. "Well, this year of 1943 sure has gone quickly. Since there will be a big festival on New Year's Day, why don't we go and celebrate at the night market. We can sing, we can pray, we can eat, we can be joyous!" Since I needed something to cheer me up after all of the drama that happened over the past few months, I readily agreed. As appropriate for the New Year, we all put on our best outfits. Ah Ma rewarded me with something I had never owned before: my own Cheongsam. The tight fitted dress came just below the knees with short short sleeves, a high neck and decorated with vivid, jaunty, complex patterns.

We were all giddy with excitement when we strolled through the night market lanes. The smell of sizzling dishes swamped by senses as we lined up to get some Cheung Fen with dark thick Soy sauce, Prawns, Curry and Broccoli fried with garlic, my favourite. I found a bench to perch on. I turned to look for my family and found that Liu Yang was right behind me.

She sighed. "I really want to get this over with. I am so sorry about my actions. Zhao Zhao and Zhang Yin mimicked yesterday some of our interactions, and ... well, I realize how mean I was towards you. I confronted them today, and left their group, and now I am here, here to apologize." Liu Yang glanced at me shyly, fidgeting with her long braid of hair. I looked at her, all alone in that crowded, swirling marketplace. "Of course, I forgive you with no hesitations." We embraced and at that moment I felt that together, we could accomplish anything.

Ah Ma and Ah Pa soon came back with the food. They gave me and Liu Yang half of it and told us to run off and play. We sprinted toward the bridge and played hop scotch there, looking out over the glittering Bund snaking along the waterfront. The moon glowed down on us, the stars winked. I could tell that this friendship was our destiny. The threads of our bond joined only a few months ago had loosened, but I knew in my heart that they will never fully detach ever again.

"True Friends are never apart, maybe in distance but never in heart."

~The End~

Xiaolong Bao

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Jolie – 14

Long ago, in a place called Shanghai, there was a young chef named Chen Xiao Long, he came from a family that owned a small, locally-known cafe. He would help out and serve customers while he was young. His mother, the Head Chef and owner, was a creative genius that invented many interesting items on the menu using her creativity. She taught Xiao Long to steer away from traditional methods and think outside the box and experiment with different ingredients. When Xiao Long grew up, he decided to pursue cooking as a career, and studied in a Culinary Arts School for four years. After he completed his studies and received his degree, he applied for an internship at a newly opened branch of a famous restaurant, this restaurant was called Din Tai Fung.

When Xiao Long arrived for his first day as a junior chef in the restaurant, the manager decided to place him with one of the Head Chefs, this chef would be his mentor and show him how things were made and how things worked in the kitchen. Xiao Long was very excited to be taught under a Head Chef of a famous restaurant franchise, he wanted to show off his creativity with different dishes to impress the Head Chef. However, this Head Chef was super strict on the rules, he followed the recipes very exactly, and was displeased with Xiao Long's experimental styles of cooking. "This does not follow the recipe!", "Why are you doing this the wrong way?!" He scolded.

Seeing that he was only irritating the Head Chef, Xiao Long started to doubt himself and his creativity, was it unprofessional to experiment? Was it really a bad thing? With his questions in mind, Xiao Long could only ask the one who inspired him to cook this way. After a long afternoon talk about his uncertainty to continue trying new methods of cooking, he came to the conclusion that he would do his experimenting in secret, without the Head Chef's knowledge.

This had gone on for a long while, behind the chef's back, Xiao Long would quietly slip in some extra ingredients to spice up a dish that they were making in the kitchen. Customers started noticing pleasant changes in the taste of the food, and the restaurant was receiving better reviews. One day, the manager gave an announcement to all the staff, saying that a food critic from Japan will be visiting Shanghai and made reservations here at Din Tai Fung, everyone was to put on their best performance. Most importantly, the manager ordered the chefs to make the food served to the food critic from Japan extra sensational. When the Japanese food critic arrived, he ordered to have the most incredible and unique food they have on the menu. When the kitchen staff were informed of this, they all put their heads together to find the most "incredible and unique" dish they could produce. Lots of ideas were thrown around, but all were too traditional and mediocre to be deemed the "most unique" dish possible.

Finally, Xiao Long spoke up and suggested that they serve something entirely new that wasn't on the menu. "What does that mean?" "How can we do that?" "How can we serve something we never made?" The other chefs said, but Xiao Long pulled together and told everyone about a secret dish he's been working on. "A secret dish?" "What could that be?" "Is there a recipe?" the other chefs said. Xiao Long pulled out a long list of ingredients that he had been trying out, some names had been crossed out indicating that they would be of no use. The Head Chef grabbed it and scanned it quickly, "This is a complete experiment! We cannot serve something like this! Have you forgotten everything I have said during your time here?!" He yelled. Some chefs nodded in agreement, but some that had become close with Xiao Long and were familiar with his experimental style disagreed and voted that Xiao Long should prepare his "secret dish" and serve it to the Japanese food critic.

The Head Chef sighed and gave Xiao Long permission to serve his secret dish since nothing else available would be considered "incredible and unique" at this point. Overjoyed, Xiao Long thanked the Head Chef and quickly started to prepare the dish. From the fridge, he took out dough, meat, and some strange item that no one had seen before. Stunned, the Head Chef demanded what that item was. It was soup, soup that had been solidified into jelly. By mixing in some gelatin into the soup and placing it in the fridge overnight, the chilled soup became jelly that would melt when heated. Xiao Long then took out a small

part of the dough and rolled it out into a thin sheet, then, he took a small section of meat and put it in the center of the sheet of dough, lastly, he took a small chunk of the soup jelly and put it with the meat.

“So what? You’re just serving it like that?” The Head Chef questioned. Xiao Long then pulled up all sides of the dough around the meat and jelly and twisted it to look like a small dumpling. He then made 5 more, and steamed them in order for the jelly inside to melt. Before sending out the dumplings Xiao Long made, he gave one to the Head Chef, after trying it, the look on the chef’s face was of pure astonishment. He had no idea something new that had never been tried before could be so amazing! “Do you see now? This is the power of creativity.” Xiao Long proudly said.

The Head Chef was not the only one to be happily surprised, the Japanese food critic was completely in love with the creative dish, and ordered another 10, as well as that, he asked to meet the chef responsible for the dish. “What do you call this food? Does it have a name?” He asked. “It does not, I haven’t got the creativity to think of a name, sir.” Xiao Long responded shaking his head.

“Well then, from now on, the dumplings will be called Xiaolong Bao!”

5! 4! 3! 2! 1!

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Michelle – 14

As I climb up on my mighty gold dragon, the fluffy clouds drifted beside me. The view of Shanghai, what a magnificent sight. People tall and small all looked up and waved at me. The adults were talking to each other, chatting as their children play tag together. Little buns tied up, they started running towards me as I fly through the blue sky. In rows, the colorful traditional clothes danced to the wind as the water droppings land on them.

I waved back to the children following my below me as my dragon flew through the airwaves. Small brown Lego houses all moved out in order for the children to run through. The parents hanging up their lanterns and the firecrackers getting ready for new year. The kites fly high in their hand as I gently pushed them aside. Behind follows pairs of phoenixes, in formation, they sang sweetly together putting me in bed. I took a big deep breath of the fresh air up in the sky. As I look back up to the sky, I lied down enjoying the moment. Slowly my eyelids became heavier as I curled myself comfortably on the dragon’s back.

Suddenly a lightning flashed beside me, I woke up frightened. Everything in my sight starting the blur. Everything I see is gray. What is happening? As the bright colors fade away I couldn’t see anything else but gray. Suddenly a shot of light shined in my eyes. As I tried to get back to my mind, I don’t see the kids anymore; I don’t see the adults chatting to each other happily; I don’t see the colorful traditional clothes flowing in the wind; I don’t see the tiny houses lined up in order; I don’t see the kites; I don’t see the phoenixes beside me...

A sudden lift, below me, is the Shanghai tower. How are the buildings so tall these days? I see the windows reflecting the sunshine back to my face. Not far I see a river. Above the pudding river, large ships sail above. The ships gently flew above the polluted sea. I looked down worried, why are we flying so high? I looked at my dragon but he just kept on going on. Getting lower, I saw some white black gray blue blocks of metal moving across the ground in different directions. What is this new fancy car? How can it be so shiny? As we go closer the reflection shined in my eyes as I see the kids in the car looking surprised at me?

Where did the happy kids go? Where did the traditional old fashion buildings go? How did they become so tall and so high tech? Where did the flying clothes hanging outside the houses? Why did they all disappear after this sudden change of Shanghai?



Without knowing the sun slowly danced down as the moon come. From blue to pink to black, the stars sparkled in the starry night. The lights of Shanghai all lit up. The colorful reflections in the water brought the night of Shanghai to live. The reflection waves in the music coming out from the buildings. Suddenly, Boom! Boom! Boom! Pink sparks suddenly burst above the sky, then blue, then red... It's just like flowers bursting up in the sky. Smoke started to come as well as more families came together to enjoy this beautiful view. I took a deep breath looking at the blessed family thinking of mine, I coughed right away. Maybe it's because of the air quality? The casual outfits all crowded together, chatting with each other. As the fireworks burst in different patterns, the laughter's the smiles on people's faces were all witnessed and heard by me. 5! 4! 3! 2! 1! Happy new year! Everybody shouted together as one.

Another lightning flashed beside me, again everything started to become blurry. In a few seconds, I'm back to the old Shanghai seeing the children hugging each other in their traditional colorful costumes that were hung outside this morning. The firecrackers made loud noises that busted my ears when the children's laughter covered the voices of the firecrackers. Bong! Bong! Bong! Happy New Year!

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Tin Yan – 11

I yawn as I wake up to a dog's bark. "Good morning sir" My shoe shiner muttered as she slowly entered my room, not knowing if I was awake or not. "I'm awake" I exclaimed, "good morning" She replied.

I slowly headed to the roadside, where my wife was playing peek a boo with my son, Ming Zhi. I sit on a wooden chair and pick up this week's issue of the Shanghai Times. My shoe shiner grabs her brush and starts brushing my shoes. "Anything interesting happening in the news?" My wife asks, "No, not much" I reply back. "I hear there's a new restaurant downtown," My wife remarked, "Really, do you want to go eat there for lunch?" I asked her, with a smile on my face, she nodded and continued playing peek a boo with Ming.

I heard my stomach gurgle, I jumped onto my bike and I headed to the bakery. "Good morning Mrs. Wong"

I said as I stare at boxes filled with pastry. "Why Good morning Mr. Zhi!" She said in shock. "What brings you here so early?" she asked, "I just wanted to get an early breakfast, so I could have a big lunch." I replied I followed up with "The usual please". Mrs. Wong grabbed three bean pastries and placed it on the counter, "that will be 7 dollars" I took out my wallet and pulled five dollars out. "Thank you, Mrs. Wong!" I responded as I opened the shop doors and left the bakery.

I hopped onto my bike and started to cycle home. "Hi, Liu Hi Ming" I said to wife and son, "Yo... you are b..back papa!" My son laughed, "Yes Ming I'm back, and I got your favorite bean bun." I exclaimed. My son started clapping hysterically and screaming "Bean bun! Bean bun!". I took out the three bean buns from my bag and handed one to my wife and son.

I sat back down on my little wooden chair I took a bite out of the bean bun and sighed. "Such a beautiful day, isn't it?" I asked my wife. "I agree, the clouds are spread around the sky, the sun is shining whilst cool breezes brush past." I nod, Ming picked up his hacky sack and started pressing and tossing it. Ming was a playful child, he always wished for a brother, sadly Zheng died at a young age and never saw Ming's Joyous smile.

I walked towards a old restaurant with a smile across my face.

Shanghai Has Changed – For Better, or for Worse?

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Vanessa – 14

As an immortal, throughout the years I have seen empires rise and fall, kingdoms conquered and vanquished. Yet none have struck me quite as much as Shanghai, and how much it's changed...

A few days ago, I was situated on the couch, watching the Discovery channel on my television (After all this time, I still couldn't figure out how to work this blasted contraption, and thus was stuck on the Discovery channel for eternity), when a documentary of Shanghai suddenly started playing. Intrigued, I pictured in my mind my visit to Shanghai a few centuries ago, a little humble city just beginning to grow. You can imagine my shock and amazement when images of a shining, gleaming city filled with skyscrapers appeared on the screen, as the narrator described Shanghai as the gateway to China, the Pearl of the Orient and the largest economic and trade center in China. I had stared at the screen in disbelief, jaw hanging. I just couldn't associate the Shanghai I knew to the Shanghai in the screen – there's no way those two were the same place. I made my mind up to visit immediately, and began packing my bags for my trip to Shanghai.

Emerging from the airport at night, I was reminded once again of the enormity of my task; to document the transformation of Shanghai was not going to be an easy job. I had found all my old photos I had taken aeons ago, and planned to seek out the locations where they had been taken, and take another photo in the exact framing and composition to showcase how the difference a few centuries can make, giving a sort of before and after effect. Now, gazing at the night skyline in awe, I felt a feeling of reverence, of profound respect. Humanity has managed to create this wonder in such a short time, without any special powers or abilities... What excuse did I have? Others had dedicated their lives to seeing this through, making their dreams into a reality, and have ultimately succeeded, with the whole city to show for their hard work, toil and sacrifice. Shanghai was illuminated by the brilliance of the lights throughout the city, littering the darkness. Looking at the scene with incredulity, I turn, and trudge to the nearest hotel to get some rest before the events of the day.

The first thing on my list was the Pudong skyline, a scene which I had enjoyed immensely before. Google also said it was one of the crucial places one should visit in Shanghai, so I had made that my top priority. Comparing it to the picture I held in my hand, I felt slightly disorientated. Here was the exact same place, exact same scene, with the Huangpu river and everything. Yet, it felt like someone had taken the outlook, and, what was the term nowadays, ah yes, *photoshopped* it, turning it into something familiar but unrecognizable, giving me a sense of *deja vu*. Where squat buildings once stood, now were towering high-rise buildings, demanding your attention. By far, the most eye-catching part was the Oriental Pearl Tower, and the Shanghai Tower. The former was a spire, looming over the others, a true feat of engineering: although the center part is hollow, and comprised of many open floors, the structure is still able to support another spherical shape on top of it without toppling over. Similarly, the latter seemed just as hard to construct, reminding me of a twisting helix situated in the heart of the city, weaving metal and glass to form it. Taking my phone out of my pocket, I quickly snapped a picture, then proceeded to Google the Shanghai Tower. Apparently, it was the second highest building in the world, a fact which astounded me, and once again looked upon it, though with more admiration this time around.

With the first task done, I reluctantly walked towards the main street, where I was once again surrounded by the throngs of people, a multitude who soon proceeded to swarm around me, crushing others without heed. You know how people say they

felt as tightly packed as sardines in a can? Well, so did I, but probably about 10 times worse. The crowd itself reminded me of salmon I had once seen during the salmon run, all trying to swim up the same river as fast as possible, desperate to reach their destination. What a contrast this was to the old days, people meandering without a care in the world. Sighing, I added to my mental list another thing to avoid in Shanghai, then pushed my way to one of the inner streets, where there was less people. After about ten minutes, I had made my way to one of the poorer areas of the town, where the towers were reduced to little houses, and the hustle and bustle of the city, and all the noise, faded away. I breathed in the air, then proceeded to cough. When did the air quality get so bad? I frowned, then with a flick of my hand changed all the smog and pollution in a 10 mile radius around me back into clear, crisp air, as the way it should be in autumn. Seeing all the window shutters closed, and doors shut, with no one out in the streets, my eyebrows knitted in confusion. Taking a photo out of my pocket, I looked, and immediately felt as if I had been transported back to that time, as a flashback ensured.

Last time I had visited Shanghai, one thing that had struck me the most was the sense of community, where everyone knew everyone else, and not only that, but also good friends, especially neighbors. Everyday, the scene of old women sitting out in the streets, working with their friends, amicably chatting and conversing, enjoying the sunshine, the fresh air, and most of all their friends' company. Everywhere you looked, you could see smiles, and feel the light and airy atmosphere. It was the time of a simpler life, where one didn't need much to be happy, and simply counted their blessings, and appreciated the little things in life. When I left, one of the friends I had made during the time, a carpenter, gave a small chair as a memento, something which the elders used to sit on while working or relaxing. Touched, I had kept it, and till this day, still sits in the corner of my room. It reminded me of a better time, of a time where there weren't any petty squabbles over the simplest things, of a time where everyone was kind and giving. The chair represented how the values people once had, honesty, generosity, being caring, ungrudgingly, are now mostly lost, in a world where all one thought about was reaching the top, being the best. Though little, the chair was a powerful reminder to me, of a past world. Things do not have to be huge to make a difference.

With the flashback fresh in my mind, the empty street seemed like a ghost town to me. In my mind I could still see the elderly in the street, superimposed on what I now see. Taking a quick snapshot, I shook my head, saying a quiet goodbye to the community there once was here. I doubt people even knew who their neighbours were now, let alone would willingly spend time with them.

By the time the week was over, I had managed to take all the pictures I needed, and began pasting them into a scrapbook, comparing the images of the past to those of the present. The change was truly enormous, until you couldn't even tell that they are the same place. As I stuck the photos on one by one, I could only now begin to appreciate the hard work of those who had allowed for this to happen. Not only those written in the history books, but the forgotten, people who had contributed as much as they could, yet went unremembered, their deeds lost in history. Because of the combined efforts of everyone who helped, now, Shanghai is glorious and imposing, China's biggest and most prosperous city, boasting a blend of the East and the West. However, as this dynamic metropolis continues to develop, one cannot help but think about the old Shanghai, of its cultures and traditions, and how easily they can be lost. For 700 years, it has been a merchant city, a multicultural hub, yet as it develops, traditional Shanghai quickly faded into memory, then no longer that. Now little remains of what Shanghai once was, and what does remain developers are keen to demolish, to make way for more modern inventions, and historians are struggling to preserve. Throughout the years, Shanghai has transformed from a glorified fishing village into an international financial trading center, emerging from a relative obscurity into a well-known industry and finance hub. Lost in thought, I closed the book, and walked away.

Large Footprints

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Tatiana – 12

The Garden Teahouse, where a few minutes earlier he had been enjoying a bowl of cha, was just a few steps away from Chen-an when the group of policemen caught up. As the hasty thuds of their footsteps became audible, Chen-an straightened his suspenders and darted swiftly down the nearest alley. Standing out of their sight, the man pressed his ear against the grubby concrete walls and listened intently to their blundering search.

A young man inside the teahouse took off his shoes and punched in numbers on the rotary dial. He wore heavy round glasses that drooped onto his nose, and his hair was combed neatly to the back of his head. Lifting the phone next to his ear, he reported to his mentor. “Detective Zheng, t-t-here’s no sign of Chen-an. He has seemed to just ... disappear.” The young man named Yang-yi stuttered nervously while his companions were huddled around the hearth.

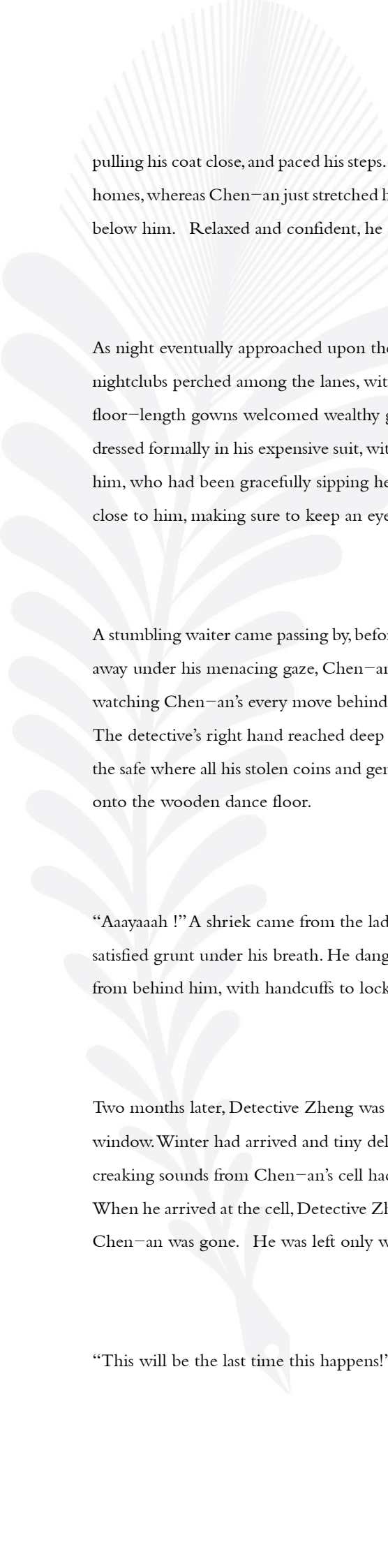
Detective Zheng was sitting in his office, filing his papers onto the side of his table. He sunk his signature chop into the red ink before printing it on the right corner of each document. “Impossible! Yang-yi, I refuse to believe that this is a challenging task for you.” The middle-aged officer took a sip of his tea and stroked his beard. “Listen, judging from the overcast sky, rain will fall in any minute. From the data I have collected, Chen-an is a 6 feet tall man, which means that his feet shouldn’t be small. Keep an eye on the road and look for large footprints” Detective Zheng’s voice was now booming as he took his cigarette out of his mouth and released a breath of curling smoke.

“But sir-”, Yang-yi furrowed his eyebrows in worry.

“Yang-yi, Chen-an is the most notorious and cunning criminal in town. Citizens are eternally complaining about him. It is our priority to catch and lock him up.” Detective Zheng bellowed in return, before slamming the phone on the table.

Sweat trickled down Yang-yi’s forehead when he heard the anger in his mentor’s voice. “Yes sir-” The line was cut. Yang-yi immediately stared up into the gloomy sky. Rain was threatening to fall and a strike of lightning shot ominously from the sky.

Behind the walls was still Chen-an, a smirk plastered on his face while muttering some curses about interfering officers. When he sensed the rain about to arrive, the criminal slipped on his suit and oozed gel onto his hair. He took his time to walk out of the alley,



pulling his coat close, and paced his steps. Everyone on the slippery Shanghai streets, it seemed, were scurrying around back to their homes, whereas Chen-an just stretched his arms out, letting raindrops slide down his coat and slither into the small puddle of water below him. Relaxed and confident, he stepped out to his evening destination.

As night eventually approached upon the once bustling city, upbeat jazz music blasted out boldly from one of the decadent nightclubs perched among the lanes, with glossy street lamps illuminating the vibrant paradise within. Women dressed in gaudy floor-length gowns welcomed wealthy guests into a land of exuberance and vivacity. Chen-an walked in with a proud gait, dressed formally in his expensive suit, with his silk hat cocked to the side of his head. Linking his arm with the poised lady next to him, who had been gracefully sipping her champagne, he swirled her to the center of the dance floor. Chen-an pulled the lady close to him, making sure to keep an eye on surrounding party guests.

A stumbling waiter came passing by, before offering a drink to Chen-an. He took the glass automatically, but as the waiter scuttled away under his menacing gaze, Chen-an was distracted by the spilling yellow bubbly liquid on his suit sleeve. However, closely watching Chen-an's every move behind him, there was Detective Zheng, who moved hastily to take matters into his own hands. The detective's right hand reached deep into the criminal's pocket, retrieving a silver key. It was Chen-an's key to his own safe; the safe where all his stolen coins and gems were hidden. He stretched out his foot, sending Chen-an and his lady tottering down onto the wooden dance floor.

"Aaayaaah !" A shriek came from the lady, piercing everybody's ears. All heads turned their way as Detective Zheng released a satisfied grunt under his breath. He dangled the key in front of Chen-an, taunting him. Then the trembling Chen-an appeared from behind him, with handcuffs to lock on the criminal's flailing wrists.

Two months later, Detective Zheng was stroking his beard while his eyes wandered around the view outside his police station's window. Winter had arrived and tiny delicate snowflakes drifted onto the ground. Suddenly, he realized that the usually-heard creaking sounds from Chen-an's cell had stopped, so the observant officer stood up and decided to check on the strange matter. When he arrived at the cell, Detective Zheng's mouth gaped open, his jaw dropping. A large hole was drilled through the wall and Chen-an was gone. He was left only with a message on the grimy door surface – in red ink, "Come catch me".

"This will be the last time this happens!" Detective Zheng cried out, but both he and Chen-an knew it wouldn't be.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Cheng, Heidi – 11

I have been to Shanghai once, in 2010, to see the Shanghai World Expo. Even though I never travelled outside the expo venue, I still know that it has quite an interesting history.

Shanghai has two sections, which are called Puxi and Pudong. Yet, it wasn't always like this. Historically, only Puxi, meaning "West Bank" (of the Huangpu River), was known as Shanghai. The northern part of Puxi was opened up as a port by the Treaty of Nanking. Slowly, merchants from different countries began to move there and so the foreign concessions, places that were not subject to Chinese law, were created. The southern part of Puxi, however, was not opened and still belonged to China. So, it was known as the Chinese City. Now that the foreign concessions no longer exist in Shanghai, it is known as the Old City of Shanghai.

The wall surrounding the Old City of Shanghai was circular, surrounding the city completely, unlike the Great Wall, which forms a wiggly line. The only way people could pass through the wall was through the nine original gates surrounding the city, six of which were on land, which meant that they were built over roads, three of which were water gates, which meant that they were built over the protective moat that surrounded the city at the time. In 1860, one new gate was built and in 1909, three new gates were built. The new gates were all built on land. In 1912, the government decided to tear down the wall and the gates but leave two very small sections. Those sections are still there today.

The city had defensive works starting from the 11th century, during the Sung Dynasty. There are still two very small sections of the walls there today but they're definitely not from the Sung Dynasty. They are from the Ming Dynasty and were built to keep out "wokou", which were pirates that raided the shores of Japan, China and Korea. It was dismantled in 1912 but two parts of the wall were left behind. Those sections still survive to this day.

Two roads ran along the city walls. The one that ran along the southern walls was always called Zhonghua Road. The one that ran along the northern walls is now called Renmin Road but it changed names a few times. At the very beginning, it had a French name, which was, "Boulevard des Deux Republiques", literally meaning, "Boulevard of the Two Republics". Since the road separates the walled city, belonging to China (back then, the Republic of China) and the French concession, belonging, obviously, to France, the two republics mentioned in the name of the road are the Republic of China and the French Third Republic. It was then changed into "Minguo Road". The name of this road, "Minguo", combined with the name of the southern section, "Zhonghua", made "Zhonghua Minguo", which translates into "Republic of China". That was the reason behind the name change. When the CCP took over, the name of the road became what it's called now.

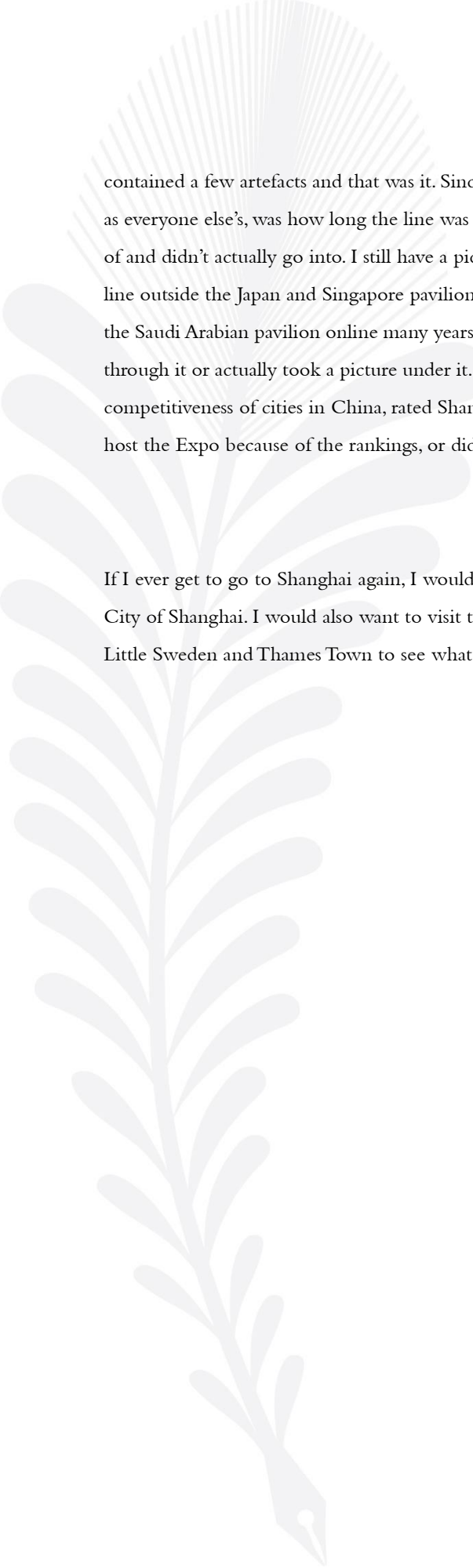
In 1993, the Chinese government decided to make Pudong, whose name translates to “East Bank”, a special economic zone. China is a communist country, so special economic zones in China are where capitalism is used. After that, Pudong began developing rapidly. That didn’t affect Puxi’s place as the urban center of Shanghai, though. Despite efforts to make Pudong more known in recent years, Puxi was older and so, more famous. Also, some parts of Pudong were developing too quickly and even if there were housing estates in those newly developed areas, the prices were not what a normal Chinese citizen could afford. For example, the 9 European cities in the suburbs of Pudong, which are basically copies of European architecture and have been on the news recently because they raised controversy. These were originally created to make people move away from urban Shanghai and live there instead but except for Little Sweden (which only isn’t empty because , those cities are now completely empty, except for the occasional couple that goes there to take their wedding photos.

When I visited in 2010, the World Expo was held in Pudong, Shanghai. There were 189 countries participating in the expo. The expo was really large, it actually had 5 zones! I only got to visit 3 of them, even though I actually went to the expo for around 5 days. The pavilion I remember the most about is the Slovenian pavilion. When I walked in, I remember entering a room that wasn’t too well lit. On the walls, I could see some patterns of books. I remember walking along a lifted walkway that was built along the walls of a rectangular-shaped building and not really seeing what was under the walkway. I also remember passing an olm exhibit. The olm was white. Its eyes looked kind of weird but the exhibit explained that that was because it lived in a cave and practically didn’t have to see. So, it was blind. The pavilion was memorable to me because it had a theme that was related to books and I liked books (still do). Also, how could I forget the Kong Kong pavilion and how disappointing it was? It only included a replica of the Hong kong Wetland Park and that was it. I was expecting more!

One of the pavilions I visited was the Chinese Pavilion, which had a red exterior because red is a traditional Chinese lucky color. It was separated into four main parts. Those were ‘Exploring the Oriental Footprint’, involving Chinese urban practises, ‘The Experience Trip’, involving a train ride, ‘Focus on a Lower Carbon Future’, which focuses on how to reduce the usage of fossil fuels and the individual province pavilions. Out of all of these, I only remember going on the train in ‘The Experience Trip’. I remember that the train I was on also contained a Chinese tour group and that at one point, we were passing through a simulation of a peach blossom forest. I also remember standing in the middle of all the individual province pavilions, unable to decide which one to go to since they all seemed quite similar. After the Expo, I was happy to hear that, like the Eiffel Tower after the 1889 Expo, the China Pavilion had been left standing and was reopened as the China Art Museum in 2012.

Another was the Canadian pavilion, which was almost entirely made out of wood. I have some very brief memories of walking along a wooden plank and trying on a moose hat at the pavilion shop. I don’t remember seeing any exhibits (there probably were some) or going to the pavilion restaurant.

I also remember going to the Spanish pavilion but I only remember getting creeped out by the big baby, which was actually a robot and built to represent the future of Spain, in the end. The Pacific Pavilion was also... unmemorable, at best. It only



contained a few artefacts and that was it. Since our standard of choosing which pavilion to go to, which was practically the same as everyone else's, was how long the line was (the shorter, the better), there were those pavilions that I just took a picture outside of and didn't actually go into. I still have a picture that was taken outside the Macau pavilion and memories of seeing too long a line outside the Japan and Singapore pavilions and deciding to take a picture instead of going in. When I saw some pictures of the Saudi Arabian pavilion online many years after I actually went to the Expo, I found it familiar but I was unsure if I just passed through it or actually took a picture under it. The China Institute of City Competitiveness, which used 276 indicators to rate the competitiveness of cities in China, rated Shanghai as the most competitive city 4 years in a row. Did people choose Shanghai to host the Expo because of the rankings, or did the rankings boost because of the Expo?

If I ever get to go to Shanghai again, I would want to visit the two remaining sections of the wall that used to surround the Old City of Shanghai. I would also want to visit the China Pavilion to see what has become of it now. Finally, I would want to go to Little Sweden and Thames Town to see what they look like.

May 29th, 1925— Shanghai

West Island School, Green, Leia — 12

John

The doors burst open and we rush in. The face of the dead man hangs from the ceiling and candles light up the room like fireflies. The citizens scream in terror.

“Everybody leave immediately!” Yells sergeant Buckley, spit spewing from his mouth as he speaks.

Floods of Chinese spill out the door. But the brave ones stay.

“Arrest anyone who disobeys my orders!” Buckley bellows again.

An innocent kneels before the hanging painting. I hesitate before grabbing the student and binding his wrists together with metal handcuffs, depriving him of his freedom. He is sobbing, his hands, a protective cage over his face. As I lead him to the car, I whisper in his ear.

“Sorry.”

His hands melt away, revealing eyes of sorrow. We stare at each other, eye to eye, before he is pushed into the police car. He buries his head in his hands and I watch him drive away and disappear round the corner. Then I run. I sprint away from my living hell and into a narrow alleyway. I vomit, over and over again. Tears stream down my cheeks and my throat burns. Gasping, I slump down onto my knees and I cry. Emotions flood me. Anger, despair, guilt. I punch the wall. Blood sprouts from my knuckles.

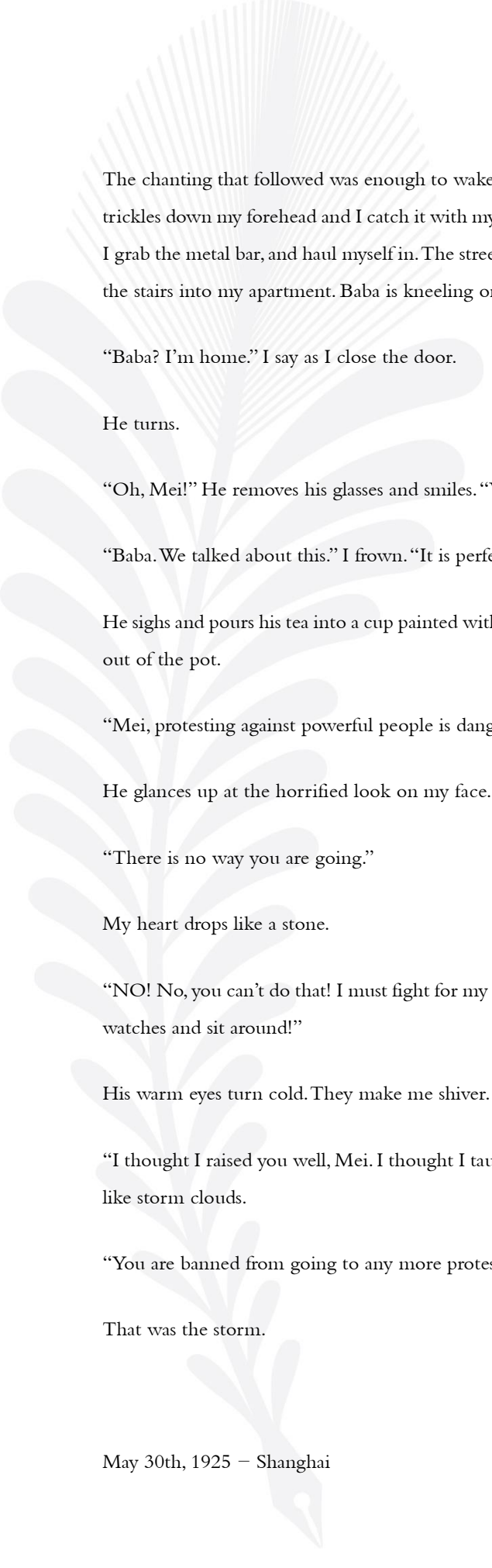
It feels good.

Mei

“This morning, we had a memorial service for a man we lost, and the British barge in and tell us to leave. And when our bravest stayed to show them that we deserve respect— they were arrested! They think that they have the right to arrest 6 innocents from OUR future generation!” Ling Han screams to the students that fill the secret back room. An uproar erupts from the crowd. The noise hits me with such intensity, I feel faint. I stare at Ling Han. I see his contorted face and the bulging vein on his forehead. His eyes scream determination, but deep down there is an overwhelming desperation.

“We have a voice and we must USE it! A peaceful protest shall take place tomorrow, 7am, at the police station. The British cannot keep treating us like dung!”

The British. Our enemy. The monster. Greedy for power, like a lion is for his meat. If we protest in front of the police station, we enter their den.



The chanting that followed was enough to wake the dead. I wade through the sea of hopefuls and stumble onto the street. Sweat trickles down my forehead and I catch it with my tongue. Salt explodes in my mouth. The tram hurtles past and I sprint to hop on. I grab the metal bar, and haul myself in. The streets go past in a whirl and I sit back. When my stop comes, I step off and trudge up the stairs into my apartment. Baba is kneeling on a bamboo mat, scanning tax papers. His brow is furrowed, his lip curled.

“Baba? I’m home.” I say as I close the door.

He turns.

“Oh, Mei!” He removes his glasses and smiles. “Well, at least you are still alive.”

“Baba. We talked about this.” I frown. “It is perfectly safe.”

He sighs and pours his tea into a cup painted with blossoming flowers. He doesn’t speak until the last of the herb drink has trickled out of the pot.

“Mei, protesting against powerful people is dangerous. Oh, and that protest at the police station tomorrow?”

He glances up at the horrified look on my face.

“There is no way you are going.”

My heart drops like a stone.

“NO! No, you can’t do that! I must fight for my people! But how would you know? You do nothing! Do you? All you do is make watches and sit around!”

His warm eyes turn cold. They make me shiver.

“I thought I raised you well, Mei. I thought I taught you to obey your father.” He whispers these words and they float around me like storm clouds.

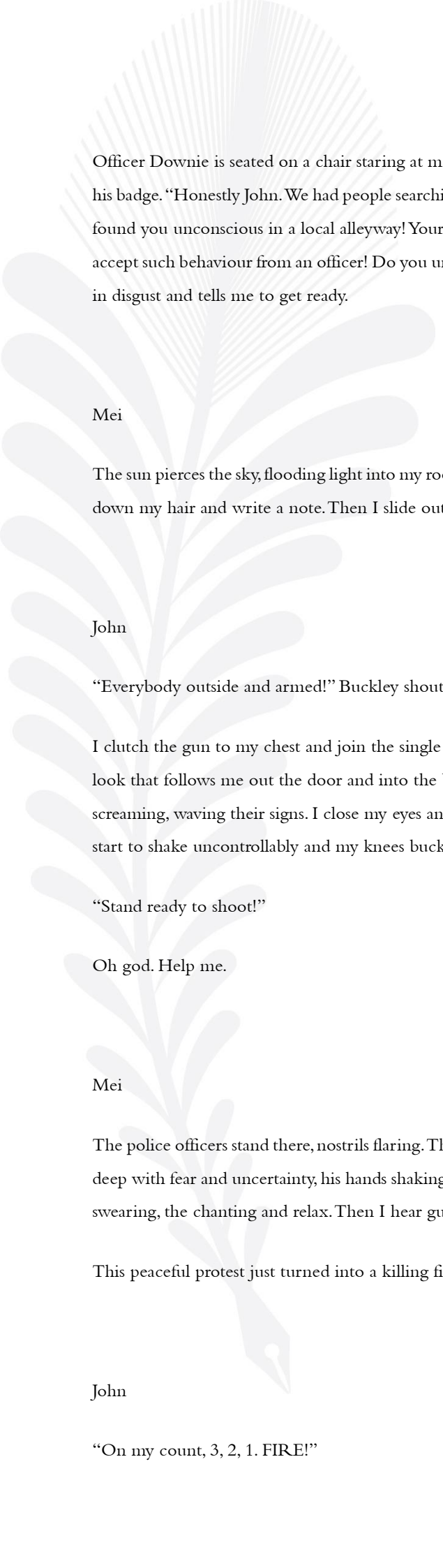
“You are banned from going to any more protests or meetings.”

That was the storm.

May 30th, 1925 – Shanghai

John

I wake with a start and rub my eyes. The back of my hand feels coarse against my skin. My knuckles are bandaged.



Officer Downie is seated on a chair staring at me through his tinted spectacles. Struggling, he lifts himself off the seat and adjusts his badge. “Honestly John. We had people searching out there till midnight! After the arrests at the memorial, you just vanished. We found you unconscious in a local alleyway! Your knuckles white and bloody. And you were drooling like a maniac. We cannot accept such behaviour from an officer! Do you understand? Big old Buckley is furious!” I snort and I turn away from him. He sighs in disgust and tells me to get ready.

Mei

The sun pierces the sky, flooding light into my room. Squinting, I shoot a glance at the clock on the wall. 5:56. Time to go. I smooth down my hair and write a note. Then I slide out the window and run.

John

“Everybody outside and armed!” Buckley shouts.

I clutch the gun to my chest and join the single file line of officers. One by one we march past old Buckley. He gives me a dirty look that follows me out the door and into the blinding sunlight. An ocean of Chinese protesters stands before us. Chanting, screaming, waving their signs. I close my eyes and think about all the hate directed towards me, horrible burning hate. My hands start to shake uncontrollably and my knees buckle.

“Stand ready to shoot!”

Oh god. Help me.

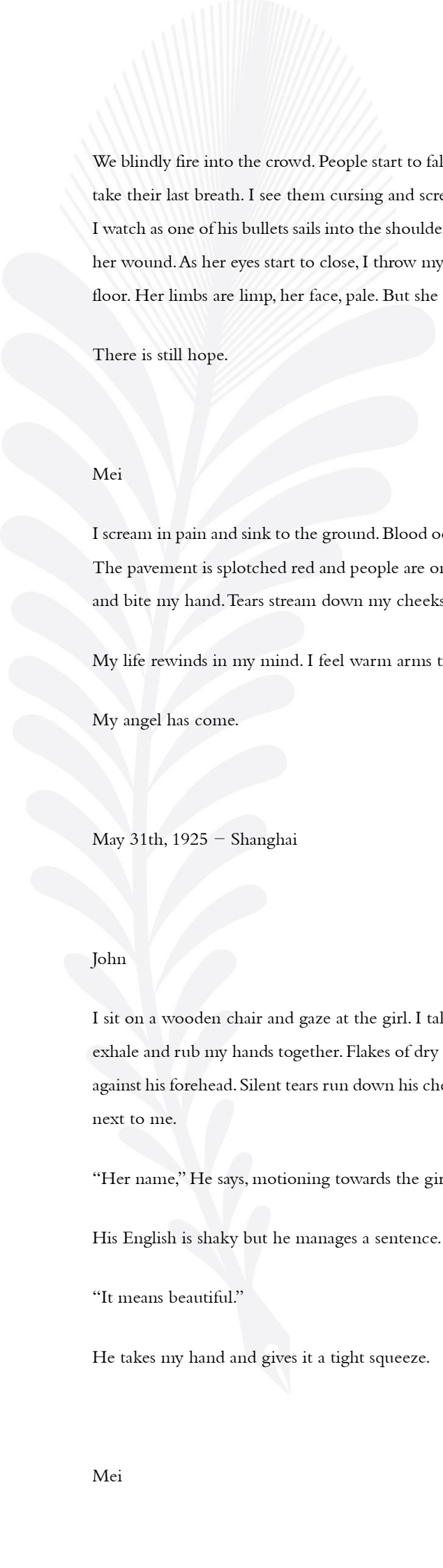
Mei

The police officers stand there, nostrils flaring. Their eyes, burning holes. Their guns, ready. One of the officers is so young. His eyes deep with fear and uncertainty, his hands shaking. Strangely, he makes me feel safe. I close my eyes and block out the shouting, the swearing, the chanting and relax. Then I hear gunshots.

This peaceful protest just turned into a killing field.

John

“On my count, 3, 2, 1. FIRE!”



We blindly fire into the crowd. People start to fall, felled by our bullets. I see innocents cry into the chests of the dead and students take their last breath. I see them cursing and screeching and fleeing. Downie— who is standing next to me— is still shooting, and I watch as one of his bullets sails into the shoulder of a young girl. She screams and collapses. I watch in horror as blood spurts from her wound. As her eyes start to close, I throw my gun onto the floor and rush to her. I kneel next to her and gently lift her off the floor. Her limbs are limp, her face, pale. But she takes struggled breaths.

There is still hope.

Mei

I scream in pain and sink to the ground. Blood oozes from my wound, trickling down my arm. I stare at the dead lying around me. The pavement is splotted red and people are on their knees screeching. I vomit. The bile sits on my lap. My throat burns. I curse and bite my hand. Tears stream down my cheeks and dots appear in front of my eyes.

My life rewinds in my mind. I feel warm arms tighten around me.

My angel has come.

May 31th, 1925 – Shanghai

John

I sit on a wooden chair and gaze at the girl. I take in her bandaged shoulder, her jet black hair and her peacefully closed eyes. I exhale and rub my hands together. Flakes of dry blood fall from my palms. I glance up at the girl's father, who is clasping her hand against his forehead. Silent tears run down his cheeks. He looks up at me. I swallow and a lump forms in my throat as he takes a seat next to me.

“Her name,” He says, motioning towards the girl with his hand. “Her name is Mei.”

His English is shaky but he manages a sentence.

“It means beautiful.”

He takes my hand and gives it a tight squeeze.

Mei



I wake with a jolting start and pain shoots through my arm. I scream, hysterical. Unbearable agony wakens my body. I try to punch my wound. I hit it again and again, until strong hands force me down. I recognise these hands. “Angel.” I whisper, before blackness hits.

John

The word angel drips from her lips like honey. Her eyes droop and her body sinks into the bed, defeated. Her father hurries to Mei’s side and kneels beside her. He gently brushes the loose hair from her neck and feels her pulse. I freeze and my beating heart is the only thing that I hear. I watch the light in Mei’s father’s eyes go out. He collapses onto Mei and sobs into her hair, kissing and stroking her face. I stumble backwards. My heart aching, my soul torn. I rip off my gleaming gold badge and scream.

Old Shanghai, New Shanghai

West Island School, Kim, Min Jun – 13

1815: The last rays of the Shanghai afternoon sunlight trickled through the cracks between the leaves, leaving the dark silhouette of a tree upon the dirt. A light breeze weaved its way through the billowing trees and across the roofs of the buildings of the Yu Garden, finally reaching a man sitting silently on a boulder. His silky pale hands held a book. It was a short book, containing the teachings of Taoism, a religion many followed in Shanghai. His eyes worked fast, reading character after character and page after page of Chinese at an alarming rate. Nearing the end of the book and realising the time it was, he snapped the book shut and walked briskly back outside to head home.

2015: The Shanghai morning sunlight trickled through the shutters, casting stripes of shadows across the room. A man slumbered in this room, or more specifically, a historian. Ever since he was growing up in Shanghai, his heart had been full to the brim with a passion for the past and a certain curiosity for his city. He had majored in history in a local university, and had found a stable job as a professor. His alarm clock suddenly rang, piercing the daytime tranquillity like a bullet through glass. He shot up and slammed down on his clock, still groggy. He sluggishly clambered out of bed, grabbed his glasses then stretched his joints. He looked at his calendar then grinned—it was a weekend, so he could do whatever he wanted.

1815: The man waded through an ocean of people bustling through the busy streets of Shanghai, determined to reach home. His wife was a tiger, quite vicious if he was late in the afternoon, and he shuddered at the thought. Usually on his way home, he would look around at the various stores selling a diverse array of goods, and the ten-metre-high wall that surrounded the city, and today was no different. Whilst gazing at everything around him, he was suddenly reminded of some very peculiar dreams he had been having these past few days. These seemed to be snippets of... some other person's life. However, there some very odd things inside this life, objects that couldn't exist for real, like a box with miniature people inside that moved, or some sort of light which lit instantly. He passed these off once again as 'just a dream', but he had to admit, it intrigued him.

2015: The historian decided to use his day off to visit the Yu Garden, a remnant left of the Old City of Shanghai. He brought only a small backpack housing his sparse necessities and a short book to read whilst there. Although the Garden was quite crowded for most of the time, he found that being in the Garden helped relax him and clear his mind, and he visited quite often when he needed some space for thinking. He caught a bus going straight to the Yu Garden, and not feeling like reading his book, he spent the journey looking out of the windows at the city and thinking. As he gazed upon the numerous buildings, cars, and people going about their everyday lives, he was suddenly reminded of some very peculiar dreams he had been having these last few days. These dreams seemed to consist of fragments of... another person's life, yet it seemed that this person lived many years before the historian did in Old Shanghai. He could remember the Yu Garden, the exotic smell of the stalls by the streets, and the wall surrounding the Old City so clearly, and it seemed so *real*. He chuckled and thought *I've read up too much on the Old City, it's just my brain playing tricks on me*.

1815: The man reached his house, a simple structure that most commoners such as himself lived in. He opened the door and went inside, his wife calling 'Welcome back, dear!' as he took off his shoes. He gratefully ate his dinner that his wife made him, and he sighed as he thought of tomorrow, when he would yet again have to go down to port for work. Today was one of his rare days off, and it had been so relaxing. In preparation for an early start the next day, he went to his bed and made himself comfortable, reading some more of his book before he slept. The more he read the Taoism doctrines, the more his eyelids felt heavy, and soon after he gave in to the darkness.

2015: The historian sat on a wooden bench situated in a relatively quiet place in the Yu Garden, soaking in the afternoon sun and reading his book on Taoism. Trying to read, anyway, as he could not get rid of the nagging feeling about his recent dreams. *They can't be real, they're just dreams!* The logical part of him argued.

But how could it feel so real? How can you remember everything in such detail? The other side of him replied.

It isn't possible that it was real!

There are many things in this world that humans don't yet know about!

This conversation continued for quite some time inside the historian's head, and yet he could not reach a conclusion. After too much time spent on thinking about his dreams, his thoughts soon drifted off to other things, such as the rays of the Shanghai afternoon sunlight trickling through the cracks between some leaves, leaving the dark silhouette of a tree upon the dirt. He felt a cool breeze gently stroke his face, and taking in the relaxing sensations, he dozed off on the bench.

1815: The man was dreaming. In his dreams, he was inside the Yu Garden with another man who looked uncannily like himself, who wore strange garments that he had never seen before and a pair of ebony glasses rested upon his face. He was quite far away, and was mouthing some words. He came closer, and as he did, his voice became audible and clear, and he came until both men were a foot apart. 'What is your name?' he asked.

2015: The man was dreaming. As he slumbered he saw himself inside the Yu Garden, with another man who looked astonishingly like himself, who wore clothes of many years long past. He was some distance away, and seemed to be mouthing words. He ran closer, and as he did, his voice became audible and clear, and he ran until both men were a mere foot apart. 'What is your name?' he asked.

Both: 'My name is Wang Li Wei'.

The Bombs of 1937

West Island School, Tsang, Jessica – 13

The ground is cold beneath my skin and the tree above me creates a dome around me with its drooping branches. I have been laying here for perhaps over an hour.

The images flash behind my eyelids when I close them, vivid with colour and memory and life. I try not to shut them, but sometimes, things can't be helped.

Despite my efforts, I blink, and I see the memory reappear in the darkness behind my eyelids.

I can see where we lived. The wooden couch, with its shiny armrests. The beautiful table YeYe created especially for us. The bookshelf that Papa bought from Mr. Chen's shop a few years ago, stuffed and filled with all of our favourite books and poems. The porcelain vase that PoPo gave to Mama stands quietly on the top of the bookshelf, proudly displaying its beautiful design and pattern.

Mama is standing in the kitchen, cooking on the stove as steam rises from the pot. She stirs frantically, stopping our supper from burning. Lee is running, the black mop of hair he owns flopping from side to side. The front door clicks open and Papa enters, in his work clothes. Mama takes a break from stirring to walk up to him and press a kiss on his cheek before she hurries back to the kitchen.

I can't see where I am. But I know I am there.

"Daddy!" Lee shouts as he runs into Papa's outstretched arms.

"Lee." Papa says calmly, but everyone can see the joy twinkling in his dark eyes and I can see a smile pulling at the corner of his lips.

The memory disappears, but another quickly replaces its position so all I can do is watch.

I see me now, us, the family of four sitting around the rosewood dining table as Mama sets out the food. The noodles that are sitting in a pool of soy sauce, waiting to be devoured by my brother, whose mouth is watering just at the sight of them. The soup dumplings, my favourite, sitting in their usual place inside the bamboo containers. Mama pours sweet and sour soup into bowls and serves them to us.

Lee immediately dives for the noodles, spooning the noodles into his bowl and shoving them into his mouth sloppily. Mama scolds him, starting to scrub at his T-shirt which has been splattered with soy sauce. Lee giggles sheepishly as he watches Mama rub at his shirt violently. I shake my head, reaching for a soup dumpling when we hear a faint bang coming from outside the white, flaky walls of our home.

Mama stops scrubbing at Lee's T-shirt and frowns, worry appearing on her youthful face. She walks over to the window, looking outside for any signs of danger. Papa follows her, setting a hand on her tensed up shoulders in hopes to calm her down. Even Lee stops giggling and holds the edges of his chair as he stares at our parents watching life go on outside of our home.

The atmosphere isn't right. I wish we realised that sooner.

Mama turns around, lines forming in her forehead. Even when she's worried and stressed out, she is still the belle of the ball. Her sleek black hair is twisted into a long braid that falls down the side of her body. She is slender and thin, her slim fingers wringing together anxiously at the front of her apron.

Papa walks over to us, coaxing Lee out of his chair. If Mama is the belle of the ball, then Papa is the prince. His black tousled hair gives him a rough look and his dark eyes are serious, yet open and caring. You could cry at all the sincerity he holds in them.

Two beautiful people, which had a beautiful family.

Papa lifts Lee out of his chair and starts walking towards his room quietly, but the air in our once happy home is suspenseful and suffocating. I can't breathe.

Another bang sounds from outside our home and Lee's face starts to crumple.

"Shhhh shhhh." Mama says fearfully, glancing back at our front door before scooping Lee into her arms.

A bang resonates throughout the room.

A yell.

Papa's weight crashing over me.

Lee's cries.

Nothing.

Black.

Then,

Debris.

Stone.

Concrete.

There is a heavy weight on my back and I struggle to get out of its heavy grip. I pull myself up using loose stones.

Standing up, I look around. I have no memory of what happened.

I look down, and I see Papa, lying face down in the rubble. There is a trickle of blood running down the back of his neck.

A sob wells in my throat as I bend down, surrounded by broken building.

I am stepping on my home.

I pull Papa into my lap. His dark eyes, so full of life once, are now empty and glassy and gone. My tears fall onto him, wetting his white shirt. My fingers brush against the bracelet he wears, and I look at him, as if I am asking for permission. Then I slip the bracelet off of his wrist and slide it onto mine.

I look around, desperate to see Mama or Lee or anyone who knows us as a family to come running and grieve with me. But there is only:

A

Suffocating

Silence

That

Grips

Me

And

Refuses

To

Let

Go.

I lay Papa gently back down on the rubble and walk my way through the shattered slabs of concrete. I wade in a hard, grey sea that drags me down and drowns me with the memories it once held.

I see a human figure lying a few feet away, and my feet involuntarily starts moving towards them. I try to pull back. But I know I am looking to find my family.

The figure is also lying face down, but she has long, sleek black hair tossed to the side. She wears an apron and the ache beneath my ribcage turns into a steady thump of pain.

Mama.

I turn her over so I can see her face. Her skin is still smooth, just scratched slightly. She reminds me of a gently damaged porcelain vase. Damaged, but still beautiful. I find my hand reaching to brush away the stray strands of black hair resting on her face and cupping her chin, my thumb gliding over the top of her sharp cheekbones. She is wearing a locket with a heart shaped pendant.

I unbuckle the necklace, the smooth feeling of gold sliding my fingers. I know there is a small picture inside the heart. I click open the heart, and a photograph of our family, with my grandparents on both sides is nestled inside safely.

"I'm going to take this Mama, okay? I want to have a picture of us all." I whisper to her as I quietly take the locket off her and secure it around my neck.

I stand up again, looking around to see if I can still hear Lee's cries. I can almost see him, his black hair messy as grey dust settles against him, tears falling down his chubby baby cheeks.

Except I can't see him.

I look down, and I see a hand sticking out from underneath the concrete. With a frown and a breathy gasp, I bend down, pushing and throwing broken pieces of concrete everywhere, and I unearth my little baby brother.

My mouth shapes an 'o', and silent screams of pain passes through my lips. I bring him up to cradle against my chest. His black hair is matted with cherry red blood and his eyes are empty.

Tears run down my cheeks as grief expands itself in my hollow chest. My ribcage is close to cracking. He was only five. He had such a life to live. I lay him on the concrete, he wears a ring on his thumb and I slip it off, gently sliding it onto my own finger. It is my way of remembering him.

I carry Papa to where Mama and Lee lie. I want them to be together. Even if I can't be with them. I stand up after carrying Papa, and I see porcelain shards lying on the rubble.

It is the vase that once stood so quietly on the bookshelf. The one PoPo gave to Mama.

It is broken, but beautiful and smooth and precious.

I walk over to the broken vase and pick up a piece of it, a piece of where I can still see the intricate detail and pattern.

I slide it into my pocket and walk back to my family.

I kiss them all on their cold cheeks and stand up, allowing the tears to fall as I walk away.

I lay underneath the tree now, and I take out the piece of porcelain from my pocket.

It is broken, but it is still: beautiful and perfect and precious.

Just like my family.



A Tale of Old Shanghai

Yew Chung International, Lo, Michelle – 13

The day the children of Shanghai first tasted freedom was also the worst day of her life.

It started with the wall. Taller than a thousand men and built entirely from cold grey stone, the wall completely encompassed the ancient city of Old Shanghai. Created ten years ago to protect the city from invaders, its heavy iron gates and towering watchtowers did not allow anyone to enter the city.

The people of Shanghai called the wall by many different names. To some, it was a miracle of engineering. To others, it was their greatest form of armour.

To Xu, however, the wall was a cage – for as no one was allowed into the city, no one was allowed out either.

Today, though, everything would change. Today, for the first time in history, the wall gates would open.

...

"Now?"

"Soon."

The children crowded around the window eagerly, chattering incessantly in anticipation. They were all twelve years old, and if there had been a day ten years ago when the wall had finished construction and closed its gates in finality, they could not recall. Out of the dozens of schoolchildren huddled at the window, none of them had set foot outside Shanghai in ten years. Sometimes, in the depths of their sleep, they remembered the faint sigh of a sea breeze and the gentle tickle of tall grasses upon their feet – but then they always awoke to the sight of the city wall and the ringing of the watchtower bells, and their dreams were gone.

Yesterday in class, they had read about the world outside of Shanghai. They had read about lush green mountains and clear blue lakes. They had spoken about the sea that existed right outside the walls. They had heard about the crystalline waters of the ocean and the soft sand of the beach, and they had all written short poems about it.

Xu stood at the front of the classroom and read her poem out loud, her voice barely above a whisper. She was a petite, frail girl who looked as though her time inside the walls had faded the sparkle in her eyes and the smile on her lips. She trembled as she spoke. "The sea is as blue as the sky on a summer's day, yet when the gates close the waves go away."

"You didn't write that," one of her classmates, Li, protested. "You don't know what the sea looks like!"

"I do know," replied Xu. "I do know."

Because, unlike the other children, she had seen the outside world. She had felt the wind blow across her face in the open countryside; she had watched the sun sink into the ocean at twilight; she had sailed across the waters of the Yangtze and tasted the sea breeze on her tongue. She had been outside, lived outside, and she remembered it all, from the exact curve of the bay to the salty air of the coast.

"Where's the teacher?"

"She'll be back, I'm sure."

The children chattered amongst themselves, rumbunctious and loud. Xu stood away from them, away from these children who had never left the confines of the city before, ignoring the cacophony as she stared at the closed gates.

"What're you looking at?" Li asked scornfully and shoved her roughly. The other children looked away. Xu wanted to call out to them, wanted to cry out for help, but she knew that they would merely turn a blind eye.

No matter how much pain she was in, they would never help her. They ignored her, *hated* her, for she was simply too different.

She would not play with them in the city courtyards. When they passed the ball to her, she let it roll by. When they called her name, she only stared at them. She remained still and silent no matter how much the others laughed.

And, of course, her biggest crime was that she had not grown up in Shanghai. She had only moved here ten years ago, and she remembered the waves and the mountains of the world away from the walls. Whereas they had been in Shanghai all their lives, even before the wall had blocked off the outside world, hence they had long since forgotten the way the world truly was.

And so, the children despised her for all these reasons, both important and trivial. They hated her stillness, her silence, her past and her passion for the sea.

"What're you looking at?" Li asked again. "What are you waiting for?"

"The sea," she murmured.

Li laughed contemptuously. "Please. You've never seen the sea and you never will."

"But... I..."

"Never!" Li cried savagely, turning around to his classmates. "She'll never see the sea. She'll not see it today either. Will she?"

The other children blinked then laughed, catching on, and shook their heads. "No, no, she won't see it!" They giggled, and their words pierced her like a sharp knife. "The wall will never open!" "You'll never see the outside world." They cheered and jeered as she looked at them in despair.

"But..." she murmured.

"Let's put her into the back room!" The cry arose from somewhere in the jostling crowd of schoolchildren, and it grew louder and louder until it drowned out all her desperate pleas. Xu fell back, shaking her head, but the children surged forwards like a tsunami, both inescapable and inevitable.

"No, no," she whispered, helpless. But they dragged her down the hallway, into the cramped, dusty back room, where they threw her in and locked the door. They smiled as they heard her muffled cries. They laughed as they saw the wooden door tremble under the blows of her beating fists. Then the children, with the faces of angels but the hearts of devils, laughed and headed back to their seats, just as the teacher arrived.

"Are we ready, class?" He asked, and the children nodded their heads eagerly.

"Are we all here?" They nodded again, beaming.

The bells tolled and the gates swung open.

All at once, the children spilt out of the classroom, running across the courtyard to join the sea of people at the gateway. They cheered as they saw the open iron gates, pushing and weaving their way through the crowd, jostling each other in excitement, and surged through the stone archway.

And it was then that they saw the sea at last.

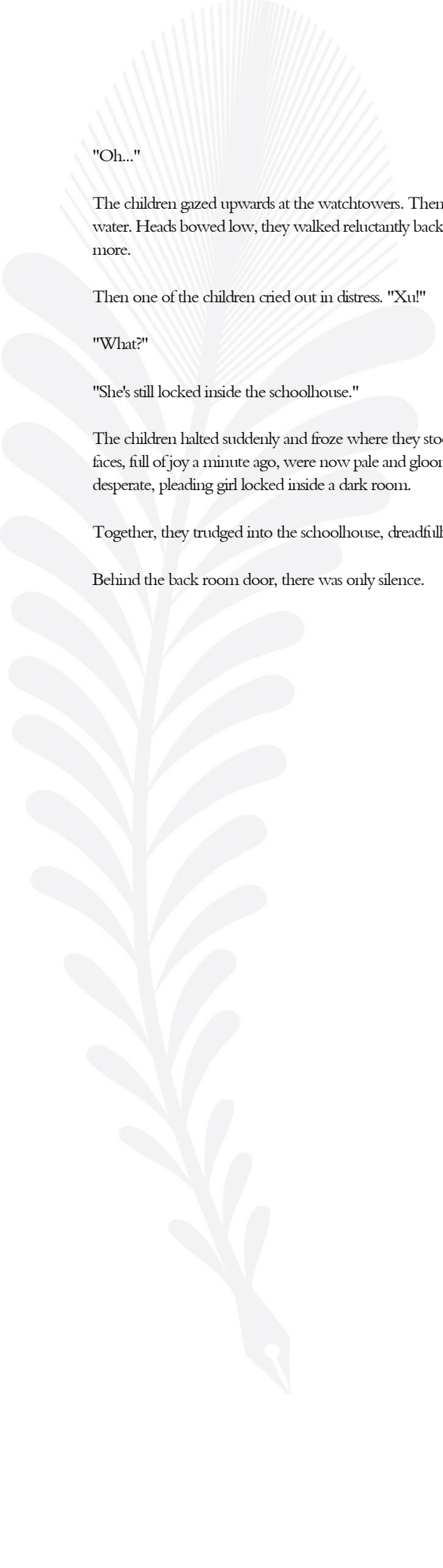
The cerulean blue waves swelled upwards, gurgling and gushing upon the shore, before ebbing and retreating back into itself. Silver clouds threaded across the indigo sky, reflected in the vast expanse of blue stretching towards the horizon. The cries of seagulls swooping through the sky echoed and resonated from the cliffs, and the sound of the sea crashing against the shore muffled the ecstatic cries of the children that rushed out to greet the water.

"Don't go too far," the teacher called out after them. "Listen out for the bells. You only have three hours before the gates shut!"

But they ignored him and ran into the sea instead, splashing their faces with crystalline water and relishing the gentle waves that lapped at their feet. They waded into the bay and smelt the salty ocean breeze. They looked at the walls and marvelled at how small Shanghai was, compared to the vastness of the world around them.

And the children, who had been trapped behind walls all their life, felt freedom for the first time.

But then, the bells came tolling from the watchtowers once more, and even the thunderous crash of the waves on the beach could not mute the brass ringing.



"Oh..."

The children gazed upwards at the watchtowers. Then they turned and looked back at the sea, with its shimmering waves and its vast expanse of water. Heads bowed low, they walked reluctantly back to the gates, and they watched with water-filled eyes as the iron gates were sealed shut once more.

Then one of the children cried out in distress. "Xu!"

"What?"

"She's still locked inside the schoolhouse."

The children halted suddenly and froze where they stood, the sound of laughter abruptly stopping as an icy wave of guilt washed over them. Their faces, full of joy a minute ago, were now pale and gloomy, and the memory of gentle blue waves faded from their minds, replaced by the image of a desperate, pleading girl locked inside a dark room.

Together, they trudged into the schoolhouse, dreadfully quiet. None of them spoke. They stood in the hallway and listened.

Behind the back room door, there was only silence.

The Old City of Shanghai

Ying Wa College, Cheng, Vincent – 13

Three teenagers were walking on a street of the old city of Shanghai. Their names were Lin An, Chan Tian and Yang Zhao.

“We should find some time to go to the temple.” Chan Tian said, “For my father, you know.”

“I thought that we are going to the graveyard.” Lin An replied.

“It has been ten years since my father passed away; maybe we should be more respectful this time.” Tian answered.

“That’s fine, since me and Lin An will have to go to the temple to pray for our ancestors as well.” Yang Zhao said.

“I prefer only going to the graveyard,” An said in a subdued voice, “It’s not really necessary –”

“Anyway, are you two free on Friday afternoon?” Tian asked as the other two nodded, “Let’s meet there at 2.”

“See you there!” Zhao said.

Three of them separated, when An looked back, he saw Tian clench his fists as he left.

Time passed quickly and Friday came. The city inside the walls was filled with people.

“Tian!” Zhao said, catching his attention.

“Hey, where’s An?” Tian questioned. They looked around but there was no sign of him.

“Never mind, he’ll come soon.” Zhao said. “He said that he wanted to go to the graveyard first.”

The temple they went to was called ‘The City God Temple’. The temple was enormous. It was wide, but its great height made it seemed narrow. They walked into it, ready to pray the gods for keeping their ancestors’ bodies safe.

Smoke was everywhere and it made walking difficult. Despite this, they were able to walk through the crowd and stood in front of a statue. They bowed.

“Excuse me,” Tian said suddenly, “I think I need to use the bathroom.”

“I’ll just wait here.” Zhao replied.

Tian left the temple swiftly, leaving Zhao with a bad feeling.

Half an hour had passed and neither Tian nor An came. Zhao thought, “perhaps I should go to find An in case he has come.” However, it seemed that An wasn’t in the temple.

“Ah! Fire!” A person shouted.

The enormous temple was suddenly covered with flame. The fire began to creep into each room and the people panicked whenever they came. Everywhere was black smoke and people around started coughing. The whole place became chaotic instantly.

Without thinking, Zhao turned around and ran. However the door was burning and there was no way out of the temple.

Zhao saw a river nearby. He thought, I may be safe if I jump down from here, but the impact may also kill me. At this moment, the temple started to fall down. Zhao had no choice but to jump down. He felt the wind blowing to his face and he couldn't hear anything. At the last moment before he dived into the river, he held his breath.

Zhao felt like hitting by a truck directly on the chest. Zhao got out of the river after he dived.

While he was running away from the temple, An saw him.

"Don't ask, just run!" Zhao replied.

They ran away from the burning temple along with the crowd until the temple could be hardly visible.

"I'm so glad that you are safe." An said.

"Zhao!" Another voice called.

Both of them turned and saw Tian running to them. His face was as hard as stone.

"Hi." Tian said.

"Did you see how the temple got burnt?" Zhao asked.

"What?" Tian asked, shocked. "The temple got burnt! I didn't notice it. I had a stomach ache."

"Let's go to the bar and talk about it." An said.

"Good idea." Tian said.

As they walked, Zhao and An started chatting about how Tian escaped from the temple. Tian walked behind them. He wondered why An was not at the temple at the time they had decided to meet.

They went into the bar and settled down on a table.

"It's cosy in here." Zhao said as he took off his coat.

"So what happened next?" An asked.

Tian suddenly noticed the necklace that Zhao was wearing. It was originally covered by his coat but he took it off. He tried very hard not to shout.

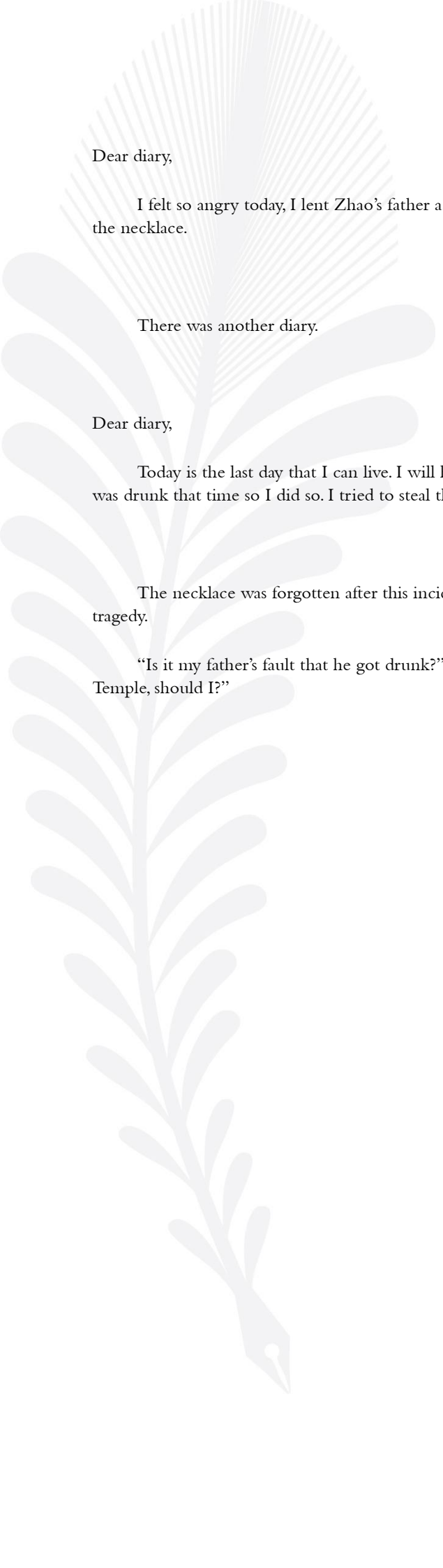
"I jumped down to the river..." Zhao continued but Tian didn't even try to listen to him.

Tian remarkably remembered his father's death and this encouraged him to have his revenge. He wasn't sure why his father had to be executed but he knew that it was Zhao's father who started it all and it was something related to this necklace. This was also the reason he started the fire to kill Zhao since Zhao's father passed away long time ago.

"Sorry, I have something really important things to do at home." Tian said, and without waiting their reply, he rushed back home.

"Where are you going?" An asked, but Tian had already ran away.

Tian went into his house. There was a desk next to the wall, he didn't really use the desk. But now, driven by curiosity, Tian looked at the books on it. There was a diary that caught his attention. It was really old, written at least ten years ago by his father. Tian read the diary carefully.



Dear diary,

I felt so angry today, I lent Zhao's father a necklace but he denied that I had lent it to him. I must find a way to get back the necklace.

There was another diary.

Dear diary,

Today is the last day that I can live. I will have my execution tomorrow. I shouldn't borrow the necklace to anyone. But I was drunk that time so I did so. I tried to steal the necklace from Zhao's house but I was caught. I really regret doing this.

The necklace was forgotten after this incident. Zhao took it, not knowing that this was the necklace which caused this tragedy.

"Is it my father's fault that he got drunk?" Tian thought. "If that's the case, I shouldn't cause the fire in the City God Temple, should I?"

The Old City of Shanghai

Ying Wa College, Siu, Cheuk Hang – 13

“Click...click...”

“Flash...flash...”

“See how popular your grandchildren are! Everybody is capturing their every move. The park is seeking names from the public. Do you have any ideas in naming them, Mr Gran Gran?” said Reporter Niao.

“Let’s call them Shang Shang and Hai Hai! They are the old city of Shanghai’s first-ever panda twins! I’m so proud of my grandson and granddaughter!” exclaimed Gran Gran.

“What good names!” said Reporter Niao. “You are the key giant panda of the Shanghai Wild Animal Park and have experienced all the changes here. Can you share with us?”

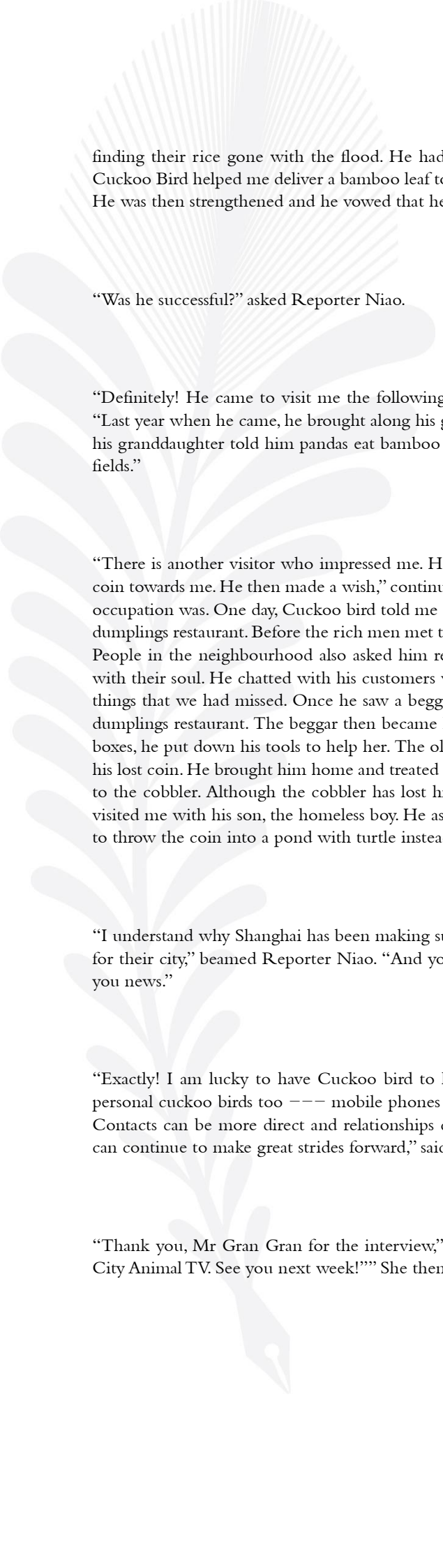
“Sure! The birth of my grandchildren has really brought back a lot of memories. Visitors have always taken lots of photos of us. In the past, visitors used cameras of enormous size. They used tripods and a big flash too. You know, I was a good model. I usually set myself at a nice posture. Later, they used digital cameras. They clicked the shutter continuously without careful consideration and deleted the photos they didn’t want. I even was not quick enough to smile! Now, there is an interesting scene. People look at us through their mobile phones! They take photos and send to their friends immediately without actually looking directly at us,” said Gran Gran.

“What an interesting phenomenon!” exclaimed Reporter Niao. “Have you come across any special visitors?”

“Yes!” replied Gran Gran. “There is a man who comes to visit me every year before the Winter Solstice. Every time he comes, he brings me a spike of rice harvested from his rice field. He throws towards me and asks me to keep warm.

“What a good old farmer! He doesn’t know you don’t eat rice or feel cold!” wondered Reporter Niao.

“Haha! He thinks that is a good treat to me. You know the spike of rice is so precious to him. Cuckoo Bird told me all about him. This hardworking farmer used to wake up before dawn to set up a fire with branches. His wife cooked rice, providing their young children’s meals for the day. The couple then went working in their field for the whole day. In summer, the fierce sun burned their backs while the cutting winds froze their ears. They kept working because the field was the heart of their life. Once they received a flood alarm and were told to evacuate. The farmer quickly grabbed some spikes of rice, though they were not ripe yet, and he and his wife ran for their life. The rice was their treasure. After the water subsided, they came back with tears



finding their rice gone with the flood. He had no money to visit me that year. So I asked Cuckoo Bird to do me a favour. Cuckoo Bird helped me deliver a bamboo leaf to him as a blessing. Looking at the bamboo leaf, the farmer smiled with gratitude. He was then strengthened and he vowed that he would start from the beginning.”

“Was he successful?” asked Reporter Niao.

“Definitely! He came to visit me the following year with his spike of rice again!” replied Gran Gran with a contented smile. “Last year when he came, he brought along his granddaughter in her Mickey Mouse costume. He took out the spike of rice but his granddaughter told him pandas eat bamboo leaves! He is now running a rice company and he hires workers to work in his fields.”

“There is another visitor who impressed me. He was a cobbler. He came every Lunar New Year. He waved at me and threw a coin towards me. He then made a wish,” continued Gran Gran. “I noticed that his fingernails were all black. I wondered what his occupation was. One day, Cuckoo bird told me that he was a cobbler. He didn’t have a family. He worked in front of a Shanghai dumplings restaurant. Before the rich men met their friends in the restaurant, they usually asked the cobbler to polish their shoes. People in the neighbourhood also asked him repair their shoes. Actually, he not only helped people with their shoes but also with their soul. He chatted with his customers when he was working. As he sat on the pavement all day, he could notice many things that we had missed. Once he saw a beggar trembling in the howling wind and he bought him a bowl of soup from the dumplings restaurant. The beggar then became his friend. Another time he saw an old woman pushing a huge trolley of carton boxes, he put down his tools to help her. The old woman then became a dear aunt to him. Then he helped a homeless boy find his lost coin. He brought him home and treated him as his son. Years have passed. People buy a pair of new shoes instead of going to the cobbler. Although the cobbler has lost his business, his kindness has helped him gain a family. Last Lunar New Year, he visited me with his son, the homeless boy. He asked his son to throw a coin towards me and make a wish, but his son asked him to throw the coin into a pond with turtle instead.”

“I understand why Shanghai has been making such significant progress. There are many hardworking fellows who love and care for their city,” beamed Reporter Niao. “And you are so lucky to have Cuckoo Bird to be your messenger and helper to bring you news.”

“Exactly! I am lucky to have Cuckoo bird to help me so that I am in close tie with the city. People in Shanghai have their personal cuckoo birds too --- mobile phones and computers. News and information can be obtained anytime and anywhere. Contacts can be more direct and relationships can be maintained more easily too. With technological advancement, Shanghai can continue to make great strides forward,” said Gran Gran.

“Thank you, Mr Gran Gran for the interview,” said Reporter Niao, then turning to the camera, “thanks for staying with Old City Animal TV. See you next week!” She then flew back to her broadcast company.

The Old City of Shanghai

Ying Wa College, Wong, Yu Kwan Yannick – 13

On the day before the Chinese History exam, I was lying on my bed, doing revision for my exam. I started to feel sleepy and fell asleep gradually. I woke up in the morning and I realized that I was lying on a bench. I have never been to this place, every single building is very old, and all of them were built in a Chinese style. I looked at the shop signs and finally realized that I was located in the old city of Shanghai. I walked around the city from the countryside to the city and my adventure began.

The locals used the local, Shanghainese language to communicate, which I didn't totally understand. I walked around the city and found a school. I walked around, hoping to find some teachers. I walked for fifteen minutes and finally found some teachers in the only classroom. I tried to communicate with them by using simple English. Fortunately, there was an English teacher among them. I finally succeeded in communicating with them.

I chatted with the English teacher and asked whether he knew why I had travelled back in time to the old city of Shanghai

“Oh! You're a time traveler, welcome!”

“Wha—at? Time traveler? Who on earth sent me back here? I'm supposed to take my Chinese History exam today”

“This is fated. I mean everybody is sent back here the night before their Chinese History exam”

“So what am I supposed to do to get away from this terrible place? I have no friends here!”

“Go to the temple in the city centre and you'll know what to do.”

He gave me a map of the Old City of Shanghai and I followed it and walked to the city centre. While I was walking, nearly everyone on the street stared at me. I was scared and started to run. Finally I arrived the temple.

I went in the temple and walked around it. I walked for a while and found the person in charge.

“Woah, welcome! You must be the time traveler. Your clothing looks cool, where did you buy it?”

“I don't care whether my clothing is cool. I only wanted to go back home.”

A girl walked in and shouted, “Who is the person in charge? Anyone?” We walked outside and met her.

“You must be the time traveler I've time travelled back here! Once again welcome!”

I questioned him, “Don't you have anything else to do? Is bringing people back to the past that fun,” I paused for a moment before continuing, “especially on the night before our Chinese History exam?”

“Little boy, you're correct! I don't have anything else to do except bringing people from the future to the past. Well I guess this is my job?”

“So your job is to teleport people from the future to the past with no reason?”

“No way! I'm given a mission to protect this temple. There are tons of treasures under this piece of land. The ground is made up of extremely hard material. No one can break it except the dragon hiding in the forest.” He explained to us that the dragon was always protecting the temple. However, over these years these hard materials had gotten softer and softer and no one knew what had happened. He wanted us to go into the forest and see what was going on. He had also promised us to bring us back if we could help him.

I asked the girl that what her name was. “Hil”, she replied. Hil and I brought some basic tools for surviving and walked in to the forest. According to the person in charge, there would be a lift when we arrived. It would take us to the dragon’s habitat. We chatted while we were walking in the forest; we exchanged our phone numbers and became friends. After 2 hours of walking we finally arrived. We took the lift and went straight in to the dragon’s habitat.

Unexpectedly, there wasn’t any dragon there. Both of us started to wonder whether they had been told the truth or not. We sat behind a box and started to discuss. Suddenly, we heard some voices. The voices of two strangers. We laid down immediately so we could hear their discussion.

“What are we going to do with the dragon? Shall we kill it or what?”

“Are you serious? It is the dragon protecting the treasures in the temple of the city centre. We should force it to give us all of the treasure before killing it. Let’s go back to our base and see what’s going on with the dragon.”

We were worried that we wouldn’t be able to go back to the future if we didn’t follow them to find out the truth. We followed behind them, quietly and unnoticed, and went into their underground base. They trapped the dragon inside a tank made of ultra-hard glass, and forced the dragon to help them to get the treasures under the temple. The dragon replied no in English. The kidnappers understood and got ready to kill it.

Without hesitation, Hil and I took action. We took out some ropes and tied them up while they were taking their guns out. They tried to struggle and use their guns to shoot me. They had only one bullet and the bullet pierced my arm. However, this didn’t hurt me a lot. We grabbed their guns and took some bullets out of their pockets. Pointing the gun at them, we forced them to let the dragon go. They were scared and followed our instructions.

The dragon was finally free and it began to talk to us. He first asked me whether I was ok. It didn’t really hurt me, although the bullet is still lodged in my muscles. The dragon explained that it was trapped by those people for a few years. However, they didn’t try to hurt it at all until today. The dragon thought I was seriously injured and told us to ride on it. It brought us to the temple and thanked us. He broke the hard materials, and let us have a look of the treasures. He allowed each of us to pick one of the treasures. I picked a stamp with a picture of dragon and gold on its surface. Then we said goodbye to the person in charge and the dragon.

Suddenly, we were sucked into the portal and left the old city of Shanghai. I opened my eyes and realized I was lying on something, holding the stamp. The injury of my arm had disappeared. I finally realized that it was my bed and just a few seconds after, my mom shouted, “Marth, you’re almost late for your school! Wake up immediately!” I woke up immediately and looked at my phone and found out it was the day for my Chinese history exam. I got changed immediately and rushed to school.

I arrived school with just 1 minute to spare. I ran to my classroom and sat down. I calmed down myself and started to do the exam paper. After an hour, the exam ended. It was recess time; I walked outside in the corridor and saw Hil. I asked why she is here. She told me that she was a secondary 1 student in my school. She was very worried about my arm and I told her everything was fine. We started to chat again, and had become important friends after what had happened in the old city of Shanghai.

The Old City of Shanghai

Ying Wa College, Zhu, Ching Yan Alfie – 13

“Hello, this is the Welsh society of Shanghai. Are you Mr. Morgan Lee?”

The grandfather clock at the end of the corridor read 5:34 am. The slow and steady swaying of the rosewood pendulum reminded Morgan how exhausted he was.

“Yes, what is the matter?” he asked.

“We’re very sorry to bother you at this time of the day, but we feel there is a great need to warn you.” The low and solemn voice said on the other side, “and perhaps you will not be so tired after hearing the news.”

Morgan woke up. His watery eyes widened and bulged with surprise and shock, like an exotic goldfish. He shoved the speaker to his mouth and yelled, “Where is it? Where is it? Tell me! Come on!” he was breathing rapidly through his nostrils, which were expanding and contracting like mad. “33 HeLe Lane, 12:00 sharp. Alright. Yes, thank you so much, goodbye.” He crashed the phone onto the golden holder and started pacing around his expensive living room. The dining table was made of Chinese perfumed wood, and the wooden chairs placed around it had emeralds and rubies embedded by one of the best carpenters in Shanghai. There were tiny silver decorations and a vase of lilies on the oak box-of-shelves, and a traditional Chinese painting was hung on the other side of the room. But now this Welsh antique collector didn’t care for any collection he owned. He was about to get the ultimate treasure, the reason he left his warm family 20 years ago to this mysterious oriental kingdom. This was what he came for.

The sun was beginning to rise, shining the first day’s light on one of Cardiff’s most luxurious houses. A young Morgan Lee quietly stepped into his daughter’s room. She was still sound asleep. He walked front and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “Bye sweetie, Pops is going out for a walk. Nice day!” and he walked away, gently closing her door. A teardrop slowly fell off her beautiful face as little Lily heard the sound of her father closing the front door. Since then, Lily sat right in front of the door, waiting for her father to come back and kiss her on the forehead again. 20 years passed, but the wait went on.

The fierce Shanghai sun was blazing over the city, hot enough to let these street stalls cook their food directly on the pavement if they wished. This did not distract Morgan, though, as he dodged and ran through the crowd for lunch. He hurried across those European architecture which he used to stop and admire, and he felt a bit of guilt and uneasiness as he rushed past these breathtaking masterpieces. He searched now for a hint of Hele Street. “Hehao Street, Hemei Street, Heli Street...” It finally caught his eye as he found the sign and sprinted into the alley, filled with the scent of sweat and all kinds of food.

33 Hele Street was a humble two-storey tall building painted with dark green. It had marble sculptures of angels holding different instruments, but the marble was stained and the sculptures were rough and old. “Not the best place to shelter such a treasure.” Morgan thought as he walked in and knocked on the main room’s door. It opened, and he saw an old man with red beard and spectacles. “Welcome, you must be Morgan Lee. I see you came here for this, eh?” the man said as he took out a tiny wooden box. What sat inside was a tiny piece of wood, carved with a mysterious Chinese character. “The rumours of the seal were true! It is right in front of me! I can finally go home!” Morgan yelled with delight, and the old man smiled too. Two alleys away, a masked man sprang into action.

The news was sent to Cardiff, and 20-year-old Lily couldn’t hold back her delight when she heard the discovery of the enchanted seal by her father. Come midnight she suddenly felt sure that the moment she had been waiting for was finally in sight. She packed some simple clothing, a Swiss knife and some bread, then swiftly and silently she climbed out of the window and left the three-story house into the cold Welsh wind.

Morgan was now walking back to his residence, the wooden seal carefully held in his wrinkly hands which he had tried so desperately to clean the dust and sand off. The wooden seal gleamed with a slightly golden colour despite the texture of the seal. Legends said the seal was made of a magnificent wood called Chen Xiang dating back 3000 years. The emperor was taking a

walk in his garden when he saw the handsome tree and was mesmerized with its elegant shape and deep, rich colour. He ordered his servants to make the wood into his royal seal, and whatever was printed upon with this seal has a magnificent but unknown power. As Morgan felt the smooth surface of the seal, he had a faint feeling that he needed to get home. Fast. He turned sharply to the left and went out of sight. 500 metres away, a big man with sunglasses put down his cup of tea and stood up, making a frightening sound with his coin-sized knuckles.

Lily found herself wandering on the crowded Shanghai streets. She tried to find someone who spoke English so she could ask the location of her father. She came to the Welsh Society of Shanghai's headquarters and walked in. 10 minutes later she was running as fast as she can towards the same path her father paced along just a moment ago, bumping into a worker carrying two full baskets of fish. She glanced at the worker and his basket. She saw a pistol laying beneath the fish. Her heart twitched.

Morgan shut the door tightly and quickly put the seal on the dining table. He quickly took out his collection of precious Chinese calligraphy and placed them beside the seal. He took out a plate of red ink and pressed it heavily on the table. He took the seal up when the door broke open as two men walked in holding sharp blades. "Mr Lee, you better stop what you're trying to do right now."

Lily Lee was dumbstruck when she saw her beloved father facing two muscular men.

"Daddy?" she shouted. The men turned around to see this charming and attractive young lady.

"Why, we have someone to hold here, eh?" one of the men said with an eerie smile.

"Lily! No!" Morgan yelped with fear, and with one swift move, he put the seal into the ink and stomped a big stamp on the paper and turned to show the men a bloody red stamp. It shone with a radiating shine, and the men and Lily were all pushed away by a deafening gust of air that brought everyone down onto the ground. Everything went deadly silent.

When Morgan woke up, he recognised the pale green wallpaper with clovers of his room. He was in his Cardiff residence, the seal in his hands. "Welcome home, Morgan." said Lily, sat at the side of the bed making coffee. Just like any old Sunday morning 20 years ago. "You ok Dad? Come out, I'm going to show you something."

Both father and daughter now sat on the wet pasture of Wales, looking at the sun rising bit by bit up the horizon, turning brighter every second. "Next time you try to go to some Far East country and risk being killed by some insane cult, it's better to tell your family so someone knows where you are and when you'll come back."

"The Seal is a mysterious antique, nothing like the antiques I've been fiddling with. If I didn't find it, it might have fallen into wrong hands, and god knows what would have happened then." They looked at each other's brown watery eyes and smiled.

"So when are you going to leave again?"

"I never know, sweetie, no one knows." Morgan replied softly as they both looked as the sun rose, alongside their hearts.



Fiction

Group 4

Shanghai's Shrieking 20s

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Idan-Cummins, Arya – 14

The smell of alcohol filled the smoky room. Ladies, in short, shimmering dresses moved to the soothing rhythm of jazz. The club seemed to be split in two; at one end sat the English, all very smart looking in bowties with cigars in their hands. On the other side, sat the Chinese. A throng of men covered from head to toe in tattoos. They lounged like lions, confident and powerful. In the centre of the crowd sat a small man. He wore a silk robe with three embroidered small monkey heads.

The man rose, stiffening the room. He was escorted to the bar by three men, his silver robe gliding behind him.

“One Gin Rickey.”

Except for the gentle jazz playing, the room fell silent. The bartender's shaking hand placed the drink on the table and he recoiled behind the drinks. The terror could almost be smelt in the room. The man sipped his drink, the chatting and smoking had started again. The night continued, the jazz almost drowned out by the play of mahjong tiles, the smell of alcohol strong in the air.

As the night grew older, more people came in to enjoy the club. One of them a handsome English man. As he strode in, his slick brown hair stayed in place, his shoulders were squared and his smile was confident.

He headed towards the almost empty bar, sitting down next to the silver robed man.

“Du Yuesheng?”

The silver robed man turned towards him, sending whispers through the room. His three escorts stood, their muscles tensing through their jackets.

“I am he,” Du Yuesheng replied. “What business do you have here?”

The Englishman opened his jacket revealing three bags of an earthy brown powder.

“Just as your men and I discussed: three bags imported from India for three hundred grand.”

Du Yuesheng raised his eyebrows. “Yes, three bags of opium.”

He flicked his hand at one of his men who left the room and came back with a black case about a foot long. Du Yuesheng opened the case filled with 300 grand in cash. Around him everyone was silent. The Englishman's eyes glowed. He cautiously put the bags on the counter. While his demeanour was confident his hands trembled when he picked up the case.

“A pleasure doing business with you.”

With that, the Englishman picked up the case and walked out.

~

The sun was out the next morning, shining and bright, just like the Englishman's mood. After a successful business transaction, he was in a jubilant frenzy, eager to celebrate, to spend some of his money.

The liquor store was just down the street. The sign was made of wood and the words “Liquor and Cigars” were written in both English and Chinese in a mustard yellow colour. The Englishman entered the shop, the smell of damp wood filled his nose.

“Hello Richard, would you like the usual?” The sales clerk stood by the cigar cabinet, already opening it.

“Hello Mr Lee. Actually, today, the best you have. Something of best quality. I am celebrating today, you see. I need something a bit fancier.”

“Well, we have some quality Cubans, but if you want to celebrate may I suggest the Cohibas; they are of the best quality and beautifully aromatic, I would say.”

For the first time, Richard noticed how impeccable Mr Lee's English was. He wondered if it was because of his frequent English clients or if he studied the language. He dismissed the thought.

“Sounds wonderful,” Richard replied. “I’ll have two boxes.”

Richard waltzed down the street, holding his boxes in a protective manner. He took a moment to appreciate how close his apartment was to the liquor store. As he walked in a gentle breeze followed him. He hadn’t remembered opening the window. Confused, he walked over to find some misplaced folders thrown behind the table. Just as he bent to pick them up, the heavy glass of a champagne bottle hammered into his head. Richard’s body slammed into the blue tiled floor, creating a loud thump. Two men in suits watched his chest rise and fall as they stood over his quite limp body.

The two men rampaged his house, pulling out old telegraphs and receipts. The house was a total pigsty. Richard’s eyes started to flutter. He was still on the cold floor. His eyesight was blurry but he could make out two pairs of brown leather shoes walking towards him.

“Rise and shine, Richard.”

One of the pair of shoes’ owners bent down to speak to him, his brown moustache creating shadows on his pale skin. Richard started to get up, the back of his head pulsating, each throb felt like a rock being thrown at his skull. With great effort, he lifted his sore body into a chair helped by the two suited men.

“We know who you are, Richard,” the moustachioed man said.

“Who the hell are you?” Richard slurred his words, his brain still foggy.

The two men smirked. “I am Jack Williams and this is my colleague Edward Taylor. We work for MI-6 or you may know us as the Secret Intelligence Society.”

Richard’s brain was racing as the information settled in his mind.

“What in the bloody hell do you want from me? What are you doing in my bloody apartment for heaven’s sake? I haven’t done anything. I am a simple man. Please find your business elsewhere.”

Mr Williams turned a crimson shade of red, his nostril slightly flaring as he took deep breaths, trying his hardest to remain calm.

“Look, Richard cut the bull; we all know the little business that you have here, the opium, the women, the alcohol. We also know your connections in India and that you deal with Du Yusheng, the head gangster of Shanghai. We have all the evidence to prove it so cut the innocent act. You’re screwed and there is no point in trying to deny it.”

It was as if a tornado had ripped through Richard’s mind. They knew his business, his secrets, his guilty pleasures. Panic crawled through Richard’s body like a snake. Questions filled his brain, so many questions, yet he couldn’t speak. Every time he opened his mouth his words would be sucked down his throat like a vacuum sucking up the dust in an old basement.

The two suited men sat, their faces now expressionless, they waited for a response from Richard but he just sat there. Finally, Mr Taylor spoke.

“Because of all your businesses, the drugs, women, etcetera, we have to arrest you. Deport you from Shanghai, back to Britain really. There you will be arrested, life sentence. What you are doing is criminal behaviour and the British Empire will not stand one of our own so involved in this filth.”

Richard sat and processed this, he looked as if his life was slowly draining from his eyes. In many senses it was. He would be arrested, rotting in jail, for the rest of his life. No family, no friends, but most importantly no booze, no drugs and not the woody taste of his sweet cigars.

“There must be something I can do, something I can pay. Please. I beg of you,” Richard pleaded in a surprisingly emotionless tone.

“There is nothing you can pay,” Mr Taylor answered hastily. “However, there is one thing you can do.”

“What? Please? I’ll do anything.”

Edward Taylor seemed to roll his eyes at that comment. Jack nudged him lightly and continued.

“So, as you’re probably aware the British and the communists aren’t the best of friends. In fact, they’re a problem and we’d like to ‘minimise’ this problem.”

Richard’s head was still throbbing, he held it in his hands looking fed up.

“What does this have to do with me?” he asked, frightened to hear the answer.

"You have connections." Edward pointed to a piece of paper with the name Du Yuesheng scribbled on it.

"We suggest that you make use of those connections to help us with the Commies. They are meeting on the twelfth of April, you might want to spread the word if you don't want to spend your life rotten in a rusty cell."

Richard's fists tightened.

"You want me to get Du Yusheng, head of the gangsters to what ...? Attack the communists? Are you out of your mind? That's what you are asking me? To deal with potentially the most dangerous guy in Shanghai, so he can attack the communists? Maybe I am a criminal but I will not risk my life as well as be the reason for an attack on other men."

By now he was standing up pounding his fists on the table. The calm expressions of the suited men fueling his anger more and more.

"It's either that or you spend the entirety of your life rotting in a cell living on baked beans on soggy toast."

Richard raked his hands through his hair; he pressed his temples until they turned bright pink. He stood like that for a few minutes before sitting back down.

"I'll do it. Bloody hell, I'll do it."

~

The next few days were a living hell for Richard. Trying to organise a meeting with Du Yuesheng without any "trade" was not an easy task.

It was on a warm Shanghai night, the streets singing gentle jazz. Richard entered the club: sequined dresses, smoke and alcohol. Normally this would be one of Richard's favourite sights but that night he dreaded it. He headed deeper and deeper into the club until three small monkey heads caught his eye, they were on a blue robe this time, on a man sitting in a dark musty corner of the club. Du Yuesheng. Richard approached him, his heart beating out of his chest.

"Hello, Mr Yuesheng."

His usual sense of charm was missing.

"I have some news for you if you are willing to listen."

Du tensed for a moment, his eyes sparkled, if it wasn't for the fear blinding Richard, it would be obvious he wanted to know.

"What about?"

"The communists. They want to close down the bars and clubs. They know what goes on down here: the women, the drugs, foreigners dealing and receiving. They don't like it. They claim it's not the communist way. So they plan to shut down all ...," he grasped for words, "social facilities."

Du Yuesheng's remained calm, worrying Richard. He took a puff from his cigar and asked, "From whom have you heard this information?"

It seemed to Richard as if the room had been set on fire. He was sweating uncontrollably, breathing heavily.

"A lady I have been seeing. I shall not mention her name as she is married. But her husband works for the Consulate, a Mr Williams, I believe. She told me about the communists, she says her husband won't stop talking about the matter."

Richard gulped, hoping his lie was convincing enough, though he stopped himself from smirking when he mentioned Mr. William's wife. His nerves killing him, the silence letting him think of everything that could go wrong. Du YueSheng said nothing, he put the tips of his long fingers together. His sapphire blue ring matched his silky blue robe.

"They're meeting on the twelfth of April at the local hall down the street," Richard continued, eager to get the information out. "Mr Yuesheng, they know about your business; by closing down all the bars all the pubs your business will drown. No more dealings, no more women, no more alcohol. The communists, they hate it all, they will do everything they can to shut it all down, everything."

"I understand." Du Yuesheng's voice was emotionless. "April twelfth, you say?"

"Yessir." Richard's voice was trembling.

"I'll see what my men can do." Du Yuesheng stood up, he was a short man but his power was tall. He walked away, only the eyes of the monkeys looking back at Richard.

~

It was the twelfth of April. Richard hadn't heard from Du Yuesheng since they discussed the issue. The suspense kept Richard from sleeping. The bags under his eyes were the same sapphire blue as the robe Du wore when they met. Richard was as white and almost as thin as a sheet of paper. The twelfth of April was the date which decided his fate. Whether he would rot in jail or be free. Either way, his life would never be the same. He would either be as good as dead or free but secretly responsible for the death of hundreds.

Richard walked up to the hall. Each step unsteady. Each step closer to his destiny. Of course, he wasn't going to be part of the fight, he was just there to observe what would happen if anything would happen.

The communists were inside just as Jack Williams had said. It was as if they were at a lecture of some sort. One man standing, talking. The man was tall; his clothes were a bright red. The more he spoke the more his round face started to match his clothes.

Richard spoke Mandarin fluently. He had a facility with languages in general. Yet standing outside the hall, he could only make out so much, through the thick ancient windows and the sound of his own heartbeat. Here and there he could hear talk of embarrassment and disloyalty and taking action. Richard started to think that perhaps his lies were turning out to be true. Before he could finish the thought he was disturbed by a piercing crash. Richard turned to the window to find hundreds of men all in black robes swarming the hall. Surprise flooded Richard's brain, soon followed by a wave of relief. His deal was done. He was a free man, well as free as could be.

Even though Richard knew his deal was over with, he couldn't help but watch the chaos in the room. The fighting had begun; the gangsters had come in with guns and knives and ropes. They were violent and ruthless, beating and torturing the communists who were mostly unarmed. The shouts and swearing of the men echoed throughout the hall. The smell of smoke and blood flowed down the street as the fighting continued. It was obvious that the communists were the minority in the situation, yet they kept fighting.

The massacre was taken to the streets eventually. For days and days, the bloodbath continued. Blood and sweat staining the grey pavement. Ropes tying people to the lampposts. The shouts and screaming never ending. Richard could hear the blood-curdling screams of people from his living room, where he sat smoking his Cohiba cigar with a copy of that day's newspaper in his hand. The headline reading: "ALL CAPTIVES SLAIN." He swallowed his gin with a twist of guilt and savoured the bittersweet taste of his freedom. At that moment, Richard knew his work had been done.

Consumption of Intellect

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Pang, Elina – 15

Consumption of intellect. Deprivation of daylight.

Clashes of glinting tall cups claiming their existences. Swishing of bubbling amber liquid igniting its flames down the railway of throats, burning away senses.

Twitching convulsions and skittering color patches of dark coattails and fiery dresses. Flitting and entangled movements.

Waiters with needled smiles.

White colored men in fine suits and shiny shoes, smirking in the the pleasures of indulgence.

Yellow colored women in sleek heels and slim dresses, smiling between pickering peeks of meticulous interrogation.

There and about, the cackling sound of rushing footsteps and speeding whirls of crowding people rocked every vein of sensation. Warm exchanges of mingled breaths, hooked their entwining fingers in luscious whirls of smoke.

Squirming fiddles of clothes. Flirting games and finalizing of prey. Excited shrieks of laughter.

Disgusting. He thought, forcing a similar smile onto his lips, speaking words of economy, work and business. The ever common topic in Shanghai.

Without money, those masked monsters with civilized suits will trample out your every last strip of sanctity and soul.

Without money, those plundering cats with seductive figures won't cast you a second glance.

Without wealth and a calculating mind, you can't survive in Shanghai.

How filthy of himself to stay in this place, stinking from the metallic smell of all of this; while staining the angel of his secret soul, by thinking of her in this kind of place! Miss Zhou, with her delicately soft Asian features, consoling blue uniform dress of a student, intelligence from the flying pages of books and most of all...the firm determination, burning with blooming passion and dreams, out of his reach long ago.

Oh how he missed them! The dreams, youth and passions! How he adored those dark brown eyes of hers! Everything he lost and in-searching for are replaced in those shining pupils, illuminating the crumbling hollows of his heart.

Those youthful, lovely eyes, I would love to protect them. I would like to claim them as mine, crowning their owner with the name of my wife. With my very last name. I would like those eyes to shine with happiness or tears, every emotions shining for me....

... no, that will ruin everything! I will, no, I want to protect them and guide them away from the striking marks and bared fangs of society. I will earn more money in places like this to provide her a better shelter, so comfortable that she won't need to walk out anymore. She would be safe under my arms. After she gets a bit older, I will propose to her, and she will be my wife. She will be safe, her eyes will be safe, clean and youthful away from the stressing reality outside.

"How very nice to meet you, Mr Liu." A white colored man walked forward, shaking my hand. "Impressive. A young man of China to achieve such progress in such short time in the great trial of business! I wonder....." My hands shook back carelessly, seeing the carefully wrapped up loathing in his blue eyes, straining out a reflection of a Chinese man newly in his middle-ages, slight wrinkles rippling on his forehead.

Every act, calculated with unfaithful purposes.

"...Mr Liu, you look rather distracted. Well, let me introduce you to a charming beauty. She will definitely gain your attention. Skak, this is Mr Liu, a successful young merchant of China." As I regained my senses, I looked up, and found myself meeting gazes with a pair of greens. Her eyes are shielded by a hard film of secluded bareness. Exotically clean, no currents of emotions seen, staring back at me with my very own face mirrored inside.

"So you're my new customer." I jumped at her blunt, almost vulgar words, contrasting to her oddly clean eyes. "What do you want me to do for you, in bed." In just some kind of way, I almost guessed that she was just trying to get this over with quickly, judging by her bluntly official tone in flat statements. That was quite strange, as with her beautifully blended features with a striking mixture of sharpness – black hair and green eyes, she could have easily entangled a man of ample background and squashed the last money out of him.

Beautiful they are, her eyes, but they give me shivers. Those green eyes of hers, hard from the knowledge gained under the running blades of reality, contrasting with her youthful sculpt of pale ivory. Robotically emotionless, they gave in, solely for the means to survive.

"She's interesting, isn't she? She's a rare one, not only a beautiful face. Unlike the other women here, she isn't looking for a husband, fashionable jewels or a passport. Regardless of our looks and backgrounds, she just treats all males coming here all the same. Takes the money, and gets out. So you can't really own her. She makes it clear that it is just business, we can't own her and she will never squabble or ask for more. But the most exciting part," His light brown whiskers twitched, jumping from his cackles of laughter, "... is that she, a woman, wants a job! The kind of job for a man! On the nights that I slept with her, I could see the bruises on her skin, amusing, but sadly ruins the soothing harmony of pallid skin. But there's also advantages, as she had trained a lot, it gets increasingly difficult for her to get tired in bed."

I looked at her. She was still there. She looked as if she didn't hear, nor sense the piercing words aimed at her, but her eyes...

Darkness, seemed to glow inside them.

As time dragged its feet, I was led to the streets by the screaming pain of my swimming mind and bubbling urge to throw up. I felt drunken drowsiness as it weighted down on my fighting eyelids, as I stumbled my way to some sort of dark alley, so I could quietly throw up without being noticed. But something in the air jerked me back to my senses. I stared into the consuming darkness around the corner, my muscles tensed and pupils dilated at the sight of the lifeless leather shoes of the white man I saw the night before, patches of red blooming on his suit. Several limbs that belonged to his male assistants, drooped lifelessly to the pit of death .

Purple high heels, clicking their tongues; a trail of dark red kisses implanted on the ground .My own terrified face, compressed to those cleanly dull pupils, burn into sight. The accepting bareness of green, the blunt reflection of aching reality. The revealing translation of my own humble cowardice.

I hate those eyes.

The sky's a frothy gray, with its half-lidded eyes a drowsy blur, turbid from the desires unyielded. With damp expressions and dim-colored suits buttoned up to stiff collars and strangling ties, crowds of people swarm about like the raging waves of Yangtze River Delta. The overlapping scratching of leather shoes form a blur of shadows, giving out a curious sense of dullness. Like well polished machinery, stiff and lifeless.

I quicken my pace, as well as my breath, as I walked nearer to Miss Zhou's school. Today, I will ask her, Zhou Ning (周寧) 's, hand in marriage. My fluttering heartbeat froze to a stop. I recognized them, those revealing green eyes that will strip me down to my original skin of filth and depth of materialistic desires. Wearing ragged clothes in loose ripples of wrinkles, she now beheld a handsome binary between man and woman. Her hair was cut to shoulder-length, messily tangled, like a wild nest unkempt. They fall in dark curls on her sharply engraved features, with a boyish cap clinging loosely to them. But this time, her eyes loosened their film of hardness, softening into a lovingly tender gaze as they fixed intense on Zhou Ning's brown ones, who was patiently teaching her how to read and write. They muttered about something, activating my memory of blissful summer hums of buzzing bees and laughed together.

My eyes widen as a thought of uneasiness quivered inside me. I spat curses under the edges of my gritted teeth. Those haunting eyes of green, to my horror, were reflecting the same love and longing of mine, to my Zhou Ning.

I hired a man named Mr Zhang, an infamous chinese cartoonist and concurrent detective who always criticized the racial mistreatment of the chinese in Shanghai, with a certain lasting interest in that green-eyed wretch. After an rewarding offer of jingling coins, I was given the background details of the women of hellish green eyes and spied on her whenever she was near my flower, Zhou Ning.

That horrid woman, who was introduced as Skak that night, was named Suozana Lavon. The parents of her mother are mixed hybrids of foreign and chinese while her father is an unlicensed Russian refugee. She learnt fighting skills from street fighting experiences, domestic violence, and from a Russian refugee as her teacher (who was once a retired soldier, now having a homosexual affair with a Japanese officer, Hakanama Takgasho). She had worked before as a bar dancer/singer, prostitute, newspaper kid, thief, gang fighter and now trying to apply to be a driver, or any job with a stable income.

I cast a glance at this thin figure of a man beside me and whisper some “thrilling” suggestions. His eyes squinting from lustful excitement, he trembled in unspeakable fulfillment of the probable chances of conquering and taming a mixed beauty with almost foreign features, gaining a queer national pride and confidence of doing, or thinking so.

Acidic pleasure lined the corner of my lips, coiling them into a predominate snarl . Yet sadly, my joy was short lived as I stared at the pathetic heap of blood and bruises named Mr Zhang in front of me days later, knowing I'd have to spend a sum to recover him to shape.

The attacking Japanese, the swarming mess of communists and the migration of foreign whites. Bombs struck, guns hit and shrilling screams echoed. The frosting darkness engulfed the hollows inside me. Grasping the bundles of gold and silver that may provide me a considerable life after the migrating escape, I rushed to the fumbling, panicking crowd of people, in searching for Zhou Ning with her clean, youthful eyes.

Where's she?

Where are those eyes?!

There's a shadow, fighting against the meddling blur of ragged screaming people and rushing heat of shooting guns, reaching towards me.

Closer.

Closer .

My eyes met with a pair of green, those I hated for a time so long. Those knotted brows of hers unwound slightly at the sight of my bulking package of silver and my troubled expression. Anxious, my hands clinging to a tighter grasp on the package, avoiding the probable sudden attack of her snatching claws.

“I heard ya call.” Those green eyes were calm with a look of liquid sorrow and hidden self loathing. With wind hurling into my face, I found Zhou Ning resting in the arch of my arms.

“ Go to LingQiao District, someone will help ya both to get out of Shanghai. He shall be a man that wears a Zhongshan suit and a red scarf. Mr Zhang had joined the communist party. He' ad agreed to provide help.” I caught a glimpse at the purple red welts imprinted on her neck. At the next moment, I was violently lunged forward, her eyes fixed into mine with a expression complex, with one of her hands grasping firm tight on my collar. “Take good care of her.” After a sullen tremble, hardly distinguishable, her lips parted and out drifted a rasping whisper, jagged and broken at its cackling edges.

Then suddenly, the grip was loosened, and she was lost to the rumbling waves.

My fingers ran down to straighten up my collar, and peered down to the sinking heights of Zhou Ning's enfolded knees. Her head hanging limply on the curve of her porcelain neck. Her blue modest petals were reduced to a crumpled mess of constriction. Her knees, greeted by the adorning powder of staining dust, were wobbly, fragile without the frame of youthful determination. Stained by agonizing blankness, Zhou Ning's gaze never left, the poisoned spot of that green eyed woman was washed away with a saddened smile, leaving Zhou Ning in my care.

I stared at her, silent, relishing the fresh peels of hollow wounds in my soul. I reached out a hand and quickly withdrew. The youth. The dreams. The rush of warmth wrapped between fingertips. I could no longer find them. Nothing was left but the slick dampness of a similar cold touch of skin, crawling back to my own veins.

Tridents and Foxglove

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Zamek, Rachamim – 15

“Boring, boring, boring,” Lee repeated as he threw the newspaper on the floor. Across the messy, room sat Wei, slowly folding his newspaper in half.

“What are you doing?” Wei asked annoyed.

“Getting to the good stuff,” Lee said in an obvious tone.

“And what would that be?”

“The recently deceased, in addition to recent major crimes. Frankly, the rest of these things are a waste of time.”

“The only thing wasting time here is you,” Wei chastised. “How long has it been since you solved a case?”

“Six weeks, two days, five hours and ...,” Lee paused for a moment as if he was waiting for something. The room was silent, but to Lee, it was full of noise. The rustle of paper on the floor, Wei’s breathing. With the sound of a clock, Lee found what he was listening for and continued, “... five hours and twenty-seven minutes.”

“Very impressive, Lee; however, I do think you should try and find a case to get you out of this hole.”

“It very well may be a hole but it is my hole. You talk about cases like they appear out of mid-air,” Lee’s comment was interrupted with a knock at the door. Wei looked to Lee and, chuckled, “Apparently they do.”

Lee jumped out of his chair and flung door open. Standing there was a frightened old lady with her fist raised as if knocking. Her clothes were red silk and exotic fabrics, her neck and hands covered in jewelry.

“May I come in?” the lady asked.

“Please do,” Lee said opening the door wider to present his crypt of a home. The old lady entered and sat, Lee began studying her.

“Umm, Madam ...”

“Chen,” she finished.

“Why come to the office, or dungeon, that is the Lee Wei Personal Investigators?”

Madam Chen began to speak but Lee interrupted.

“Your husband, he’s been murdered.”

“How did you know?” Madam Chen gasped.

“Because of your ring. You keep rubbing the ring, most likely your wedding ring. So it regards your husband. Usually, it is suspicion of an affair but when that happens women slowly pull it off and then put it back on. You, on the other hand, hold it close to your heart. You’ve also been crying, as your makeup is smeared.”

Madam Chen looked to Wei to try and ease the awkwardness.

“Have we met?”

“No, I don’t believe we have. What was your husband’s name? When did he die?”

“His name was Wang Qiang and he died, well the police found him on the sixth of June.”

Lee walked across the room to a cabinet and removed a file labeled ‘June 7th’. Inside were newspaper clippings and scribbled notes. Lee pulled out a clipping.

“It says here in his obituary that he died from a heart attack,” said Lee with a slight smile on his face.

“Which is why I’m hiring you two.”

“Madam Chen, is there anyone who would want to hurt you husband?” Wei asked.

Madam Chen gazed out the toward Old Shanghai’s port, then back to Wei.

“No, I don’t know anybody who would want to hurt my husband.”

Lee spoke up, "Thank you Madam. That's all we'll need. We will be charging our standard rate, now I do think you should be getting home."

As madam Chen left the office, she stopped and took one last look at the two investigators.

~

"I think we should take this case," said Lee excitedly.

"There's no case," said Wei seriously.

"Her husband died of a heart attack."

"You didn't realize that she was lying. She deliberately avoided eye contact with you. She needs our help."

"No, what she needs is closure."

"We can provide that whether or not he was murdered."

"We need more information on how he died."

"To the police station!" Lee exclaimed.

Lee shot through the door almost breaking it off its hinges and the two climbed into a broken rickshaw. An old man holding onto long metal poles began to run. Pulling the cart forward. Around the pair was the hustle and bustle of the old city. Towering over them were buildings of varying sizes, their architecture ranging from an era long ago to the coming age of industry. Around the city once ran a defensive wall now but a shadow of time. To the east was the city's port filled with ships carrying raw materials and exotic cargo.

The pair arrived at the police station and as they walked up the stairs, Wei began pleading not to enter. "Lee I don't think we should go in there."

"Why is that?" Lee asked.

"Because the last time we went in there we almost got arrested for interfering in an investigation."

"As you said, there is no case here, so how could we interfere with this one?" Lee said as they walked through the doors and were greeted with stern looks.

"Nice to see you guys again," Lee yelled as they walked defiantly towards the front desk.

"What do you want, Lee?" Officer Zhang asked.

"I want access to Wang Qiang's case file," Lee demanded.

"Wang Qiang doesn't have a case file. He died of a heart attack," Zhang said, as he handed a file to another officer.

The world seemed to still as Lee walked around the crowded room absorbing the smell of musty pages, half eaten food and the slightest tinge of gunpowder wafting from the officers. Lee continued to walk around the room looking over officers' shoulders reading files and repeating to himself, "Boring, boring, boring." He returned to where he was standing. Looked at Zhang's face, and the world started to move again.

Zhang stood there with arms crossed and said, "He's doing it again."

"Sorry Officer Zhang but you are lying to me," Lee said.

"Excuse me," Zhang said offended.

"Why does everybody say that after they lie?" Lee asked.

"I think we should go," Wei said.

"How did you know Qiang died of a heart attack? You would only know that if there was a file. Or you were the officer who found him. Or you are close to the officer who was there."

Zhang took a deep sigh, leaned in close to Lee and whispered, "Listen Lee, this is bigger than you. Stay out of this one."

"I think the press would have a huge interest in what is going on here, don't you think?" Lee challenged.

“OK, fine. Meet me in the back in five minutes.”

“Thank you, Officer Zhang.”

As Officer Zhang walked away Lee turned to the front door with Wei following, lecturing. “If Zhang says this is too big, then it's too big. This may be very dangerous.”

“Danger is my middle name.”

“No, it's not. You don't even have a middle name.”

Wei and Lee walked around the concrete building to find Zhang looking around and fidgeting with a file. Lee and Wei had never seen him nervous like this before.

“Let's just get this over with,” Zhang said as he handed the file to Lee. Lee opened with curiosity and excitement.

“Wang Qiang doesn't have a file but he is a part of one, the Trident File. It started a year ago a very wealthy man named Li Xiu Ying died on June 6th from a heart attack. He had a trident symbol carved into his back. Fourteen days later on June 20th another rich man named Liu Min also died of a heart attack, with a trident carved in his back. Then the deaths stopped ...” Zhang was explaining when Lee interrupted.

“The deaths stopped until they started again. June sixth, Wang Qiang, a wealthy man, dies of heart attack, with, a no let me guess, a trident carved into his back.” Lee looked up from the file frightened turned to Wei then to Zhang. He took a step back and said, “We are dealing with a serial killer.”

Wei held his head in his hands breathing heavily. He was truly scared. Lee looked to Zhang and saw his fearful eyes that never rested on a single point.

“Zhang, can I keep this?” Lee asked calmly.

“Yeah it's a copy; now get out of here,” Zhang ordered.

Lee hid the file in his coat and grabbed Wei by his collar, urging him to get going.

Lee eventually dragged Wei into another rickshaw and headed back to the office.

“Wei, I think you should stay out of this one,” Lee urged.

“Why?” Wei asked.

“The significance that the dates June sixth and twentieth hold. I believe it may compromise your judgment.”

“The only thing that could compromise my judgment is the fear that ...,” Wei said then continued in a whisper, “... fear that there's a serial killer in Old Shanghai.”

“You used to be a street rat in your teens. After what you have seen that would not scare you, especially because you do not fit the pattern of a wealthy businessman. However the date June sixth, the day a major accident took place where you used to work and injured your wife, and fourteen days later, on June twentieth, she died. Such events will be important to the investigation but may hurt you in the process,” Lee explained.

“I promise I'll be fine, let's just catch this guy.”

For fourteen days, Wei and Lee reviewed all the clues they had, each day drawing closer to the next inevitable death. Wei and Lee sat and paced around the office, staring at a wall filled with pictures and clippings, some connected by lengths of string.

“Listen Lee I have to go out for a bit. My wife ...,” Wei's explanation was finished by Lee.

“Your wife died on this day three years ago; yes I understand go and pay your respects and please do come back, I need your help.”

“Do not worry friend I will be back,” Wei assured him as he walked out the door.

Lee let out a deep sigh and set back to his work.

Hours later Wei arrived back at the office to find Lee slumped on the floor lying on top of his files asleep.

"Digoxin, Digoxin!" Lee's cries startled Wei.

"Care to let me in on this."

"Digoxin a chemical isolated from foxglove, a flower with a beautiful shade of purple. In excess Digoxin can cause a heart attack. Most likely dispensed through injection."

"Why didn't the victims cry out for help?" Wei asked.

"The attacker knocked them out using chloroform. You can see evidence of it from the bruising around the mouth. They were most likely injected with the digoxin while unconscious. The consistent trident symbol was also carved into their backs while they were unconscious. They were then dumped back on the street from where they were picked up," Lee explained.

"How do you know it was digoxin?"

"The most recent victim, Wang Qiang, the police took more effort to document his death. They took pictures of him at the crime scene. What they did not realize was an area on his chest was covered in thicker than normal veins, a symptom of digoxin poisoning."

"Well, that certainly must narrow it down."

"Yes, it does. Wait a minute how long were you gone?"

"Five hours," Wei said very nonchalantly.

"Five hours! What took you so long? Your wife's grave is right around the corner," Lee said astonished.

"My wife loved a specific type of rare flower. I thought it would be fitting to put on her grave," Wei explained.

"What type of flower?" Lee asked. Wei was about to answer when the phone rang. Wei rushed to the phone to stop the ringing from driving Lee crazy as it's done in the past. Wei held the phone to his head and then immediately dropped it in fear.

"There's been another murder!"

"Well, that does fit the pattern. We were too late," Lee said as he put his hand to his face, he then looked up with new determination.

"This latest death might be the final clue we need to catch this man."

When Wei and Lee arrived on scene it was surrounded by the press who demanded answers. Police stood lined up holding back the crowd. The officers conducting the investigation were distracted by the roar of the people and the flash of the press cameras. Lee and Wei pushed through the crowd to see Zhang.

"You two get in here," Zhang urged Wei and Lee. Zhang lead them into a messy building littered with tools and parts. Everything smelled of oil and was covered in grease.

"It seems the police could not keep this story hidden for long," Wei said.

"Apparently we had a major leak. The entire file was dropped on a reporter's desk this morning," Zhang complained.

"Well, it wasn't us," Lee counterer.

"We eventually got the file back. It looked as if someone spent the time to make an exact handwritten copy."

"Interesting. Well, let's see the body, Zhang," Lee said. Zhang lead them to a body covered by a large sheet. Lee kneeled down and lifted the tarp slightly off the body. Around his mouth was subtle bruising. Lee continued to pull the sheet off of the victim and found, he was wearing a gray jumpsuit covered in dirt and oil.

"A man whose body is found in a mechanics shop wearing, old dirty clothing. Does he seem like a rich man?" Lee asked as he looked to Wei.

"I wouldn't think so," Wei answered.

"So it's not part of the trident case," Lee said hopefully.

"One way to be sure Zhang. You two lift him up by his arms," Lee demanded. Zhang and Wei grabbed the man and pulled him up as if he were sitting upright. Lee unbuttoned his jumpsuit, Lee touched his chest, and found the veins in that area were stiff. He continued to undress the top half of the man's body and finding a trident symbol carved into his back. Lee looked up with a sigh.

"He is diverging from the pattern," Lee said with curiosity.

"Is it possible it's a copycat attack?" Zhang asked.

"People only found out about this today. Collecting all the necessary materials needed to do this would take time. Time someone who just gained interest would not have, Only the murder could do this one."

"I'll give you the file when we're done here, but right now you need to go. The press looking right at us," Zhang explained.

Lee fell back in his chair, his hands together against his face as he looked at his newly decorated wall of dead people.

"Li Xiu Ying, Liu Min, and Wang Qiang," Lee said as he pointed to each picture.

"All of them died the same way. Before Wang Jun died the only other connection was that they were rich men."

"But the pattern changes. Why?" Wei asked.

"I do not know." As Lee spoke there was a knock at the door.

"Well, maybe she will know," Lee sighed as he opened the door to Madam Chen.

"When did you call her?" Wei asked.

"This morning while you were out. I needed more information. Now please, Madam; come in," Lee answered.

"Madam Chen do you recognize any of these men?" Lee asked.

"Yes, they all used to work at the Harbor Company with my husband," Madam Chen answered.

"That's where I know you from, Mr. Wei. You used to be a laborer who worked there. Your wife was my florist she would bring me the most beautiful flowers."

"Are you ready to tell us why someone would want to hurt your husband?" Lee asked.

"My husband did something bad with his associates. He burned one of his ships to collect the insurance when the company was near bankruptcy. Sadly it also burned a passenger ship destroying the company. After that they all split up," Madam Chen explained.

Lee turned to Wei. "That was the accident that injured and eventually killed your wife." Lee stood up and began to walk towards Wei.

"The dates of your wife's injury and death align with the murders of the four people responsible for her death. Digoxin, the chemical that was used to kill these men was from the flower foxglove. Foxglove! The very plant I found on her grave today while you were out presumably mourning. Her grave is just a short walk away from here not five hours away. Five hours gives you enough time to visit your wife's grave and kill the most recent victim."

"Are you accusing me of murder?" Wei said in an offended tone.

"No, *murders*. The trident symbol carved into their backs was the logo of the Harbor Company you used to work for. It was a calling card used to strike fear into the coming victims and yet none of them noticed, except for me."

"This is outrageous," Wei said as he slowly walked towards the door.

"Zhang!" Lee yelled and, Zhang burst through the door to grab Wei.

"While you were out for those five hours my suspicions were getting to me. I went to your wife's old workplace and found these."

Lee then revealed a couple of syringes and a rag that didn't look suspicious but smelled awful.

"Chloroform on this rag and syringes used to inject the Digoxin. Officer Zhang, please arrest Wei. I have the evidence but yet no motive. Hence why Madam Chen is here to confirm my suspicions to me, Zhang, and his superior officer."

Zhang and his boss cuffed Wei's hands behind his back, and started walking him out.

"But one question was left, chloroform an anesthetic used in hospitals. Where did you get it?" Lee asked.

"That's the thing, Lee, I knew you would eventually find out, but I wanted to leave one last mystery."

"No, the true mystery is how could a murder be my best friend, for all these years, and never noticed."

Old Shanghai

Cheung Chuk Shan College, Li, Jerry – 14

I stepped into a mysterious street with the name Shanghai Street. There was absolute silence in the street, with rubbish and fallen leaves. The wind swirled up the leaves and made the street bleaker. With no sound and no sense of breath, I carefully stumbled, avoiding making any sound that will break the peace.

A sound was getting louder while I was walking. Was it from the quarrel between a couple? Or was it a sound of an antique musical instrument? Neither. As soon as I hobbled, the voice became clearer. It was the grin and laughter of a group of people.

In front of me stood a grand and hold nightclub. There were two men wearing formal tidy suits that welcomed me enthusiastically. I entered. There were: golden tables, golden chairs, golden tights, with lots of people gathering wearing luxurious and extravagant clothes. Such a feast for the eyes. There were slot machines, which I liked the most. I instinctively walked towards them and made my first attempt. The excited I experienced was amazing.

“Thank you for your support sir,” the waiter served me politely.

I ordered a bottle of water and a piece of cake.

“Here you go. Please enjoy and it costs \$810,”

I put down a 1000 dollar note and left.

I went on my journey. This time I went to a factory. The noise of the machines was annoying. It was a totally different picture comparing this to the nightclub. With people grumbling it seemed like Hell.

“Here comes your dinner!” A man exclaimed.

All the workers queued and got their precious supper, which was only a piece of bread. But expectantly there was no joy shown on their faces. They quickly swallowed the food and continued their chores.

“What are you doing kid? It’s not a place for you. Get out! The man ordered

I was expelled from the factory and left this place with blood, sweat and

Tears. Shanghai a city of both heaven and hell.

Snowflakes

Chinese International School, Lo, Curtis – 15

The wintry wind passes through winding roads and quiet towns, whistling a requiem to the most unfortunate ones it may concern. Galloping alongside this wind, is a lone rider.

Upon an auburn steed he rides through towns and villages, stopping for nothing and no one, save for hay for the horse, and directions for the rider. After which, he rides again. His garb, once those of the intellectual aristocrat, now the rags of a lonesome vagabond. His coat faded and patched, his straw hat in tatters. His face was flimsily shielded from the cold with a black cloth, so that all others could see was a pair of black eyes on a pale canvas, depthless abysses ridden with sorrow and loss, plagued by distress and exhausted with running, filled with an insatiable desire to fulfil an impossible mission.

And so the man rode, and rode, and rode. The frigid gales flailing his Manchurian braid this way and that, numbing his fingers, gripped tightly around the reins of his horse. His gallop becomes a canter, and a canter becomes a trot, as the horse comes to a halt outside the local tavern.

It is the middle of Chunjie, the coldest season of the year, the trees have withered and the crops sown. People retreat to seek warmth in the fires of their homes, or at the bottom of beer glasses. The streets are empty save for the couple of men rushing home with fresh firewood, their silhouettes bulging from layers upon layers of coats upon coats.

The man dismounts, leading his mount to the stable before pushing open the wooden door to the tavern, allowing the frigid winds to invade its warmth, the cackles of the wind clashing with the yawping and hollering of the tavern's inhabitants. Drunkards and mopers, wenches and maidens, gathered in the solace of a burning fire.

The man walked straight to the bartender, ignoring the demeaning glances, glares, stares and scoffs from ruffians looking for a fight.

"Hello sir! What can I do you for on this... chilly... winter day?", asks the bartender, a cheery man, with scraggly facial covering rosy cheeks.

"Just directions to the next town, bartender.", replied the man, taking nervous glances at the door every three seconds.

"Not even a sip, then? You won't find better whiskey ten miles in any direction.", pushed the bartender.

The man's eyes were fixed on the door.

The bartender sighed, "Aye, alright. You'll want take the main road, paved and patrolled. Guaranteed, no bandits. That will take you straight to Shanghai."

"Or you can take the forest path...", said a drunkard to the man's left, beard and collar drowned in ale. "Cut... cut through the woods..."

The bartender explained, "Aye, there's that. But it's much too dangerous, rumours of bandits and ghosts plague those trees. And besides, the winding path is no where fit for a horse."

"... But it is quicker..."

And with the whistling wind cackling through the half open door, the man was gone.

~

As mount and rider sped through the snow-shrouded trees, wind-weathered hooves drummed against the snow, kicking up showers of powder. The man had resumed his journey, his legs and arms tucked tight against his horse, his body arched and his eyes squinting to avoid the falling snow. The weather had grown colder once again, the wind merciless against all who dare to stand in its path, a category which unfortunately included the man. His fingers were painfully cold, pale and frozen like the icicles that grew on the trees. Every inch of his skin left bare was left in a painful purgatory between the numbness of frostbite and the stinging whip of the wind. But despite the pain, the man's grip grew ever tighter upon the reins. The path winded this way and that, with trees and snow alike blocking much of the man's vision, but still the man ushered his mount to greater and greater speeds, intent on reaching his next destination, and anxious to distance himself from whatever was behind him.

As the man rode faster and faster, and farther and farther from his past, and pain and numbness spreading more and more across his body, he reminded himself of the very reason he had set out on such a perilous journey, a cause that would have warranted the wind's cruel whip as a worthy sacrifice, a choice wherein the alternative could somehow be worse than the heartless torture of the winter cold.

He remembered his mother's last smile as she returned to the earth in a cradle of wood.

He remembered his best friends tears, as he clutched his final heartbeats, sent into the abyss by a mugger's bullet.

He remembered Shue Hua, his beloved wife, lulled by miscarriage into imperturbable peace.

He remembered their faces of unconsolable terror and endless pain, the life and hope leaking through their pupils, and the breath from their mouths turned to air, their legs twitching and their fingers stiff. Accompanied into the afterlife by the pain of drawn-out heart disease, an unexpected bullet, or torturous miscarriage. Ushered into the unknown by a fear of the very unknown.

Most vividly, he remembered the unnamed man, cloaked all in black, dark as a midnight shadow on a raven's wing. His skin, on the other hand, was a deathly pallor, like the bloodless veins of the fullest moon. His lips a shade of bleach, and his fingers colourless twigs.

Most terrifyingly, he was always there. At the funeral of his mother, in the alley where his friend was mugged, beside the deathbed of his wife. He was always there, as if an infallible catalyst, of the tragedy that always followed.

One day, the man noticed this ominous spectre outside his home, trailing his steps, stalking him, wherever and whenever he may be. And the man knew, that the ghost of death was to follow him into his grave, beside his wife.

But as the man reminds himself of his cause, his horse reminds him of a low-hanging branch approaching fast. The man tries to rear his mount, but his eyes widen when he realises his tardy reflexes.

The man lay sprawled in the snow, horse confused, eyes dazed, forearm fractured, body laying in the piling snow. The man rose from his snowy ad hoc grave, shaking his head and limbs to regain his senses and shed the numbness.

As he blinked away the stars and swirls in his eyes, reality welcomed him back to familiar snowfall and bleached fir trees. He exhaled, marvelling at what he once viewed as a visual obstruction. The seemingly microscopic flakes of silver purity, carrying an intricate aureateness, rivalling man's most expensive murals and rugs. The fir trees were the silent sentinels of an unspoken treasure, beauty buried just beyond the human eye. Unmoving roots and waving branches provided both shelter and company to the falling snow. And while the wind whipped him as sharply and coldly as before, his skin no longer

seemed to mind, treating it as if the pokes of a mischievous child, while the gentle caress of snowfall seemed to apologise for its friend's pestering. Such a child laughed all around him, blowing the snow this way and that, whistling tunes and howling ballads.

The man tried to stand up, reaching out his hand to balance himself, when he realised not only the absence of a glove upon his right hand, but how he felt no cold despite such an absence. As he stared at his hand, wondering how it managed to maintain its temperature in such gales, he witnessed the weightless descent of a snowflake upon his index finger, and then its immediate disappearance as it melted into the air once more.

Suddenly the man's face grew warm, but it was warmed by none other than a steady stream of tears. Tears that melted the snow upon his hand, tears that stained his ragged boots, tears that warmed his cheeks but stung his heart. The man sat back into his mattress of powder, scattering the surrounding snow.

As tear-fall and snowfall descended in sync, as endless streams of tears cascaded into the freshly fallen flakes, the caress of snowfall wiped away the man's tears, consoling his confused and weary conscience.

Many moments and snuffles later, the man sat against the trunk of a fir tree, the trails of his tears still visible on his cheeks. His puffy eyes staring through the tree branches and snowfall, deep into the heart of the sky. Through tearful rumination and snowy assuage, the man had reached a simple epiphany: Inevitable death, fearful as it may be, is that which gives meaning to tragically temporary life, and that to enjoy the former, he must accept the latter. And such was the irony of life. No matter how far he ran, how many shortcuts he took, how many times he looked back, or how many times he pushed himself forward, no matter how many times he convinced himself that "life finds a way", all that meant was that death would as well. All the running he did, was not only vain, but wasteful. Wasteful of energy and age, wasteful of what little time we all have on this planet.

In many ways, life was akin to the falling snowflakes, falling miles in the air, delicate and beautiful. Only to melt into nothing, a journey seemingly in vain. Until they form in the chilled sky, once more, only to fall, once more. But as beautiful as the falling snow can be, it is only made so because of its inevitable fate to melt. It was the very fleeting nature of the snowflake, that lent beauty to its brief time on Earth.

Not far away, the crunch of boots against snow sounded. The man did not turn his head to greet the unnamed visitor— He knew who had come to take him.

The unnamed man, cloaked in black, with skin as pale as the snow he stepped in, stopped beside the man. He smiled at his visitor, and Death smiled back, for it was so rare that he could come across a man who accepted him.

Death lent a hand to the man, helping him onto his feet, and together they left the forest, beyond the falling snow, past the melting flakes.

~

A day later, a passing band of merchants, sickened by the cold and the wind, were taken aback by a lone corpse, sat against a fir tree, half-steeped in snow, his lips purple, his pupils milky, dead from pneumonia, smiling, melting, into the falling snow.

1942 – The Year Tigers Flew

Chinese International School Hangzhou, Lee, Johaan – 14

Pheeeew... Boom! Bang! Boom! People ran onto the streets screaming, I covered my ears.

Pheeeew...Boom! Another firework went off and the kids poured onto the streets with ecstasy and the parents were dazzled by a thousand colours that filled up the night sky. The firework flames warmed my face as news of our victory warmed the hearts of the people who were celebrating everywhere. The war is finally over! We won the war! However, it wasn't always like this....

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Tomorrow, we shall leave Yang On(Former capital of Burma which is now Myanmar), it will be our turn to show the world who we are. We are the protectors of justice, democracy and freedom. We will fight. Fight to protect the innocent from the bombardment of shells; fight to stop the growth of a fascist empire; fight to show the world that wars should not be fought only to expand one's territory and gain more resources. We will drive them home, home to their tiny island in Japan. Any questions?” Commander Chennault piped into the microphone. Silence followed as 30 pairs of eyes fixed themselves upon him.

My hand shot up, “Yes John?”

“Um, sir, why are we protecting China? Why can't we just attack Japan?” I asked in my Southern drawl, “Those buck-toothed rice guzzlers, those filthy guks who never wash themselves and spit all over the floor, They stole our jobs, you know. After 30 years working iron on the railroad, my father is now on the dole! All because of those chinks! Swarming into our country and stealing our jobs.”

“Johnny, as long as our economy is powerful, there will always be people moving to America and stealing our jobs. Whether it be the Chinese or the Mexicans, as long as there is a country poorer than us, they will come. But that's beside the point. The enemy of our enemy is our friend, so China is our friend. If we protect the Chinese, that is one more ally to help us fight the Japanese who bombed Pearl Harbor.” I fell silent, not knowing what to say but still feeling unconvinced.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Operator, am I through?”

“Yes Madam Song, please go ahead.” The Operator's voice crackled over the receiver.

“Mei Mei, it's me, Qing Ling.”

“Oh Jie Jie, I miss you so much! How long has it been since we last talked? 10 years? My heart grows sore waiting for news of you everyday.” Mei Ling paused, half sobbing.

“You know, things aren’t looking too great for China, the Japanese have invaded Nanking.” Qing Ling said in a solemn tone.

“I know, my husband told me last night. That’s tragic! We loved that old house back in Nanking didn’t we?” Said Mei Ling, “The gardens are filled with our childhood memories, now they’re filled with Japs, in fact our whole country is filled with those little turnip heads. It’s a little annoying don’t you think?”

“Yes, I agree, it’s more than annoying, it’s despicable!” Replied Qing Ling impatiently. “What about putting the country first before the party, wouldn’t a truce between our two sides be the right thing to do now?”

“No! My husband would never agree to that, not even if you kidnapped him and pointed a gun to his head!” Mei Ling answered. (*context: Kei Shek got captured and had a gun pointed to his head and he agreed to joining forces in 1936)

“If we don’t even have the strength to fight each other, we would never stand a chance against them. I think we should not only enter a truce, we should join our armies together! I think the Communist Party army would be a great addition to the KuoMinTang forces, imagine the all the foot soldiers of the Red Army combining with the technological advantage of your planes and artillery, we will be a force the Japanese have to reckon with!” Qing Ling stated emphatically.

“Very well Jie Jie, if you insist. I will try and speak with Kai Shek...but not before I’ve filled his stomach with a warm meal!” “Hah! Hah! Hah!” The sisters laughed liked little girls planning some mischief. Mei Ling could see the sense in what her sister proposed and was now thinking of ways to persuade the President of the country.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“John! Get up! Time to go!” Chin Rui Dian (A.k.a Arthur Chin) boomed. “KuoMinTang just gave us the coordinates to Japanese base! 1, 2, 1, 2, fast, fast, get up!”

“Coming...” I answered eventually. We hopped into the plane, throttled the engine and soared into the sky. Arthur was my co-pilot from Guangdong, “So, Pilot John, why we flying so high?” he asked. “So we wouldn’t bang into trees?” I replied jokingly. “But Pilot John, we be out in the open, they so easy see us. We should fly low.” “But what if they find us, chase us and shoot us down?” I asked in bewilderment. “Then they bang into tree. We good, we no bang tree.” Arthur quibbled.

It made sense, one of the best pilots from the Chinese Resistance should know better than a random pilot from Kentucky, so I dived the plane down and flew low. Suddenly, I heard over the din of the propellers, “Tree! Tree! Fast! Straight Ahead! Straight Ahead!” I looked straight ahead but there were no trees. Arthur must be seeing something I couldn’t see, but trusting my navigator, I veered left to avoid this tree he was speaking of. Then there it was, a tree! Right in front of me, maybe 200 yards. I was flying at 100 per second, there was no time to think, my reflexes kicked in. I grabbed the throttle, jerked it upwards, moved my flaps up so that air would stream off my wing creating extra lift. Like on a roller coaster, I did a 360° loop, and returned to my flight path 500 yards behind the tree. This time I veered right avoiding the tree. It felt like I had just pressed the ‘Respawn’ button! It felt great!

“Are you trying to kill me?” I turned around and screamed behind. “No. Tree was on the left. I said “Go straight ahead!”, but who know you don’t go straight but turn left into tree. You dumb.” Arthur defended himself. I chuckled, “We need some agreements on terms, see you at 8 at my tent, okay?” “Ok. But can we come up with something now?” He asked. Our 30 minute conversation went on and on and we talked about flight terms, war tactics, grammar, and our families.

“Look!” Arthur pointed towards two o’clock. Through the fog and early mist I saw the bare outline of what seemed to be quite a few army camps. Arthur checked the coordinates “These should be the coordinates that we were given.” I turned off my walkie and recited my mantra, the one I use everytime before I drop a bomb, “So I bomb so hard muthers wanna fine me, first niggas gotta find me, bomb so hard, this shit crazy. Y’all don’t know that don’t shit please me...”★ Kanye and Jay-Z reverberated in my ears while I dropped the bombs.

Just as half the bombs had been dropped, the sun came out. A single ray of gold shot through the clouds and shined holy light onto a lone flag fluttering from the roof of the camps. At first it looked like a red sun with red beams coming out of it – the flag of the empire of Japan. “We just saved thousands of civilians. Good job.” I shouted and Arthur rejoiced. However as we got closer and closer to the flag, I noticed something awful. There were no diagonal beams! It was the flag of the Red Cross! I just bombed our allies! I bombed a hospital! I panicked, the song went on in my head. “Bomb so hard, this shit weird, we ain’t even suppose to be here, that shit crazy, ain’t it eh?” The song didn’t help calm me in the slightest. I was shocked and paralyzed. My plane spiraled out of control. When I came back to my senses, we were already in a death spiral. I lost control of the plane. Every attempt just made us spiral faster. “Bomb so hard, I’m shocked too, I’m supposed to be locked up too.” The song kept playing in my ears and with the last phrase, our plane went SMACK! All went to black.

★ (lyrics found in <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kanyewest/niggasinparis.html>)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“It’s alright, you’re fine, just relax.” A soothing voice said to me. I slowly opened my eyes. “Where am I?” I inquired.

“The red cross hospital. We saw your plane crash and rushed over immediately.”

“What happened to Arthur, my co-pilot?”

“I’m terribly sorry, he wasn’t as fortunate as you, he didn’t quite make it.” My palms started sweating, a crushing sensation in my lungs, fog gathered in my brain, “No, no, not Arthur.” My pupils dilated, my right eye started twitching and tears dripped onto the bed sheet. “My fault... all my...”

“Madam Song – Chairman of the Red Cross will be here soon to talk to you.” The nurse said, trying her best to comfort me.

When Madam Song came in, my hands were still shaking, I was still seeing bright splotches of light everywhere. “I’m Qing Ling, it’s a pleasure to meet you. I don’t suppose you stumbled on our hospital and bombed it by accident?”

“N...No, we..we were given coordinates, we were told it was a Japanese military camp.” I spoke softly, still weak from the crash landing and shocked by Arthur’s death.

“Ah, it all makes sense to me now. I was wondering when did we offend America? Do you care to tell me who gave you the coordinates?” Madam Song replied.

“I’m not sure, Arthur said that a radio transmission from our base in WuHan gave it to us.”

“What a surprise! My sister just moved her base to WuHan. I guess our alliance was a little contrived, maybe our ideals don’t quite match with theirs just yet.” Madam Song was pensive. “I wonder what your ideals are like in America?”

“We certainly aren’t as generous to our opponent as you are. We tried to shoot down the planes that bombed us at Pearl Harbour instead of treating them with kindness. You know, in America, they say “Everyman for himself.” It’s the fundamental force that drives our society forward... I guess it lacks kindness and compassion.”

“Here in Communist China, our principles are based upon sharing and caring. However in practice, we can’t quite get the reality to fall in line with our ideals. Corruption is rampant, people think only about themselves even as we preach Confucian values for the greater good. I guess when you work hard but get the same amount as the guy next door who slouches around all day, there has to be a strong sense of nationalism and pride for you to continue working hard. I once considered forcing everyone to work hard for the common good through brainwashing, but I wasn’t sure that using an immoral method to achieve a moral goal would be true to my principles, so I’m still trying out other options.”

“In the army, we are bombing our enemies and fighting other human beings to protect the ones we love and no one seems to have a problem with that.” I replied.

“But no one having a problem with it doesn’t mean that it is the right thing to do. No one in the Nazi Party has complained about the slaughtering of thousands of Jews in Poland, but that doesn’t justify their actions,” Madam Song said in her soft but firm voice. I had no response to that. “It was my pleasure talking to you, Captain John, but I have to attend to the other patients too. We will be sending a jeep to pick you up and deliver you back to KuoMinTang barracks. Best of luck to you, Captain John and may God be with you.”

“Good bye Madam Song.” I said reluctantly, remorse welling in my heart as I recalled Arthur’s face smiling at me and the golden ray of sunshine shining upon the Red Cross hospital flag.

“Oh by the way, say hi to my sister, Mei Ling, and please tell her not to make any more mistakes when she sends her pilots on a killing mission.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

That was more than three years ago, but tears still well up in my eyes whenever I think of Arthur and I still feel a cringe in my heart as I recall what great care and compassion Madam Song showed me even after I tried to bomb their hospital.

Pheeeew... Boom! Boom! Boom! People are running onto the streets screaming, I covered my ears.

Pheeeew, Boom! Another firework goes off and the flames warm up my face as news of our victory warms the hearts of these people, people I have come to respect and love, people that I want to help and save, even if I can never bring back Arthur from his grave. However, with our victory comes our enemy’s defeat. I wonder whether they are celebrating all over the streets in Japan too? I wonder through killing Japanese pilots, who also fought to protect their loved ones, how many lives have I made miserable? I wonder, what separates us from them; what separates “good” from “bad”?

The Bomb

Chinese International School Hangzhou, Malhotra , Mahan – 14

The abhorrent sound of planes whizzed by us. Our hands were planted firmly on the window, looking outside at the antagonizing view.

“It’s a B-29, I think.” Fujimoto said.

Our teacher was crying on her chair, unable to even look at us. Some students were trying to cheer her up, a Sisyphean task. Nothing could help us now. We all knew that B-29’s were used to deliver bombs. No one said anything as we stared blindly through the window uncertain with what we were looking for.

Outside, I took a look at our beautiful school landscape, for what may be the last time. It was a somewhat cloudy day, but the sun still remained to shine. I looked at the our playground outside, the rustic nature of it providing a level of nostalgia. The playground was made up of poles and swings. The course, lush grass contrasted viciously with the purple playground. Our school overlooked the rest of the city. On a normal day, we used to see people running from site to site like ants. Now the city was dead.

Desolate.

The last thing I remember was the bright light stinging my eyes as I collapsed.

...

I regained consciousness an unknown amount of time later. I felt the same dizzy and burning sensation throughout my whole body. Unable to move anything but my head, I looked down at my hands and legs. They were covered in blood. I took a look at my surroundings. Sandy dust was flying around everywhere. Fire had covered the whole plain, the acrid smoke clogged my lungs. Our whole school was diminished to rubble, the bomb had laid waste to everything around. Nothing was the the same. A sudden pain erupted in my body. I looked down at my leg. It was trapped beneath debris. I felt each splinter of the debris piercing my vulnerable skin. My head was overheating with panic. I felt my mind slowly drifting away like a bad dream in the morning. But some faint singing brought me back to my thoughts...

“Thousands of years of happy reign be thine;

Rule on, my lord, till what are pebbles now

By age united to mighty rocks shall grow

Who’s venerable sides the moss doth line.”

About 10 of my peers were singing the Japanese national anthem. I heard the sobs of fellow classmates, some calling to their mothers. hot tears leaked down my face, the salt burning my eyes. I tried to join the chorus, but my voice

was crowded by fear. My mind felt pervaded. I started wafting from reality, again. I heard the soft, conciliating voices of the students as my thoughts fell into a void of darkness...

“Thousands of years of happy reign be thine...”

I awoke to someone uttering my name.

“Yoshitaka, wake up, Yoshitaka.”

I opened my eyes. I saw Fujimoto standing over me. He was trying to lift the debris from my leg.

“It.. won’t... bUDGE!”

As he said the last word, he pulled the debris off my leg.

“Cmon, we need to go.” He exclaimed.

He offered me a hand, which I took without any thought. All my might was needed to stand off the dreaded ground. I stood up with some trouble but was able to at the end from leaning on Fujimoto. As I got up, I gasped. The view shook me. From the ground you were not able to see the true destruction of the bomb. It had destroyed everything. The whole city, was nothing. The city, denigrated to dust and rubble. Flames engulfing the city, everything was fire. Looking at the scenery made me feel the heat. The sky had become black, a colour of none. The mushroom cloud was growing bigger and bigger by the second.

“What are you doing! Hurry up and start walking!” said Fujimoto

We jumped over the remains of our school, bricks shattered all over. I saw the bodies of my fellow classmates lying on the ground, like the bricks. I saw Shihoko on the ground, I saw his chest moving up and down.

“Look! Shihoko,” I said “We have to help him!”

Fujimoto and I trudged over to him.

“Shihoko! Wake up!”

We kneeled down and flipped him on his side. Shihoko was barely alive. His skull was cracked open, he was missing an eye, flesh was dangling from head, no spot on his face was left without blood. He moaned to me.

“Mother... Mother!” He mumbled.

His whole lower body was trapped under rubble and dirt. He pointed to the notebook in his front pocket.

“Mother..”

“You want me to give it to her?”

He nodded with his last bit of life left with him. I had never seen him in such a feeble position before. Shihoko was known as the class clown and the athletic one. Once that first tear broke free, the rest followed in an unbroken stream. Shihoko rolled his head, and fell unconscious. I lowered his body back to the ground. And left him.

Fujimoto and I walked on down. The bodies of many lay trapped beneath the wreckage. Many only with hands and faces sticking out. All of sudden, I felt a hand grab onto my ankle, then another, and another. The students were grabbing onto my legs. I felt so futile, there was nothing I could do to help them. I had to leave them behind, like a coward. I heard a vehicle’s tires screeching as it stopped.

“Let’s go! That’s the army, they’ve come to save us.” Fujimoto said.

I felt sickened by the fact that I had to kick my friends hands off of me. But I had to, there was nothing I could do. The army official was waiting by us.

“You guys were lucky, we’re here to collect the dead bodies.” He said

I saw them stacking the dead bodies on top of one another. Treating them like a sack of potatoes. It was horrific. Fujimoto and I entered the car and waited for them to finish. The mushroom cloud had changed. It had grown much bigger. It seemed to catch the light and display every colour of a rainbow. It was beautiful, in a way. The cloud made me realise, I would never see my mother, my father, my brother, ever again. I could feel it breaking me. But I knew, now I would have to be as strong as ever, like never before. The driver got into the car, and we drove away.

“I am handing my message over to the children who visit. I want them to learn about Hiroshima. And when they grow up, I want them to hand down the message to the next generation with accurate information. I’d like to see him conveying the right sense of judgment so that we will not lead mankind to annihilation. That is our responsibility.” – Yoshitaka Kawamoto

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Diocesan Girls' School, Wei, Tiffany – 16

“**K***uai, kua!* Ladies, it's your turn. Min'Xia, quit reapplying your blush. Ah'Huang, scoot over here and get into position! Chop, chop, hurry up!”

Twelve dolls, their faces caked with makeup and their hair bundled in tight knots, hastily formed a line as they shuffled in their pink dresses. A plump woman in her fifties was busily inspecting the girls. As music started to play, the girls extended their dainty arms in *lanhuashou* and stepped out into the sea of blinding lights.

One, two, three, one, two, three. Ah'Huang beamed as she raised her leg to draw an elaborate circle in mid-air; the room thundered with cheers and whistles. Her heart pounded in excitement as she displayed her polished dance moves under the spotlight. The girls received a standing ovation as they proudly assembled in their ending pose.

“Good work tonight, girls,” The plump woman grinned as the girls filed into the backstage. She glanced at Ah'Huang. “Especially you, Ah-Huang. No wonder your basket was overflowing.” She handed Ah-Huang a basket overflowing with banknotes. Ah-Huang flushed bright red and mumbled, “Thank you, Mrs. Zhang.”

The clock struck four when Ah'Huang returned home. She slipped out of her dress and carefully hung it behind the door. The sequins embedded on the hem of the dress sparkled like diamonds under the soft moonlight. Ah'Huang smiled contentedly. She shifted her gaze, which landed upon a poster of a strikingly beautiful lady. Her creamy, slender leg extended through the thigh crack of the shimmering red *qipao*. She flaunted her figure as confidence shone from her smile. Gently caressing the *qipao* on the poster, Ah'Huang shook her head, and sighed.

“I can already picture you in the *qipao*,” a voice broke the silence.

“*Okaasan*. I thought you were asleep.” Ah'Huang turned to face her mother, who was leaning against the bedroom door.

Her mother shifted towards Ah'Huang. “You can do it, *musume*. Trust me. You danced before you knew how to walk. You're a natural.”

Receiving no response, her mother continued, “Tomorrow is *Tanabata Matsuri*, *musume*. Make a wish and it will come true.”

Ah'Huang hugged her mother tightly as a tear rolled down along her cheek. “Yes, *Okaasan*. Tomorrow, in the bamboo woods, I shall record my wishes, and they shall come true.”

She casted one last glance at the poster before she went to bed.

Tanabata Matsuri had always held a significant position in Ah'Huang's heart. She vividly remembered the times when she celebrated the festival with her father, ten years back. “*Musume*, never forget your roots.” He would say. He made sure Ah'Huang knew that, deep down, she was a Japanese at heart. But was she? She was born and raised in Shanghai – did that make her Chinese? She had no answer.

After a night of dancing, Ah'Huang was ready to fall unconscious in bed. However, she knew that tonight was special. Tonight was the night when wishes would come true. Somewhat reluctantly, she heaved herself out of bed, slipped out of

her house, and ventured out into the darkness. Upon arrival at the bamboo woods, she stood rooted to the ground, staring into the looming darkness. She felt welcomed.

“Make a wish, *musume*, make a wish! You’re Japanese. The wish will come true.” Ah’Huang giggled as she scribbled a rough sketch on a scrap of paper. She looked up, meeting her father’s loving gaze. She pointed at her sketch elatedly, “*Kazoku!* I wish we could stay like this forever, you, me and *Okaasan*.” Her father gently ruffled Ah-Huang’s hair. “Of course, *musume*. Our *kazoku* will stay complete.”

Well, seems like wishes don’t come true after all. Ah’Huang knelt onto the ground and fished out a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket. She jotted down her wishes, mumbled something in Japanese, and gingerly hung the strip of paper on a bamboo. As she was about to leave, she met a pair of eyes glowing in the darkness. They were the glistening eyes of a young lady. Somehow, Ah’Huang found them familiar, as if she had seen them before. Before she could identify who that was, the pair of eyes had vanished.

When Ah’Huang arrived at her usual nightclub the other evening, all the dancers were huddled together. Ah’Huang assumed they were gossiping about some wealthy young man again. *Ever since Hu’Qing married a businessman a couple of years ago*, Ah’Huang thought as she applied her makeup, *everyone has been fantasizing about meeting their prince charming at the nightclub*. She chuckled at the thought of it.

“Ah’Huang, Ah’Huang!” The dancers realised Ah’Huang had entered the room, and immediately huddled over her. Ah-Huang gaped in confusion as eleven pairs of fake eyelashes batted at her face. A few uneasy seconds passed and only the soft bass music could be heard from the stage. No one breathed.

“Haven’t you heard? You’re this year’s Chinese Red Blossom, Ah’Huang!” Hu’Ling piped up, squealing in ecstasy. The other dancers fervently nodded their heads, their pinned hair knots bobbing. One by one, they planted a kiss on Ah’Huang’s cheek, wishing her all the best. Ah’Huang looked blank, as if she had been stunned. The world was spiraling around her, befuddling her senses. Even when Mrs. Zhang busted through the door and hugged Ah’Huang, almost crushing Ah’Huang with her weight, Ah’Huang still had not regained her consciousness.

“Ah’Huang, *baobei*, I am so proud of you. You bring honour to our nightclub! We haven’t had a Chinese Red Blossom in so many years... finally! Finally!” Tears were pouring out of Mrs Zhang’s eyes, her mascara smudged all over her puffy cheeks. Ah’Huang ignored Mrs Zhang and ran out the door.

The cool summer winds embraced her. She touched her cheeks – they were flaming hot but her hands were chilly. Her feet were numb but her neck was burning. She was cold. Hot. Cold. Hot. She started ambling through the streets of Old Shanghai, taking in the familiar scene of nightclubs packed neatly along the two sides of the street. Young girls, dressed in unnecessarily cropped miniskirts, hurried into the nightclubs. On the far end of the road, boys that looked no older than fifteen were sniffing a powder from a packet and collapsing onto the ground in delirium. Ah’Huang no longer felt like walking. She began to hop. To twirl. To leap. Almost involuntarily, her body raced against the wind. Ah-Huang found herself cachinnating; her drunken laughter echoed throughout the streets. She felt alive. Recharged. Rejuvenated. That was when it sank in– She, Ah-Huang, was the Chinese Red Blossom.

‘*Although*,’ Ah-Huang realised, ‘*That doesn’t sound right.*’

It was finally the night of the show, the night when the Chinese Red Blossom would flourish. The show was an annual event that was held in high regard in Shanghai. Tradesmen, merchants, and gangsters– all the usual customers of all the nightclubs in Shanghai, would gather to enjoy the show of the Chinese Red Blossom. The show symbolised honour, glamour, and pride; Old Shanghai would not be the renowned “Paris in the East” if the show did not exist.

Ah-Huang’s fingers danced over her *qipao*. It was beaming scarlet, which effuse elegance with a twinge of fieriness. The figure-hugging dress sashayed onto the ground, the lace embroidery revealing a low-cut dip at the back. It was breathtaking.

The room was packed with guests. Everyone wanted a glimpse of the famous Chinese Red Blossom, Ah'Huang. Among the guests sat Mr. Du, "the King of Shanghai". He was lounging in a velvet couch; one of his wives was fanning him with her handkerchief.

One, two, three, one, two, three..... Cheers resounded throughout the room, the streets, the whole of Shanghai. Ah'Huang swept across the stage with unparalleled gracefulness; her every move displayed exceptional skill, passion, and talent. The red *qipao* blossomed like a flower as Ah'Huang twirled. Thousands pairs of eyes were glued to her body. And she loved it. She loved every moment onstage. She loved the sense of manipulation over the audience's emotions. She had been climbing, climbing ever since the sweet age of fourteen; tonight, she reached her pinnacle of success. "*Chinese pride*", the poster starring Ah'Huang as the Chinese Red Blossom stated, "*Catch a glimpse of the prettiest Chinese girl in town!*"

The audience roared in elation as Ah'Huang retreated backstage. All the dancers hurried over and gave her a tight embrace. Ah'Huang scrutinised the faces of her fellow dancers. She saw exhilaration. She saw pride. But she could sense that, under the many plastered fake smiles, their hearts were green with envy.

"Dance with me, Ah'Huang." The dancers parted and Ah'Huang found herself facing a bony man with perked ears. She shot nervous glances at the girls around her, but they were reciprocated with anticipating and encouraging ones. Reluctantly, Ah'Huang followed the man.

That very night, Ah'Huang married him. He was none other than Mr. Du, the richest triad leader in Shanghai. Ah'Huang did not initiate the marriage, of course, but who was she to object the most powerful man in Shanghai? She knew she was supposed to be grateful, as Mr. Du was probably the epitome of "the man of dancers' dreams", and she was certain that all the dancers' heart were poisoned bright green.

Ah'Huang tried her best not to get involved in the whirlpool of gossips Mr. Du's other three wives engaged in. She could feel she was isolated, but she preferred it that way. As the Japanese proverb goes, "*deru kui wa utareru*". The stake that sticks out gets hammered down. Ah'Huang did not attempt to gain Mr. Du's attention, unlike other wives. She was almost unnoticeable.

That was, until one evening, when she overheard the conversation between Mr. Du's wives.

"They attacked Lugouqiao."

"We simply could not match their standard."

"I heard they were planning to annex the whole of China. Oh, the Japs, the Japs!"

Ah'Huang sharply turned towards the wives. "What?"

The wives seemed taken aback, as sweet young Ah'Huang did not usually participate in their conversations. The eldest wife, who was dripping with jewels, shook her head and sighed. "We are at war with the Japanese."

Ah'Huang could not believe her ears. She was sucked into pitch darkness, and it was suffocating. Why? Why? Why? Images of *Okaasan* and *Otōsan* flashed before her eyes. It never occurred to her that one day, she might not be welcome in China. After all, Japanese blood flowed in her streams. *But then*, Ah'Huang comforted herself. *No one knows that I'm not Chinese.*

Ever since her marriage, Ah'Huang had not been performing as much. It was more for passion, rather than money. She would return to her nightclub occasionally as a gratuitous cameo, to boost the revenue of the nightclub.

"I am so proud of you," Mrs. Zhang would say every time she saw Ah'Huang, "So, so proud. You are just like my daughter."

The paparazzi still trailed Ah'Huang. The Chinese Red Blossom did not wither so easily. Every now and then, she still made headlines: "Chinese Red Blossom living in a fairytale!" Men blocked the streets and cooed over her when the driver drove Ah'Huang and Mr. Du around Shanghai. "Bastards," Mr. Du would swear under his breath. "She's mine."

Initially, Japanese aggression in China began as rumours. Ah'Huang dismissed them and refused to believe them. However, the media quickly verified the rumours. It dawned on Ah'Huang that the Japanese were indeed invading China – and Shanghai was their next target.

"Out with the Japanese!" "China power!" "Against the Japanese we stand!" Protests raged the streets of Shanghai, the youth formed organisations that initiated movements against the Japanese. Flyers and posters were taped on the walls of every street and nightclub, offering a reward for any Chinese who reported traces of Japanese in Shanghai.

No one knows, no one knows. Ah'Huang tried to hypnotise herself. She hid behind the facade as she piled layer and layer of makeup on her face to cover her tear stains. She feared stepping out of Mr. Du's house, she was phobic about being exposed in the light. The local newspaper published graphic photos of Japanese residents being publicly flogged until they crumpled as a bloody mess, embellishing them with captions that denoted victory and satisfaction. *Why should I even fear? I lived in Shanghai all my life!* Ah'Huang would protest between surges of tears. *"Musume, never forget your roots."* Her father's voice would immediately reverberate within the walls of her mind. Sometimes, when Ah'Huang was alone in the shower, she would drop to her knees and bawl her eyes out; she would bite her arm until it bled, to muffle her cries. *Jiuming, jiuming, tasukete, tasukete!*

She was afraid. She was at the pinnacle of success; she could not afford to slip and fall. The news of her mother being beaten to death further shook Ah'Huang in her bones. She constantly felt out of breath, she was running, running, escaping from her own demon. *When is this nightmare going to end?*

Alas, paper could not contain flames. Mr. Du returned home one evening, stormed up the marble staircase and flung open the door to Ah'Huang's room. Ah'Huang had been sobbing; her eyes were bloodshot, a stark contrast to her snowy skin.

Ah'Huang found Mr. Du difficult to read. His face was twisted in a nasty grimace, Ah'Huang read fury, disappointment, desperation. Mr. Du clenched his fists. "Get out. Now."

Without opposition, Ah'Huang brushed past Mr. Du, headed down the stairs, and silently stepped out the door. The heavy gates banged shut in her face with a loud "clang".

It was as if Ah'Huang expected this day to come. Tears began streaming down her angular face, but she merely brushed them away, and raced towards her nightclub, her second home. Her form-fitting red *qipao* attracted the attention of passersby, many of whom gasped, pointed, and exchanged glances. Ah'Huang clung onto her red *qipao* as she fought against the wind, just as she was desperately clinging onto the final rays of hope.

The nightclub was dark when Ah'Huang arrived. Only the grandfather clock was ticking, ticking. There was almost no sign of life. Cautiously, Ah'Huang pushed open the door of the dressing room, just to find the dancers nestled in a corner. Their eyes widened as Ah'Huang approached them. Ah'Huang could feel them shuddering.

"Go away! You are not welcome." Xi'Wen exclaimed. Her brows were furrowed, her large eyes glistening in the darkness. A strange sensation crept up Ah'Huang's neck. She had seen those eyes before. In a dark environment. *Tanabata Matsuri*. Those eyes belonged to Xi'Wen. Ah'Huang almost choked. *Xi'Wen knew she was Japanese.*

"You traitor!" Ah'Huang could no longer suppress her outrage. She was a famished lion, pouncing on her prey. Vengeance burned from the depths of her eyes as she delivered a forceful punch on Xi'Wen's nose. Blood spurted out like a fountain. Before Ah'Huang managed to regain her composure, Xi'Wen delivered yet another blow in Ah'Huang's stomach. The two dancers rolled on the ground as a catfight developed, blood staining the white marble floor.

Without warning, a pair of thick arms separated the two rivals. Ah'Huang, her face smothered in fresh blood, looked up and met Mrs. Zhang's glare. There was a moment when Ah'Huang believed Mrs. Zhang could save her. She was her so-called daughter, after all. She was about to smile when Mrs. Zhang slapped her smartly across her cheek. Ah'Huang could not react. Her cheek burned, the incessant stings penetrating her heart. All the colour drained from her face. Ah'Huang looked around— everything was dead white, except for the glaring scarlet of her *qipao*.

"You are a Jap. You do not belong here." Tears tumbled down Mrs. Zhang's round face, her fists clenched until veins popped. She hissed, "Get out now. Or you will regret it."

Hugging her stomach with a trembling arm, Ah'Huang crawled out of the nightclub. Her *qipao* was torn and stained with bloody patches. Her vision was blurry, her nostrils filled with the pungent smell of blood. She could not bear it anymore and collapsed on the grimy streets of Shanghai.

An outcry arose somewhere down the road, but Ah'Huang could not heave herself upstraight. A few gunshots followed, and Ah'Huang's heart missed a beat. A tramped of soldiers marched up the road, entering the nightclub. They did not seem to have noticed Ah'Huang. Squinting her eyes, she scrutinized the field caps the soldiers were wearing. They had a star. *The Japanese had arrived in Shanghai.*

Shrieks and wails shattered the glass windows of the nightclub. The soldiers came out of the nightclub within a few minutes, their bayonets dripping with blood. Ah'Huang realised they were grinning. A chill travelled down her spine. To her dismay, the soldiers noticed her as they were about to enter the neighbouring nightclub. One soldier cracked a smile and raised his bayonet, ready to strike.

"No, no! I am Japanese!" Ah'Huang cried in desperation. For once, she was relieved she was not Chinese. "Watashi wa nihonjindesu! Watashi wa nihonjindesu!" Stunned, the soldier lowered his bayonet. They eyed her from head to toe, exchanging nervous glances with one another. Ah'Huang shivered as a bead of blood dropped from a bayonet onto her *qipao*.

A general crouched and stared straight into Ah'Huang's eyes. "Anata wa hontōni nihonji (Are you really Japanese)?"

Ah'Huang thought she would say "yes" immediately. The word remained at the tip of her tongue, refusing to be sounded. She tried mouthing the word, but it was to no avail. Was she Japanese? Only her blood proved so. Was she Chinese? Her blood betrayed her. Who did she want to be, then? She had no answer. Flashbacks of her mother and father flooded her vision, and yet they were quickly replaced by the memories of Mrs. Zhang and the nightclub. She glanced at her treasured *qipao*, now battered and weary. She had to resist the urge to laugh. Everything seemed funny to Ah'Huang. Yesterday, she was the Chinese Red Blossom, the lead dancer of a famous nightclub in Old Shanghai, a wife doted by a billionaire. Today, she was a pathetic Japanese, a social outcast, a rejected wife. Wasn't it funny how a night could turn one's life upside down? Everything was just like a meteor. Fleeting. Transient. Intangible.

She stared at the general. His eyes were pitch black; an abyss she could not fathom. She mustered up courage from nowhere and broke free, sprinting for her life, ignoring the indignant hollers behind her. She ran as far as her worn feet could carry her, she kept running, running, running. She needed to escape from Shanghai, from her background, from her life.

Ah'Huang dropped to her knees as she panted for breath. The floor was rugged and damp. Following her gaze, she realised a large stretch of sea extended in front of her. Delirious, a string of sniggers bubbled out of her mouth. The sniggers soon grew into chortles, and within a few moments, Ah'Huang found herself guffawing uncontrollably. She stared straight into the sea and felt welcomed. Without a second thought, she strode to the edge of the harbour, and leapt.

There were no tears, no screams, no movement. A scarlet *qipao* floated in the Old Harbour of Shanghai, and all was serene.

La Flâneuse à Shanghai (The Shanghai Wanderer)

Diocesan Girls' School, Wong, Ariel – 16

The wailing siren tore through the early morning sky. The welkin became Lucifer's canvas. Wild sanguineous streaks were drawn across the horizon. Furious crimson splotches scarred the heavens. Buildings went up in flames. Piercing screams and cries rang on the streets. With panic gushing through her veins, the girl clutched the grass slippers to her chest and ran for the air—raid shelter. Alas, the girl tripped. The next thing she knew was a bayonet at her throat, and a rising sun flag staring down blatantly at her. It finally dawned on her. The empire of the sun has risen. It dawned over all of Shanghai with its rays penetrating every alley of the old city. Nippon had finally dawned over Shanghai.

Then, the lights flickered out.

"What? That's the end? What happened to the girl?" Ke Rou exclaimed.

"If you want to know more, pay up," said the storeowner of the *Xiyangjing* shop, fanning his hand—fan nonchalantly.

"I paid for a full show!" demanded Ke Rou.

"Sorry, the price has gone up, young lady," said the storeowner in a buttery voice.

"You crook!" shouted Ke Rou as her face fumed with anger.

"Jie, just leave, we're causing a scene," said Kai Rou to her sister. Staring down at those fear—stricken eyes, Ke Rou relented. She tugged her sister's hand and stomped out of the shop.

"This is the first trip I've taken with my sister and I've already messed it up," thought Ke Rou as she strolled through the Cheng Huang Temple.

"Shanghai handicrafts! All hand—made! It's only 30 dollars for a pair of *JiaDing Caoxie*!" hollered the granny at a nearby handicraft store.

"I've always wanted a pair of those!" cried seven—year—old Kai Rou excitedly as she dragged Ke Rou into the shop.

As Ke Rou wove her slippers, she stared at the shopkeeper. She may be old, but her hands were like vivacious birds, flying quickly over the patch of straws, bringing the strands of straw over each other, crisscrossing them to form an intricate pattern.

Then the ringing of the bell at the entrance put her out of her trance. Fragments of heavily accented Chinese tumbled out, "Wai Po, You really should stay with us at Pu Dong. The city is developing so rapidly, many skyscrapers were built, the view is fantastic..."

"He is your grandson?" Ke Rou asked with disbelief. At the doorway, stood a young man in his twenties with tousled brown hair and a pair of shimmering sapphire eyes.

"Oh! I took care of a French child during the Battle of Shanghai, so he treated me like his mother. This is his son, Nathan."

"I see," said Ke Rou. "Then, why are you still staying in this old town and weaving these plain old shoes? You should live with them in the city and see Shanghai in its splendor. "

"As I study the intricate weaving patterns, I can't help but marvel at our ancestors' wisdom. Weaving is like living. You are like a strand of straw. Whenever you cross paths with someone else or a place, your life interlaces with the others' lives or that places' fate, just like how the strands of straw cross over each other. Therefore, they always say every knot, every twist of a weaving carries the memories of the weaver and her ancestors, and the weaving itself is holding a part of the weavers' soul," said the dewy-eyed shopkeeper.

"I've stayed in the old city for such a long time, that my life, like the strand of straw in a woven shoe, had become fully entwined with this place. "

"Some even say your weaving bears memories from your past life," added Nathan whimsically.

"You're joking, right?" Ke Rou, asked, raising her eyebrow.

"You never know," replied Nathan, with a glint of amusement in his eyes.

Ke Rou rolled her eyes.

Clutching the finished shoes in their arms, the sisters thanked the old lady and left the shop. Once they stepped out on the street, they were greeted by the hubbub of the Yu Garden Bazaar. Ke Rou couldn't help noticing the ancient Chinese architecture. The eaves of the building were upturned, just like the wings of a swallow being spread out. Giant red lanterns hung from the cornices of the buildings. As she looked closely, lucky cloud patterns were engraved on the pillars of the building. Abruptly, a flurry of indigo swept past her. And when she looked into her arms again, one of her shoes was gone.

"Thief!" She hollered at the top of her lungs, and sprinted after the boy dressed in indigo shirt towards the backstreets (*longtang*) of the old city. They took twists and turns through labyrinth-like old city. When she was so close to catching the thief at his collar, she slipped. As she fell backwards, she saw numerous poles extending out from the ancient buildings, hung on them were clothes and blankets, billowing in the wind, stranded across the blue sky. Then, the intriguing scene ended with a thud, and everything went dark.

"Ke Rou, wake up!"

"What?" mumbled Ke Rou.

She adjusted her gaze. She found herself sitting in the classroom, as the teacher carried on teaching the history of Shanghai in a monotonous tone.

She then turned to chat with her neighbour. Yet, what met her eye was so astonishing that she almost let out a scream. Every girl in the classroom was dressed in *qipao*, and their hair was tied up in buns.

"Why is everyone dressed in qipao?" Ke Rou asked the strange girl sitting next to her. The girl pointed towards the front.

"Huh?"

Ke Rou, turned to look toward the front. Smack! A white chalk flew right into her face, hitting her right at the centre of her forehead.

"Zhu Ke Rou, don't sleep in class!" hollered the teacher.

"Wait...Who is this teacher? I've never met him before. What is this school? Why's everything so ancient?" Her neighbor, Mei Ning, gave her a look of disbelief, then quickly scribbled on her notebook.

"You are in St Mary's Hall in Shanghai. Is everything right? You seemed like you forgot everything." Ke Rou scrutinized the notes written by Mei Ning. Eyes widened and hands trembling, a stark realization struck her. At the top right corner of the paper was a tiny line of words: 09 December 1935.

When the bell rang, signaling the end of the school day, Ke Rou ran for her bicycle. After acquiring every piece of information she needed about her persona from Mei Ning, she figured out the best way was to go straight to her home in the Chinese city.

When she rode out, the scene on the street took away her breath. The road was filled with bicycles and rickshaws. Thick cables stretched across the skies as trams scuttled through the road.

"I knew a shortcut through the former French concession to this place." thought Ke Rou and paddled faster along the road.

Suddenly, a trio of French soldiers stopped her and grabbed the front wheel of her bike.

"Such a pretty young lady and a nice bike, "said one with a crooked smile.

"Let go!" cied out Ke Rou exasperatedly, as contents from the front basket rolled out.

Suddenly, a pair of sapphire eyes caught her sight. It's the French boy from the shop!

"Nathan! Help!" she called out. Surprised, the boy in the military uniform looked towards her way.

"What's going on?" he shouted. "Comrades, let the girl go! Don't you recognise her? She's the daughter of the mob boss, Du Yue Sheng!"

"What?!"exclaimed the soldiers. "I'm awfully sorry, mademoiselle, please accept our apologies. Our friend, Nathan, shall escort you home," said one of the soldiers with trembling voice. Right after his speech, the trio fled.

Ke Rou bent down to pick up the objects on the floor. In the pile, she found her lost pair of shoes! What the boy said at the store rang in her ears.

"You Chinese, really should stop trespassing into others' territory," Nathan's voice broke Ke Rou's line of thoughts. "Wait, how did you know my name?"

" I'm Ke Rou, not 'Chinese'. Besides, how can 'you French' treat people like that? What happened to *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*? Shouldn't all people be treated equally?" huffed Ke Rou.

The soldier stared at her, wide-eyed and taken aback. "You are weird too."

"Don't you remember me? I'm the girl from the store."

"No, I don't know you. Anyways, I'm escorting you home. By the looks of your attire, you live in the Chinese city, right?" replied Nathan, trying to sound dismissive.

Being curious, Ke Rou prodded him with a question. "Clearly, you knew I wasn't Du Yue Sheng's daughter, so why did you help me?"

After sending a few glances at the girl, Nathan replied in a firm voice, "As a supporter of Voltaire, I, too, believe men are born equal. Thus, I would stand up for those being mistreated at any cost."

"Given that both of us are strange beings, I guess we could be friends," said Ke Rou as she held out her hand. The soldier took her hand, chuckling and shaking his head.

When they arrived at Ke Rou's home, she found herself standing in front of the exact same store. Leaning out of the doorway was an old granny who looked just like the shop owner.

"Po Po?!" exclaimed Ke Rou, as she stood dazed at the doorway.

"Don't look so surprised, my dear," said the kind-hearted granny. "Did you take the shortcut again?"

"Phew. At least my persona did the same thing, it wasn't that unforgivable," thought Ke Rou.

After numerous failed attempts of time travelling, she gave up on going back to the modern times. She became a girl who lived with her granny and as the successor of the weaving shop.

"What is taking him so long?" sighed Ke Rou exasperatedly as she paced along the border of the Chinese city and the French Concession. When she stared down, Ke Rou caught sight of her battered straw slippers. "It's been two years since I travelled back time," thought Ke Rou.

A shriek escaped from her mouth as she was wrapped into a hug. A series of chuckles rang from behind. Ke Rou turned around to see the French boy with a wide grin plastered on his face. "Stop daydreaming. Aren't we going to the Cheng Huang Temple Bazaar today?"

Every week, Ke Rou would take Nathan to different parts of Shanghai, introducing him to "Paris of the Orient". On that very day, they visited the Cheng Huang Temple Bazaar. The streets were lined with hawkers selling different types of scrumptious snacks, such as fried river snails, *shengjian* buns and even *ningbo* dumplings.

Ke Rou showed him round the temple, pointing at the intricate architectural designs and telling him the buildings' history and even gesturing him to try some of the delicacies.

Yet, even with the vibrant decorations hanging down from the buildings and the energetic city life around him, Nathan kept his eyes on the strange yet fascinating girl in front of him. Sensing his gaze, nervousness gathered in Ke Rou.

With her cheeks blushing, Ke Rou mustered her courage, cleared her throat and said, "Let's go to the small world theatre at the northern part of Cheng Huang Temple." Without receiving an answer, she reached for his hand and tugged him towards the theatre. There, they watched magic performances, Kun Operas and even movies.

Afterwards, the pair headed towards Ke Rou's home. On their way home, Nathan would often tell Ke Rou stories of faraway places. All of those stories seemed far more attractive than her life in this old town. Despite the colourful lifestyle in the Chinese city, Ke Rou still didn't feel content. She often felt like she was trapped in an obsolete realm.

"How I wish I could go and see the world," said Ke Rou, her voice filled with yearning.

"Just come with me and your wish shall come true!" replied Nathan instantly.

Ke Rou stopped in her tracks and stared at the soldier with disbelief. A shade of red started creeping the boy's face. "That is... if you want to," stammered Nathan as he rubbed his neck.

"I would love to!" exclaimed Ke Rou as her face shone with radiance. She gave a quick peck on his cheek and sprinted home.

Ke Rou ran home as she smiled at the rosy sky. As the sun cast its remaining rays into the sky, the sky was instantly dyed into a magnificent shade of pink. Yet, so overcome with joy was the girl, she failed to notice the group of sanguineous clouds gathering in the distance.

During dinner, Ke Rou sat at the table patching up her pair of shoes.

Ke Rou said, "Granny, why are you still weaving those shoes? It's not going to amount to anything with factories moving in and the textile industry developing so rapidly in Shanghai."

The shopkeeper stood up and said, "It's not about money but about inheriting our ancestors' wisdom and skills. Do you know why you are named after one of the most famous weaver in the Song dynasty? That's because our family is placing our hopes on you. You should take up your responsibility by inheriting these skills and passing them down to your descendants."

"Can't you see? With the technology developing so quickly, these so-called skills amount to nothing. Besides, I want to leave this backward country and see the world outside."

"What are you talking about? 'Eloping' to foreign lands, just to 'see the world'? Why are you so keen on cutting your ties with our country? We are like trees whose roots are grown on our nation. By declining your nationality, you are cutting your own roots. Yes, you will soar in the sky like a leaf in the wind, enjoying its fantastic scenery, but also like a leaf in the wind, you would always be thrown into a turmoil of events, losing stability, losing a place called home, and even your own identity. Your grandfather died as a revolutionist in the Xin Hai Revolution serving our country with his life. And what did you do to help your country? Instead of complaining, why don't you do something about it?" chastised her grandmother.

Fuming, Ke Rou threw down her shoes, dashed to her room and slammed the door. She fell on her bed with tears streaming down her cheeks.

The next day at school, Ke Rou pondered on what her grandma had said, blissfully unaware of the events that awaited her.

Then like the cry of the crow, signaling the start of the sequence of ominous events, the office assistant shouted from the doorway. "Zhu Ke Rou, your grandma was hit by a car and she is in hospital now!" Without hesitation she dashed to the hospital.

In the hospital, what greeted Ke Rou was a chalk-faced grandma, lying lifelessly on the hospital bed. Lying beside her was Ke Rou's pair of shoes. Inside, was a piece of paper, stating "Don't forget your duty to the family and your nation."

Clutching the pair of shoes to her chest, Ke Rou uttered in a trembling voice, "Granny, I promise I shall stay for my family and my nation."

As she exited from the hospital, she was wrapped into a hug. "I'm sorry for your grandma," said Nathan.

"There's something important I have to tell you. The Japanese are going to invade Shanghai. I've been ordered to retreat. I could bring you along and leave this country."

At last, her wish was granted, but her granny's last words rang in her mind. Using every ounce of the energy left in her, she resisted the temptation and replied, "No, I'm staying."

"Don't be foolish! You've always wanted this." said Nathan, grasping her shoulders tightly.

"I promised my granny that I would stay to fulfill my duty." She looked up at the soldier with defiance engraved on her face.

"But....," said the soldier through clenched teeth. As Ke Rou gazed up into those sapphire eyes, she couldn't help noticing that they were turning red.

"I'm sorry," she swallowed. She hugged him tightly as she felt the soldier's body shaking and tears sliding down her cheeks.

"Stay safe," said the soldier in a broken voice. Couldn't bear it any longer, the girl broke the embrace and ran home.

Tired and heartbroken, Ke Rou laid on her bed and fell into a deep sleep.

The deafening sound of airplanes woke Ke Rou. Startled, she got to her feet. Suddenly, there was an ear-splitting noise, shattering the windows, shaking the grounds, causing Ke Rou to fall to her feet. When debris stopped raining down, Ke Rou grasped the pair of straw shoes lying beside her and ran for the shelter. As she ran, screams and wails filled her ears. Adrenaline gushed through her veins. Then, amidst the messy crowds, she saw the entrance of the shelter. She picked up her pace. Alas, she tripped. Just as she was trying to get up, a bayonet was already at her throat. Realization struck her.

"The girl from the mirror, that's me!" thought Ke Rou.

She closed her eyes not daring to take a glimpse into the future, nor to learn of her fate. Suddenly, beams of light shot out from the slippers, enclosing her in a world of warmth and light, shielding her away from the cold blades of bayonet and the thundering sounds of exploding bombs.

"So warm, so soothing," thought Ke Rou, "I can finally take a rest."

"Jie," Kai Rou's voice broke the silence.

Ke Rou rubbed her eyes and found herself sitting in the weaving shop.

"What happened? Where am I?" croaked Ke Rou.

"You slipped while chasing the thief. Po Po and I, took you back to the store."

"Now you understand why I stayed," said the shopkeeper. Suddenly, the ringing of the shops' telephone cleared her fuzzy memory. Scenes from her travels flashed in front of her eyes.

"Nathan! Where's he?" said Ke Rou frantically.

"He's caught the thief and retrieved the other shoe. He says he's waiting for you at the western mirror shop," said the shopkeeper after putting down the phone.

She dashed, clutching the pair of shoes tightly to her chest.

"This time, I'm not letting anything go, not the shoes, not him."

The Oriental Pearl

German Swiss International School, Chan, Elvis – 14

Staring at the girl in the mirror, I put the final touches to her makeup. She stared back at me with chestnut-brown eyes flecked with black. They were wide and innocent, yet she seemed to know too much. I picked up a cherry-red lipstick from the cluttered surface of her dressing table – it had once been immaculate, but was now coated in smears of lipstick and splotches of mascara – and carefully traced her taut lips. I wanted to look good, to conceal her imperfections from the world.

“Wow, how flattering I must look,” I thought to myself, admiring the way the dress accentuated the curves of my body in the full-length mirror. It was a QiPao, one of Pa’s finest pieces. A stream of embroidered flowers and birds ran along the fringe, complementing the butterflies that I had weaved into my tresses.

Taking one final glance at the beguiling young woman in the mirror, I headed down the stairs. Pa was already standing at the bottom of the steps, resting against the newel post.

“Happy birthday sweetheart!” he exclaimed. “You look gorgeous!”

I nodded a sign of approval before making my way to the breakfast table. Laid out before me was a hearty meal of all my favourite dishes of porridge, steamed buns and dumplings.

“But Pa –” I complained. – I can’t finish all this! ”

“Darling, of course you can. I have cooked the same birthday meal every year and you ravenously devour the food every time. ”

“Pa, have you forgotten about my diet?”

The smile vanished from his face, replaced by a look of concern.

“Sweetie, I love you just the way you are. You don’t need a diet!”

“Pa, but that’s how I fit into your beautiful QiPaos!” I retorted, rolling my eyes. “And do you not realise what a hackneyed phrase that it?”

“Darling –”

“*I love you just the way you are,*” I jeered, mimicking his whiny voice.

He flashed a crooked discoloured smile at me, the wrinkles deepening on his hollow cheeks. It almost seemed painful for him to laugh, gashes appearing every time his face puckered.

Time was a thief; he stole beauty.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I held on to him tight, with my perfectly manicured fingers curled around his arm, as we made our way through the bustling street market. Hawkers shouted from both sides; all around us was the sound of scuffling feet and raucous chattering.

We arrived at the jewellery store after passing through the throng of people. A chime signaled our arrival as we stepped in.

“Welcome!” Mr. Dong greeted us, cheery as always. We were frequenters to the shop. “What would you like to try on this time, Miss Yu?” he enquired politely, gesturing at the glass encasements housing rows upon rows of gold, silver and jade. I noticed the shafts of sunlight filtering in through the window, the specks of light dancing playfully from one jewel to the next.

“Actually, it’s her birthday today.” Pa said.

“Oh, it is?” Mr. Dong exclaimed, feigning a look of surprise. “Well, you better buy her something very special, sir.”

“Indeed.”

I paced the room, scrutinizing the pieces of art. Each sparkled in its own way, invoking stirring emotions, but none in particular caught my eye.

“Are there any pieces that Miss fancies?” he asked pleadingly.

“I’m afraid not at the moment, Mr. Dong,” I replied after a long period of contemplation.

He failed to conceal his disappointment, the sparkle in his eye dying like the final glowing embers of a fire, flickering to nonexistence. Pa motioned for him to come over. After much conferring with each other, muttering and murmuring with their backs to me, they finally came to a conclusion.

“Miss Yu, we do have a special collection reserved for special buyers,” he said, leading me to the back of the store. We walked past several layers of glass encasements, to a well-hidden door that seemed to merge into the wall.

“Welcome to the Dragon Chamber.”

There was a pneumatic hissing sound as the door swung open, tendrils of smoke spilling forward. They curled and unfurled, grasping at our feet and motioning for us to enter. I took a few tentative steps forward, feeling my way through the mist. Gradually, the smoke dispersed, parting to reveal a dragon in the centre of the room. Its ruby eyes

glared menacingly at me, guarding the pearl inset in its jaws. Its long body trailed behind it, its scales all beset with gems that glinted in the light. It curled protectively around the pearl, forming concentric circles that surrounded it.

“The Oriental Pearl, Miss,” he explained.

I stood there, entranced by its intricate craftsmanship. It seemed so real that I half-believed it would let out a mighty roar and soar up to the domed ceiling, encircling its prized possession.

“So, what do you think of it, Miss?” Mr. Dong whispered, finally breaking the prolonged silence.

“It’s – it’s simply amazing. I have no words to describe it,” I whispered back, savouring the quietude. Sensing my affection for the pearl, Mr. Dong pried it from the dragon’s clutch and handed it to Pa.

“Be very careful with this pearl, Miss,” he warned. “If you treat it well, it will return the favour; if you mistreat it, it will do the same.” I nodded, enraptured by its glossy sheen that captured the glint of sunlight.

Slipping the ring onto my finger, Pa said, “Listen Yu, I want this pearl to forever remind you that in my mind, you are perfect and flawless.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

To Whom This May Concern:

On behalf of the Chinese army, I regret to inform you that Corporal Li has been killed while fighting in the Sino-Japanese War on the Shanghai front. He died a heroic death on the battlefield, while serving his country and fighting for what he believed in. His name shall be honoured for generations to come.

Please accept my deepest sympathy. We will do our best to assist you in this time of grieving.

I reread the letter, unable to believe what it was suggesting. There was no way that my father could have died. He had been so strong; the arm that I had held on to, the shoulder I had cried on. Life seemed to drain from my body, leaving me lethargic and numb, as if too much anaesthetic had been administered into my system.

Grief welled up inside of me and threatened to capitulate to the pressure. I shook uncontrollably, tears slashing two streaks down my face. Despite the formal statement of his death, a spark of hope still ignited within me. I refused to believe that he was dead.

Time was a thief; he stole love.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

As time passed it only worsened. My home was requisitioned by the Japanese Army and the rest of my savings waned, until I found myself scraping together barely enough to stay alive. Holes festered themselves into my clothing, my hair grew out of style and I reeked of litter.

I resorted to scrounging for free meals in the market, prowling through the narrow alleyways in search of prey.

“Miss Yu, you have been standing outside for an unusually long time. Is everything alright?” Mr. Dong asked, his voiced tinged with concern.

“Oh – everything is fine,” I answered. “I’m just waiting for Pa to return.” I couldn’t bring myself to admit that I was now homeless.

“Oh,” he replied curtly, a quizzical look plastered across his face. Furrowed brows framed deep-set eyes that bore into my soul, but he said no more. In the uncomfortable silence that ensued, I twiddled my thumbs, playing with the pearl ring on my little finger.

Eventually, I grew tired of waiting; but the thought of Pa returning became the only reason that I persisted. My hope dangled precariously by a thin thread, threatening to come loose from the fringe of my QiPao.

Soon my nightmare became a reality. My final morsels dwindled to nothing. I had no choice but to sell my possessions. The ring was not an option; I was not ready to let go of the last physical remnant of my lost father. So I decided to sell the only my only remaining asset: my body.

Time was a thief; he stole my dignity.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The building loomed before me. It boasted an imposing façade, but it wasn’t how I remembered it to be. When the war came hurtling in, it had brought along with it a barrage of gunshots and a flurry of commotion. The building’s façade had become marred by the scars of war, with flakes of paint scraped away by the constant fighting and bullets lodged in its once whitewashed walls (now an ugly shade of tar-brown), like the wrinkles on an old man’s face.

I approached the weathered oak door, running my fingers along its grain. It was flanked by marble lions on either side that seemed to welcome me back home. Only this time there was a spine-tingling coldness in their stone eyes.

I inhaled deeply, mustering the last trickles of courage within me, and pushed.

A flood of emotion surged through me as familiar scents assaulted me from all sides. It was unmistakably redolent of my birthday meal: the aroma of porridge, steamed buns and dumplings pervaded the air. I was on the verge of tears, gripping on with all my might, but I felt my clammy hands slipping.

I bit my lip to stifle the tears. My vision clouded and morphed into nebulous blotches. Scenes from my childhood played out before my eyes like a movie of my life story. Pivotal moments flashed by: my pudgy fingers

clinging on to Pa's calloused ones on my first day of school; a comical smile splayed across my face as I proudly showed Pa my first fallen tooth; Pa clapping along to my song during the New Year Festivities...

The doors bolted shut behind me with a loud thud that reverberated through the hall. I snapped out of my reminiscence and wandered further into the house. From the newel post where Pa had stood on my birthday, I could see the banisters casting ominous shadows on the wall, shifting as if they had a life of their own. I ventured up the first couple of steps and peered upstairs.

"Hello?"

My trembling voice trailed off into the depths of the shadows, engulfed by the deadly silence.

"Is anyone here?"

No reply once again.

As I turned, ready to leave, I heard footsteps coming from upstairs. The floorboards groaned, loudening with each step. Out of nowhere, an apparition materialised at the top of the stairs, beginning its descent. My body was frozen stiff with fear. I stood there, unable to resist as the shadow enveloped me in its harsh embrace, suffocating and choking me until my world dissolved into oblivion.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I awoke with a dull throbbing in my temples. Propping myself up onto my elbows, I found myself in a room that was bare except for a bed placed in the centre of the room.

I had been allocated the room at the end of the corridor. My room. It still smelt faintly of lilies, but all my belongings had been discarded. The comfort of my childhood made the pain ebb away, receding into the murky shadows. But every night, the gash was reopened, the pain relived.

Suddenly the door creaked open and a man stepped into the room. He was a mustachioed gentleman, sporting gleaming medals on his lapel that clinked with every move he made. He clamboured onto the bed, pinning me to the bedframe. All struggle was futile, for no matter how hard I thrashed, I could not escape from the phantom that loomed above me. I watched helplessly as he encroached in on me.

"You are gorgeous, my dear," he whispered in my ear.

I shuddered at his raspy voice. Shivers snaked down my spine. It felt like a hallucination, as if he was infusing poison into my bloodstream.

"*Don't call me dear!*" I wanted to spit in his face, but I resisted the urge, choking back the words that were attempting to claw their way out. He left with a satisfied smug at the end of the night. I winced in pain as I headed back to bed, my bruised and battered body hanging as limp as a dead lily.

Every night, these strange men would pace the hall, choosing a pearl that they fancied. Oftentimes I would be chosen, stripped from the warmth of my bed sheets and forced to stand in the cold, undraped.

Time was a thief; he stole what I treasured the most.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Layers of makeup washed away as I splashed cold water onto my face, revealing my war scars for all to see. After peeling back the layers, like a chrysalis unwrapping itself, I found my true self.

I examined the war scars, streaks of red that never fully faded away. I put the red lipstick back in its place next to the pearl ring. It had gone through so much with me, reminding me that Pa was always by my side. Its once glossy sheen was blemished with scratches and scrapes, but it was still beautiful to me. I stared at the girl in the mirror, with haunted eyes and dishevelled hair, and left the smears of blood and blotches of tears on the surface of her dressing table.

Reimagining History

German Swiss International School, Lai, Arista – 15

“I’m an artist, not a miracle worker,” I pointed out sharply.

My companion only chuckled to himself. “I’m not expecting that from you. I just need you to imagine what you see; bring it to life.”

“Why?” I asked. It hadn’t been in the job description. All I had known was that a historian had offered me money to commission a few pencil sketches—as of now, I was still in the dark about his intentions. The young man beside me let out a melancholy sigh, more nostalgic than a man of thirty years could sound.

“This building we’ll visit... it’s over a hundred years old. Can you believe it? All that history just bulldozed away. Gone forever. It took a century for it to become what it is now, and after one signature from the authorities a small stitch in the fabric of humanity’s history is going to be lost.”

He spoke as if the building were an ancestor and he the last man of the bloodline—an infertile one at that. I couldn’t sympathise. There was a reason I had gone into fine art instead of architecture. Buildings just didn’t hold much appeal, they were all bricks and mortar, really—their only difference being the way in which these were married.

The man seemed to be in no hurry to speak again, and we lapsed into silence. He glanced around as he walked, soaking in the surroundings, more like a tourist than a native of this quiet cultural quarter of Shanghai. I adjusted my stack of drawing paper and my backpack full of supplies.

“Here we are,” my temporary employer halted, gesturing enthusiastically at a fading pagoda, something straight out of a movie. The external walls, once white, were now a rather grim shade of dun. I fumbled for the pencils in my bag, and sketched a rough outline of the structure—the graceful curves of the roofs separating each floor; the rectangular windows with their now barely discernible engravings; the wooden tiles that had long lost their red coating. I didn’t, however, include the bright banner that wrapped the top two floors of the pagoda with its garish text announcing the realty developer, the jackhammer of fate.

“Shall we?”

The ground floor of the building had high ceilings and a massive entrance hall. I immediately felt small in contrast to the grandeur of its design. Each footfall echoed throughout the expanse of the opened area, resounding eerily within the maze of corridors. Sound travelled quickly here: most of the doors between rooms were carved geometrically such that there were more holes than wood.

“I’m a historian,” my companion suddenly spoke up, restating what I already knew. “But I have no idea what this building was used for. That’s why I need you.” He absentmindedly swiped a hand over a mahogany chest that stood on the side. Dust billowed in the air, forming a smokescreen. There was a stool beside, perching on a moth-eaten rug, once red, I think—I imagined that a family would have once sat there to put on and take off their shoes. The children would have bounded back home, yelling out to parents and lining up their little slippers neatly under the chest. The parents would have used the drawers to store trinkets or keys.

“Capture this home in its former glory. Help me protest the felling of these pieces of our culture before it ebbs away with each passing day. Show me the significance of each room over the years. We can’t save this building, but we can try to raise awareness for this cause.”

I roughed out a sketch of the entrance hall, adding vibrant colours and new shine to long-faded, worn furniture. I drew the peeling yellow wallpaper as bright and white, with calligraphy serving as a pattern. In my mind’s eye, the place became a warm home instead of a shell of a once-majestic pagoda.

Following my train of thought and the comforting scratch of pencil on paper, I made my way to the other side of the hall. A divider separated the two rooms, which fascinated me. It looked relatively new: a delicate piece of silk embroidered with flowers and birds, encased in glass. Pushing it away, I discovered the dining room.

The historian followed me, running his fingers over the divider's scratched glass in wonder. "It looks new, doesn't it?" he mused to himself. Meanwhile, I contemplated the circular table with interest. Around the table were nine chairs. I pondered the number's significance. A sketch was slipped from my arms, disrupting my concentration. "Hmm. Very nice. So you think that it used to be a family house when it was first built."

I blinked at the man beside me, thinking it rude of him to interrupt my work. He didn't notice my indignation. "This is good, this is good," he muttered, "yes, we will make our way through the house and discover all the purposes it has served. Through art."

Tuning out his mumblings, I curiously inspected the dragon designs on the backs of the chairs, sketching them for later reference. They looked imperial, but whether they were Chinese or Japanese, I couldn't tell yet.

"Look at this!" I pressed my lips together after yet another interruption from my companion. He was grinning and pointing at a small brown protrusion on the wall. I peered closer to find that it was actually a rusted metal hook. "I wonder what a family would have hung here?"

I hummed in acknowledgement, mulling over the dragon carving. I knew I had seen it before somewhere. "This room looks adapted. Not as familial," I observed. It was minimalistic, the only other furniture apart from the table being a low glass tea table in the corner. "Almost... official."

The man suddenly straightened up, and before I could blink, another piece of paper from my arms had been snatched away. He stared pensively down at my dragon sketch with a furrowed brow, tracing the outline with his finger repeatedly. Suddenly, his eyes shot to mine. "No wonder it looked so familiar! It's the same as the ones on the Nine-Dragon Wall in the Forbidden City. And the nine chairs...!"

That made sense. I could picture this room as a meeting place for government officials to discuss strategies or imperial matters over cups of oolong tea, constantly watched over by a likeness of the Emperor. Perhaps the family home had been seized by the government to be used as a Shanghai office about one or two decades into its life. The location of the building was close enough to the city centre to be convenient, yet far enough to be unaffected by the plebeian hustle.

"Let's see what we can find on other floors."

The second floor was revealing, as if whoever had used the pagoda after the government had ignored the ground floor and just fashioned the next one to suit their uses. The interior design differed entirely from traditional Chinese. Wooden doors exchanged for the intimidation of metal, with large locks. The air smelt heavier too, as if this floor had been abandoned a long time, consciously avoided by generations of inhabitants. I thought briefly on whether or not to follow their discretion.

"Curious, very curious indeed," the historian remarked, reminding me to breathe. "Shall we try investigating one of these... rooms?"

I realised immediately why he had hesitated to put a name to the unforgiving single walkway, along which the doors stood to attention like uniformed soldiers. The vision bore a startling resemblance to the rooms in mental asylums, and a shiver touched my spine. I trailed hesitantly as my companion jostled the padlocks on each door until he found one that was rusted enough to give way. The door creaked horribly on its hinges in protest against our combined pushing. I gripped my pencil tighter, glad that it was sharp enough to act as a weapon. What dangers lay beyond, I didn't know. What a thin graphite pencil could protect me from, I also didn't know.

"Oh. Wow." His voice held a slight tremor, but I wasn't sure whether it was in awe or fear. Gingerly, I allowed myself to soak in the sight of the room. To say it was bare would be generous. There were no decorations in sight. On the ceiling was a lightbulb, cracked open with age, now just a filament carcass. In the middle of the room was a single metal chair—this intrigued me this intrigued me: unusual for twentieth century furniture. The room had an unsettling atmosphere, seeming impossibly colder. My skin crawled; I felt ghostly fingers brushing my arms.

"Are you sure that we should be here?" I asked weakly. The man beckoned me closer to a corner of the room, where he was peering intently at something. It was a broken piece of chain, I could tell, and it seemed to disappear into the floor. There was some rust on the greying links.

"This floor was actually walled off before, but I asked for it to be opened. See this," he encouraged, dangling a length of rusted chain in front of my face. I gave it a suspicious whiff. It smelled of iron, and I remarked as such. However,

the historian shook his head indignantly. “Not just iron. Blood.” He gestured to the walls, which were stained with copper. “Blood, everywhere.”

I suddenly noticed a lack of ventilation in this room: no windows nor vents, even less glamorous than a prison cell. Blood, chains, a metal chair. My imagination added two uniformed men armed with instruments of torture and questions; a writhing victim in the cold chair struggling against cuffed hands and shackled ankles. I quickly drew my vision out and shoved it almost violently at my employer, who nodded in approval, signalling for us to exit the room. It seemed I wasn’t the only one who wanted to move on.

“An interrogation room,” he broke the silence as we proceeded to another place that he had marked down for our visit. “Perhaps used by the Japanese during the 1930s, while they occupied provinces in the second Sino-Japanese War.” He seemed pleased at our discovery. “You’ve been most helpful, I’m glad I decided to bring an artist along.”

This man was too outspoken for my sensibilities, and I had elected to stay quiet around him very early on in our professional partnership, but I made an exception this time. “I don’t understand why you chose me for this job. I told you that I specify in drawing still life—I illustrate what’s there, not what’s missing.”

There was a twinkle of mischief in his eye as he looked back at me. “That’s exactly why you are perfect for this. You see, this house is a jigsaw puzzle of its past usages, just as we embody the experiences in our lives. Some bits may be missing now, however you see past that and piece the whole building together through illustrating its different parts; it is because you refuse to see things in anything other than their whole form that your perspective is crucial.”

Another floor, and to describe what I saw in two words: hastily refurnished. It all looked thrown together in a hurry to serve a temporary purpose, and then, so used, had been vacated.

There were cots without mattresses, wooden crates, in rows of five and columns of three. The walls seemed to have been repainted white, but not very professionally—the yellow wallpaper underneath showed through the peeling white curls. Clean and neat and tidy, my guess was that this room had been a dormitory, or shelter. But there wasn’t enough indication of which.

Taking a page from my companion’s book, I smoothed my palms over one wall, reaching high and pacing along its length, paying attention to each nook and cranny. I was hoping for a clue, no matter how small, that could show me more about this room so that I could reimagine it more accurately. Just then, I saw something black out of the corner of my eye. My fingers brushed a shaving of paint, and I scratched at it with my nails, peeling it back to reveal the wallpaper underneath.

“Wait! You’re tarnishing a historical relic!” the owner of the reprimanding voice appeared at my side, but despite his words, I could sense his curiosity. I peeled and scrabbled until, finally, six characters were revealed to us.

“*Lin shi yun fu zhen suo*,” I read. “Temporary clinic for pregnant women.”

The historian grunted in thought. “Possibly used during World War Two or the Chinese civil war, circa mid-1940s.” I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach as I surveyed the drab clinic with little more than narrow cots for comfort. Makeshift it may have been, but it must clearly have lacked supplies with the army taking first priority. This put wartime thinking into perspective—the home front and civilians, including women and children, were frequently ignored to sustain the armed forces.

And then I started to understand why Andrew was so passionate about this pagoda’s influence on culture and its historical importance. Standing here, uncovering the layers of the walls, I felt like I was stepping in the shadows of people who had once walked these floors lifetimes ago; I felt connected with my ancestors of old Shanghai through touching the walls that had sheltered them, and being in a room where children of my grandparents’ generation had been brought into the world.

Buildings were long-lasting reminders of civilisation. Through the changing of hands, renovations, appropriations and commissions, the pagoda had prospered and suffered variously, surviving to tell its story. But now, it was set to be razed to the ground. Even the pillars of society must fall.

Just as we headed to the next flight of stairs, Andrew turned to face me. He pushed the blueprints of the pagoda into my hands. “If we’re going to be partners, then... maybe you should choose where we explore next. One final destination.”

I smiled gratefully, appreciating the gesture. He fiddled with his hands as if uncomfortable with handing over control of our venture to me. Surveying the map, I focussed on a square space in the middle. “Let’s go there,” I suggested.

“Good choice, the *feng shui* garden. You might find it a little... wild.”

Indeed, it was. The garden was small, but open to natural sunlight. Typical, believed to bring luck as well as make a home more welcoming, there was an artificial pond in the middle with a wooden footbridge stretching over its narrow width. Smooth and shining rocks lined either side of a cobblestone path, leading over the bridge to a miniature stone likeness of a temple. Once, this garden could have been a serene, idyllic refuge from life’s complications. Decades later, the flowering shrubs and leafy plants that scattered over the rest of the space had grown larger and freer, denser and wilder, so that the garden looked more like a parody of a forest. Still, it retained its charm, and I grew to like its naturalism, finding myself drawing the garden for what it looked like now. The pagoda, in a sense the exoskeleton of the garden shielding it from the harsh world, had withered, yet the garden had flourished over the years of disuse. It was almost a metaphor for how the living inhabitants of the pagoda had grown in its protection. Like a mother hen watching her chicks leave the roost, people had come and gone, abandoning the building that had given them a home and allowing it to degrade.

“It’s beautiful,” I stated, feeling self-conscious at my inability to express all my inner thoughts without slipping into what my brother called the ‘artist’s ramblings’.

“This looks rather expensive, don’t you think?” Andrew mused. “Owned by someone important.”

“Like something a high-class villa would have,” I added with a laugh. “Another government official?” I thought hard about the Chinese history that I had learned years ago in secondary. “Seems a bit much for Communist Party officials, though, given their mentality about equality.”

Andrew shrugged. “Agreed, but when the Party first came into power, it is quite likely that since Shanghai is an important city and the new government needed to win over support from the right people, they could overlook the glamour of this house when assigning it to an ally.”

I made a mental note to myself to research more into the multi-faceted history of my city. Maybe then would I fully understand Andrew’s boundless passion for a seemingly dull, forsaken building. Maybe then would I be able to appreciate how influential past events were with regards to shaping my present.

“May I look?” Andrew hovered over my shoulder as I flipped through the drawings. He sighed, however this time it was a sigh of longing rather than nostalgia. Looking back at the pagoda before us, I shared his frustration. History. So long to establish, so fast to erase. One century to build, one day to destroy.

I offered the historian a reassuring smile. “I’ll get these back to you later.” He frowned in confusion. “I want to finish these properly, paint and canvas and all, so you can compare a photo of the pagoda now to its change over time. No extra fees.”

Andrew seemed to understand my deeper sentiment, a new light—hope—blooming in his eyes. “Thank you.”

I had always illustrated what was there, not what was missing. But even if the pagoda was lost, it would stay alive in my memory; it would stay alive in the stories of those who lived in it; it would stay alive as a part of Shanghai’s journey through a hundred years of history.

The Brush and the Quill

Harrow Beijing, Yao, Caitlin – 14

1

My name is Bamboo; I'm a calligraphy brush, the writing instrument that has been used in China for centuries. I've dwelled in the city of Shanghai for a long time; served many calligraphers during my existence. Every one of them has a unique story, entwined with this glorious city's past and present.

★ ★ ★

"I told you, this one isn't for sale!"

It has always been quiet in Yang's antique shop. People paid less attention to the archaic porcelain vases with Qing decorative arts on them nowadays; they would rather go to see the skyscrapers near The Bund. However, on this particular morning, a girl named Estelle entered his shop and demanded for calligraphy brushes. There was only one in the store, which Yang has specifically labeled a "Not for sale" sign on the delicate rosewood case of the brush.

Estelle did not give up, she offered a price that was beyond fair; but it only resulted in the shouting that startled the nearby stores.

"Why?" She asked with great frustration.

Yang pursed his lips and asked her to look at the case closely. Estelle leaned in from the counter and saw a hollow space carved next to where the brush lies; it's about the same length as the brush, but wider.

"A quill should be here, right where this empty space is." Yang said brusquely, "Unless a quill suddenly appears here and make this set of...writing instrument complete, this brush isn't going anywhere."

Somehow Estelle made no further comments at Yang's odd explanation. "Ok, then." On the contrary, she nodded in understanding. "Thank you anyway. Just so you know, sir, I really like that brush, it's nice." She glanced at it once more, smiled at Yang politely and walked out.

Yang waited till Estelle disappeared from view and took out the case again. He slowly traced the outline of the vacant space that took the shape of a quill, lost in thoughts.

★ ★ ★

The way Estelle's eyes lingered on me was weird, as if she has recognized something familiar.

"The quill" is how everyone addresses Feather, a long lost friend of mine. Yang, my current owner, has been looking for her because of an unfulfilled wish. It's a Mission Impossible, the last time I've seen Feather was decades ago, and she could be anywhere in the world right now.

2

I once belonged to Yang's grandmother, Fan Xing.

When she was little, "Well-off" was inadequate to describe the life the Fans lived. They owned a fine house in the International Settlement, where her dad was a wealthy businessman who traded with the British and Americans. Xing's parents always made sure that she and her brother were well provided for. Most people said they lived in the lap of luxury before everything went drastically wrong.

It all started from the cargo ship that cost Mr. Fan a fortune but was shipwrecked in a storm, a storm that destroyed their past and shrouded their future. The Fans had to give up everything they once had and move back to the Old City; but the worst was yet to come.

In the spring of 1935, members of the Chinese Nationalist Party captured Xing's brother, Yu, an ardent supporter and member of the Chinese Communist Party. Rumors said that Yu couldn't stand the torturing, so he gave away the whereabouts of a few of his fellow members, and died after the interrogation.

The Fans no longer lived comfortably in a fancy house, the kind that has a yard in front of it and allows bright, warm sunlight to penetrate the French windows in the morning. Their residence in the Longtang seemed like a tiny hut in comparison. It had a gloomy feeling to it, like the mixture of sorrow and resentment that overshadowed them.

Fan Xing had developed a particular liking for me since then. She constantly softened the stiff tip of mine and stopped her parents from writing with me, because I would wear out after that. She had indulged in an eccentric habit of talking to me; whispering in a mysterious tone, and named me "Bamboo" which made her parents thought she had gone insane.

However, She said it was because I was the only thing her brother, passionate about calligraphy, had loved and treasured; talking to me made her feel like Yu had never really left her.

★ ★ ★

"Do you wish Yu was still with us, Bamboo?"

It was the question Xing asked me very often. The truth was I missed Yu more than she thought I did, but there was no way I could tell her that. On a morning of early summer, however, her question wasn't responded by silence as usual.

"I'm so sorry about what had happened." A croaky voice echoed through the door, which was left ajar.

Xing walked over and pulled the plank doors open. A tall and lean figure stood outside, she was about Xing's age, a pair of astonishingly blue eyes distinguished her from all the residents in the longtang; but what had caught my attention was the quill she tucked behind her left ear. "Hello." She said casually as Xing stood in front of her, holding me in her hand, "I'm sorry...should have told someone about this visit."

"Who are you?" Xing asked in a language she hadn't used for a long time, looking blankly at the girl.

"My name is Sylvia Wood." A smile climbed onto her face as she introduced herself, "You remember your dad's old trading partners? My dad was one of them...I...I heard what had happened after you moved, I just want to see how you and your parents are doing." She gazed at Xing and added, "I remember you fairly well."

Xing's eyes narrowed, her expression was something I've never seen before: rigid, her lips curled up unnaturally. "Oh yeah? Want to see how miserable we ended up?" She snarled, "Well, we are doing fine! Why don't you go back to your perfect little concession world? Girls like you shouldn't be standing in this dark, filthy alleyway!"

"No, no...you misunderstood, I just..."

"Get out of my sight!" Xing yelled. It was surprising that I had survived from her fist that clenched me so hard. "Why is everyone lurking around us and spying on our life?" She mumbled furiously under her breath, which sent a chill through my body.

Sylvia was twirling her hair ferociously. Her lips moved, but no words came out. Her fingers were trembling as she lifted her arm and adjusted the quill behind her ear.

"So, if Madam Sylvia has no further inquires, please excuse me from this conversation." All of sudden the burning rage in Xing's voice was gone, replaced by a cold, icy tone; but Sylvia made no sign of leaving.

"I saw you talking to Bamboo."

Xing froze. She raised her head up slowly and stared right into Sylvia's eyes, "Pardon?"

"I saw you talking to your calligraphy brush." Sylvia glanced at me, repeating the sentence seemed to have drained all the courage out of her, "I'm sorry about your brother, Xing, I really am." It was the first time she addressed the matter of Yu. Her eyes were suddenly growing misty as her voice trailed off, "I know what it feels like." She said wearily, "I lost my sister when I was fifteen. She had leukemia, there was no cure for it."

Sylvia pulled the quill from behind her ear, holding it in a gentle caress, "She loved to write." Her voice sounded dreamy, "She wrote many things with this quill. Somehow I felt she was still with me when I look at it." She lifted her head up and met Xing's eyes, "Just like you, I talked to it and even gave it a name, Feather."

"That's exactly how I felt!" The words escaped from Xing before she realized it. She uncurled her fingers around me and showed me to Sylvia as she saw Feather the quill lay motionless in Sylvia's palm, the edge of the feather was embroidered by golden thread, a letter "S" drawn on one side of it with ink. Sharing a tragically unusual experience in common has brought them closer. It then occurred to me that perhaps a bond has formed between me and Feather as well, since we were both forced to bear the weight of our owners' grief, pain, and their unwillingness to let their loved ones go.

★ ★ ★

Sylvia started to drop by more often since that day. Xing would invite her in and make a cup of Jasmine tea for her; the two of them would chat for hours. Xing liked listening to Sylvia talking about the concessions, it would always evoke her distant but pleasant memory of her childhood; when she had nothing to worry about, when her family was still "whole".

"Mr. Fan was my dad's main trading partner, he was a nice man." Sylvia grinned from ear to ear as she talked, "I used to walk pass your house quite often, you and your brother were always..." She stopped abruptly and glanced at Xing nervously, "Anyway, where does Mr. Fan work now?"

"The Central Mint." Xing heaved a deep sigh and said, "Minting the commemorative coins."

"Oh." Sylvia nodded, "I've heard of it...it's linked to the Central Bank of the Republic of China, right?"

"Yeah." Xing looked away from Sylvia, she took a deep breath and said, "He was a Nationalist, had different beliefs from Yu. They used to quarrel a lot."

Xing had never brought Yu up to anyone ever since he died; listening to her telling Yu's story to Sylvia was the sound of miracle. She told Sylvia everything, from the point when Yu joined the Communist party to when he was captured. She didn't miss a single detail.

"He made a deal with them...said if he told them the whereabouts they'd have to guarantee our safety." A tear rolled down Xing's face as she approached the end, "The Communists called him a traitor then...they have no idea that this bitter rivalry between them and the Nationalists are tearing families apart..."

Sylvia remained quiet as Xing was sobbing too hard to continue the story. She pulled Xing in for a hug and whispered, "It's all right; it's all over now." Feather told me Sylvia played the most important role in Xing's life: A listener.

★ ★ ★

Unlike Xing, who dwelled on the memory of the concessions, Sylvia was deeply intrigued by everything in the Longtang. Her eyes would twinkle with excitement as she saw the children holding bowls, going to every neighbour's house during dinnertime, sampling different dishes; she liked seeing people sitting on cane chairs outside, enjoying the night breeze in summer; she was astounded by the fact that everyone in the Longtang would get involved when two families quarrel.

"It's always noisy here, hope you don't mind." Xing said as she took the clothes off from the clothesline outside, "Where you live is much quieter."

"No, no, I like this place a lot!" Sylvia shook her head ferociously, "It feels like a big family here, everyone in this narrow alleyway."

Xing smiled and took the clothes inside.

Feather and I would keep each other in company as Xing and Sylvia chatted. "Her parents have an unhappy marriage." She once told me about Sylvia, "They are cold and distant people, Sylvia doesn't talk to them very much; especially after she lost Lorraine...she has been isolating herself until she met Xing."

It was mid-summer back then, the sprouting friendship between Xing and Sylvia convinced me that days were getting better; I had no idea about the chaos beyond the Longtang, nor that China would soon be haunted by its worst nightmare.

3

“Xing, pack your things by tomorrow, we’re moving.”

“Where to?”

“Kunming. Shanghai isn’t safe anymore.”

1937 marked the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War; people who lived through the eight years would rather erase every piece of memory of it from their heads. The Fans had left Shanghai behind and moved away as Mr. Fan, who worked in the Central Mint, requested to work in one of its branches in Kunming.

★ ★ ★

On the night before they departed, Sylvia came over to Xing.

“Be careful.” She said, hugging Xing tightly, “Will we ever see each other again?”

“Of course.” Xing tried to sound reassuring, “You’re the one who should be careful, this city has fallen into chaos.”

“I need to show you something.” Sylvia was holding an elongated case in her hand, it was made of rosewood, with two tiny figures carved on the lid; the inside of it has two empty spaces that roughly took the shapes of a brush and a quill. “See this? I made it for Bamboo and Feather.” She said solemnly, “I will bury this under the tree at the end of this alleyway. Write to me before you come back to Shanghai, alright? I’ll then dig this case up and put Feather here.” She pointed the space that looked like a quill, “I’ll put the case back again. If you see Feather there when you come back, that means I’m fine, we’ll be able to meet up soon, understand?”

“Okay.” Xing touched the figures on the lid, “Who are they?”

“You and me, can’t you tell?”

“Not very talented at crafting, are you?” Xing giggled.

“Well, that’s the best I can do!” Sylvia slapped Xing’s shoulder playfully and swung her arms around Xing, “Promise to keep in touch, Xing.”

“Promise.” Xing grinned with tears emerging from her eyes.

“So, it’s a goodbye then?” I said to Feather as we parted.

“Yes. Hope I could see you again, Bamboo.” Feather swayed her soft, pearl-white feather and bid farewell to me.

Xing went to the City God Temple of Shanghai afterwards, she didn’t pray for good fortune like most people did, but only for the safety of her family and Sylvia, who was to remain in the city.

★ ★ ★

The Fans lived in the safe haven of Kunming for 8 years, where Xing got married and had children.

Xing had lost touch with Sylvia Wood in 1941. The vision of the two of them strolling up and down the Longtang on a summer evening more than 10 years ago have faded completely, but Xing couldn’t have forgotten the girl who constantly travelled from the International Settlement to the Old City to see her when everyone else thought she was lunatic. As the grueling war of blood and anguish ceased in 1945, Xing went back to Shanghai and brought me along.

She returned to Tongfuli Longtang and walked along the alleyway, where so many memories are buried. When she reached the end, a promise she made years ago came back to her.

She walked over to the tree and dug out the rosewood case, the figures on the lid were almost undistinguishable. She opened the lid desperately only to find an envelope lying where Feather should be. Xing tore it open; she blinked several times as if seeing if she has misread the words. After a while that seemed like a decade, sadness, shock and confusion assembled themselves on Xing's face, it had delicate and undefined features that made her seem vulnerable.

Dear Xing,

Sylvia had died...there were troops everywhere in the International Settlement 2 years ago...it caused a lot of panics, she was killed in the chaos...She had talked about you before, I am aware that you are just as sad as we are. You had been a good friend of Sylvia. By the way, Sylvia had said that if anything...anything happens to her, she'd like you to have her favourite quill. However, her mother had insisted that we take this quill back to London. I would bring it back to you someday if I could.

With Respect and Gratitude

Thomas G. Wood

09.12.1944

★ ★ ★

Xing had been longing to see Feather again until she passed away in 1998.

When people visit Shanghai now, they'd be amazed at how modern this city has become, the bustling streets; the flashing lights of shopping malls and nightclubs; they would admire the Oriental Pearl Tower in awe. Not many of them would go into the Longtangs, the narrow alleyways and interconnected lanes. There used to be lots of them here. In recent years, some of them are renovated, others have disappeared; the stories of ordinary people there were buried in the demolished residences.

★ ★ ★

"Hello." Yang was shocked to see Estelle standing in front of him as he sat quietly in a café the night after they met.

"Have you been following me?" Yang scowled at her, looking alarmed.

"Well, there's something I have to tell you." Estelle pulled the chair in front of him and sat down, "You are Fan Xing's grandson, aren't you?"

Yang gaped at her, bewildered.

"My grandma was Sylvia Wood's cousin." Estelle ignored his astounded face and continued, "Does this name sound familiar to you? Have you heard of the story?"

"Yes, my father told me, but how did you..."

"The Woods went back to London in despair after Sylvia died and the failure of their business during the war. The quill Sylvia once treasured ended up in my grandma's possession as Mrs. Wood passed away. I was very curious about Shanghai after listening to Sylvia's experience, so I came with this quill. I've been to countless antique shops, you're the first one who wanted to reunite the brush and the quill."

"I'm here to return something." Estelle said finally, taking out a transparent case from her bag. A quill lay motionless inside; its feather was embroidered by golden thread, a letter "S" drawn faintly on one side of the feather. "It belongs here, in Shanghai."

The City That Never Slept

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Law, Mei – 14

Shanghai city was calm, despite the automobile horns, the bicycle rings and the tram bells. Shanghai was home to some of China's most beautiful architectural treasures, which were proudly on display at all times. It was truly a sight to behold, and the community knew that one would have to be extraordinarily foolish to take such gifts for granted.

Each morning consisted of trams loitering outside busy markets flourishing with exotic fruits and artists who resided on cobblestone pavements to capture the vibrancy of Shanghai. These paintings were often sold to visitors (or the local families who enjoyed filling their homes with fine art).

And at night, the shops would switch on their neon lights and floods of women would flock to markets, and seas of men would push their ways into pubs. Children on bicycles would cycle under the moonlight, exploring outside the fence that mother had told them not to cross, picking up frogs and insects and playing football in the field.

Despite the constant buzz of the city, it was orderly. Everyone knew what he or she was doing, from the ladies who sold hand-painted umbrellas outside the town hall to the business men who ran to catch the tram in the morning. And although the commotion would never stop, it never wore out; at sunrise simply resetting as the golden sun would wake and stretch its honey rays over the city, always just enough to catch the windows and play tricks on mischievous shadows.

It could best be described as outer space; tranquil, beautiful and perhaps a little mysterious. Where the planets methodically circle the Sun, yet never once collide. It almost resembled a lone astronaut witnessing the glittering stars that reflect and refract the golden rays from the Sun. And although the sun would disappear behind the shadows, the city never slept.

Mei Ling was on her way to the tailor's little shop just down the road from her spacious house. If there was one thing the city knew, it was that Mei liked to dress up. She went to the tailor's every week, each time requesting a more intricate dress, a more exquisite hairpin. She was married to Mr Ling. Mr Ling did not tell people his first name. He left the house only after 11pm, where he would make his way down to a bar and drink into the early hours of the day, always leaving in darkness, with a half drunken bottle wrapped in a newspaper.

Mei Ling was not happy and many suspected she was uncomfortable in her marriage. This, however, did not stop her from pursuing her own interests, which mostly consisted of going out to dinner parties and entertaining guests.

Mei saw the city changing. She knew that everything was unfolding from the tranquil community into something more menacing. She saw the planets crossing paths. She watched a shadow, of at first an insignificant gloom, evolve into a seemingly infinite nothingness. Mei knew everything was about to change. Mei witnessed the slow, almost torturous, engulfing of the planet by the swelling black hole, and the chaos that followed.

The silent enveloping of the planet had triggered turmoil. Behind the obscurity of the black hole, planets and asteroids were colliding and the crashing of the two bodies threw rocks and remains. The serene atmosphere was quickly swallowed by the deafening sound of destruction.

Hongqi Lao was called 3 hours after the murder of Mei Ling; a respectable detective whom the community relied on to solve the case. Hongqi examined the scene. Mei lay on the carpet, her cold arms by her side. There was dried blood on her head, about 2 hours old according to Hongqi. There were no signs or trauma or struggling, he added. Judging from her RMB2000 dress, she had been out that night. It was 5 in the morning, and not even the neighbours had risen yet.

Hongqi decided to interrogate her acquaintances.

He first called her neighbour, who told him that she heard a bottle crashing at around 2:30am. She claims it was so loud that it woke her children, but she thought nothing of it and returned to her slumber.

The lady who ran the fruit market, Chengguang, was summoned next. Chengguang said that she knew Mei very well, and that she bought fruit from her stall everyday: melon, apple, oranges and such. She said that Mei always bought dragon fruit because it was her husband's favourite.

Last of all, Hongqi requested for Mr Ling. Mr Ling told the detective that he went out drinking that night but didn't remember what had happened next.

The rumours travelled worryingly fast in the city, and the news had spread by 7am. Doors were locked and children were not allowed outside after dark, but most noticeably, the calmness that inhabited the city was now replaced with fear. The planet had demolished the astronaut in one sickening blow that hurled waves of debris in all directions.

Hongqi continued to search the living room in which Mei lay lifeless and limp. He found beauty products and expensive jewellery and numerous receipts for furniture and fruit. It seemed as though nothing of importance was hiding under the velvet armchairs or the satin drapes, until he found carefully folded bits of paper inside her silk pillowcase.

Hongqi carefully retrieved them and looked at the paper. It was thick paper, and written in rich ink that probably costed more than his small apartment. He traced his fingers over the envelope, closed with a deep red wax seal. Even before reading the contents of the envelope, Hongqi knew that these letters were of significant importance, certainly to Mei, and thereby perhaps the case.

Love letters.

Letters that spilled forth the contents of a man's heart. It was written in such a way that it was immediately clear that the pair were in love. Hongqi's eyes drifted further down the paper, savouring each character, the ink dancing on the crisp paper. The characters painted pictures emanating passion, and Hongqi read over it more than once to truly comprehend the words. It was funny how just stringing together a handful of words could create such a beautiful meaning, and that one relied on these simple sounds and phonics to express their feelings. Words were precious like that, and this man knew how to use them. Hongqi scanned the paper for a name, but there was no name. No man.

He sifted through the many letters, but the mystery lover signed none. Hongqi inspected the envelope once more. There were subtle grooves outlining the envelope. He had large, rough hands, but he traced them delicately with the tip of his fingers. Hongqi knew to handle evidence with care, and besides, he had no interest in damaging the letters. With nimble fingers, he flipped the envelope over. There was a small painted flower on the corner, decorated with rich blues and deep reds. In the bud of the flower was a name:

CHUNHUA

Hongqi immediately traced the mystery name down, and paid a visit to her little shop. It was small, but filled with beautiful antiques that brought warmth into the home. She sat at a small desk in the middle of the room, which was covered in cigarettes and pomegranate seeds. Chunhua resembled the complete opposite of her home. Her eyes were worn with fatigue and her hair was pinned behind her ears in such a rushed manner that ringlets protruded from her forehead and nestled over her face while she worked.

Hongqi approached Chunhua quietly so as not to disturb her. She was clearly busy as her head was cocked to one side and her tongue was pressed awkwardly against the roof of her mouth. She was perched on her plastic chair, which was covered in paint of ambers and emeralds.

Hongqi stepped close enough to notice that she was painting flowers onto a collection of envelopes, one after the other. She had a fan blowing overhead, which not only disturbed her hair even more, but also left a fluster of paper and ashes and cigarette butts swirling around the room. The envelopes, on the other hand, were stacked in orderly metal racks. Unlike the rest of her home, the metal shelves were spotless.

The old lady only noticed the detective once he had placed himself on the plastic chair opposite her desk and began to speak. When she looked up, her tired features took Hongqi aback. He reckoned she was about seventy years old. The creases of her face dug deep into her porcelain skin. Hongqi began asking questions:

'What do you know about these letters?' he demanded, sliding the many envelopes over her already crowded desk. One could perhaps describe Hongqi as admirable, considering his obvious liking to get on with the case; there was no silly introduction that demanded the inevitable wasting of one's time. No, Hongqi was not keen on describing the context, and it was rather apparent.

'What do you think you're doing here?' Chunhua retorted. (This was just one of the many cases where Hongqi's straightforward manner resulted in the obvious distress of his clients.)

'Excuse me, ma'am, I am a detective who is demanding that you tell me who you wrote this for. Withholding evidence is against the law so I suggest you speak fast,' Hongqi said, evidently surprised at the reply of Chunhua. You see, there was something commendable about the way he handled situations like these.

'I don't remember,' the woman replied matter-of-factly, busying herself once more in the vast piles of paper.

‘Ma’am, I urge you, this is a matter of utmost importance, these letters are dated the 2nd of January 1943, a mere week ago. Perhaps that is why I am unconvinced,’ Hongqi said.

Chunhua was considering her options, ‘I don’t remember his name, but he was carrying some dresses under his arm’.

At this point, Hongqi was frantically scrawling notes into a little book that fitted in the breast pocket of his overcoat.

‘Do you remember what kind of dresses these were?’ he asked.

‘Beautiful, expensive, more beautiful than when the Sun boasts its honey—gold rays, I can tell you that.’

Hongqi left the shop, burying his head in the notebook. Mei Ling was having an affair, it went without saying, really: the exquisite dress, the love letters, and the depression around her husband.

And that’s when it clicked.

Mr Ling was the murderer.

There was no other explanation.

Hongqi wasted no time travelling back to Mr Ling to officially arrest him and lay down his case. He thought to himself on the tram back about how he hadn’t seen the signs before. Not even the enticing scent of red bean pastries could distract him: Hongqi had won.

In almost no time, Hongqi had Mr Ling down at the station. Mr Ling, naturally protested, but there was nothing he could say: Mr Ling was the murderer. After all, there was no other explanation.

Chengguang returned to Mei’s home, the home which once proudly boasted warmth and precious chandeliers, but now a depressing vestige of Mei’s once glamorous life. Mei’s cold body had been removed, probably transported to the Morgue, where she would lie amongst hundreds and thousands of other dead bodies. Mei was simply a memory now, a meaningless body; a cruel reminder of the light she once inhabited.

Before long, Chengguang was down at the Morgue. She wouldn’t let Mei rest in such a depressing building. The structure itself was almost rotten, worn and tired and grey. Paint was peeling off the walls, the concrete peeking through as if there was something worth hiding underneath.

Chengguang demanded to take Mei’s body out and let her rest someplace else. She couldn’t stand to allow her friend to reside in such a place, which was so opposite to her values and interests. After much negotiation, the lady behind the desk agreed to let Chengguang see her deceased friend’s body.

They hadn’t changed Mei’s clothes. She lay in the same dress and makeup and hairpin that she wore the night she died. Tears escaped Chenghua’s eyes, rolling down her face in delicate streams. Chengguang remembered Mei vividly, which only made seeing her dead body far more poignant.

Chengguang grazed her hand over Mei’s cold face. Upon seeing Mei’s loose hairpin, she took it out to fix it.

But nothing could have prepared her for what came next.

Instead of pulling out a pin from her hair, Chengguang removed a long exquisitely thin but amazingly sharp pin that had buried itself in her head. She continued pulling. The needle in its full length was about 15cm; long enough to kill a person.

Long enough to kill a person.

It had killed Mei. She ran out in such a hurry that she didn’t cover Mei’s body. The tears that were once filled with grief were now brimming with anger. She held the pin in her hand, where the needle was coated in dry blood. Chenghua’s mind raced; she was formulating explanations, looking for someone to blame. The only reason Mei hadn’t taken the pin

out earlier was because she hadn't felt it, that would explain why there were no signs of struggling, a placid death, peaceful, even.

Hongqi was surprised, to say the least. Not particularly because he hadn't suspected the hairpin (though it is unlikely he did), but because it was a lady who sold fruit at a market who had actually solved the case. Mr Ling was released at once. Hongqi snatched the hairpin out of Chengguang's hands. He examined it closely, until coming to the conclusion that it was, indeed, a hairpin that had killed Mei. He now began to examine it closer, holding it close to his eyes to read the small print on the decorative bone on top. It read:

'Baozhi's Handmade Dresses'

It was the local tailor, and they had their culprit.

They made their way to Baozhi's shop. Hongqi took it from there. He flashed his identification and said in the coldest possible manner, 'Did you really think you would get away?'

Baozhi denied it at first, until, of course, Chengguang had found not only a stash of ardent love letters signed by none other than Mei Ling herself, but also an identical sewing needle, about 15cm long; long enough to kill a person.

Long enough to kill Mei.

From that point on, everything moved fast: bringing Baozhi to the police station, Chengguang returning to work and even recovering from the initial shock.

After multiple interrogations and some fruitless probing, they had pinned Baozhi's motives. They were, as Hongqi had predicted, in a relationship. They were both hiding it from Mr Ling, whom Mei feared would hurt her if he were to find out. From Baozhi, Mei received warm embraces and expensive dresses. From Mr Ling, Mei was shown no true admiration other than a grumbled thank you when she got up from the table to fetch him a beer can. Baozhi had murdered Mei to keep her safe.

You could see the madness in his eyes, but he was not insane, he was in love. He didn't murder for malice, he murdered for devotion. He had promised to protect her, and when he feared Mr Ling was onto their affair, he murdered her to keep her safe. Baozhi claimed that Mei knew nothing of his plan and didn't even notice when he had slipped the needle into her hair on their final night out together.

Love is funny like that; the way it manifests itself in the feeble human mind. No detective could have predicted that; it takes a certain kind of genius (or madman, for that matter) to understand his motives. Love had claimed Mei's life, and not long after, it claimed Baozhi's life. After all, according to Baozhi, he had no will to live without his love.

After the confusion and mourning had passed, the calm city of Shanghai had settled once more.

It could best be described as outer space; tranquil, beautiful and perhaps a little mysterious. Where the planets methodically circle the Sun, yet never once collide. It almost resembled a lone astronaut witnessing the glittering stars that reflect and refract the golden rays from the Sun.

For now at least. For although the sun would disappear each night behind the shadows, the city never slept.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Heep Yunn School, Chew, Adan – 16

I

I locked the door of the apartment, and took the lift to the ground floor. The view of Shanghai never failed to amuse me – laced with skyscrapers and lightning rods, I sometimes wonder how my hometown came to be, through 5000 years of Chinese history. I hurried along in the crowded roads of Shanghai, admiring the hustle and bustle of the city, as white collars whipped up gusts beside me. I smiled in nostalgia as I picked up the phone. It already feels like a long night.

“Hello? Qiao speaking.”

“Hey, it’s agent S8 here. ID has swept up our pig. You can find the intel in your phone.”

I mumbled an ‘okay’ and hung up. So, who’s the lucky target the Intelligence Department picked up for us today? I unlocked my smartphone and looked at the profile: Lin Zhong Tai, aged 35, on the run for drug trafficking and distribution. I took a close look at his face – dry and cracked lips, irises that looked out-of-focus. Taking a deep breath, I prepared myself for some hardcore action scenes. I then took the battery out of my phone, and chucked it into the nearest bin. Ah, I kind of liked that newest model.

I scanned my surroundings a bit, partly admiring all those streets lights starting to come on one by one. This city seemed so alive and healthy, and I, as an agent, was to keep it that way by eradicating these criminals discreetly.

“Qiao. Where’s he?” I said into my earpiece.

“He’s two streets down from where you are, 90th floor, playing pool, probably smoking weird stuff, too.”

“Got it. Is he armed or with bodyguards?”

“I’ll look into it. Stay out of cameras.”

I looked around at my surroundings again, nobody suspicious. They probably just wanted to get home as quickly as possible after a tedious day of work. I continued to walk towards the building briskly, also wanting to do the same as those workers. Boarding the lift, it gave me a feeling that our pig was pretty rich. The escalator looked extravagant. It must be hard for him to not have any bodyguards if he were a man of such status. I felt my own chest; the metallic lump of my pistol always gave me the security I needed.

The lift sounded, and the doors opened. The music of a nightclub blasted into my ears. The smell of weird substances was starting to make me hallucinate. I groaned in my mind, it was going to be hard distinguishing someone’s footsteps if the music’s this loud and the smell’s this horrendous.

And, a second later, I found out I was right about footsteps, because someone pulled me in a split second to a dark room and pointed a knife at my throat.

“Who are you?” The black figure whispered fiercely.

Instinctively, I kicked him in the shin, ankle him in the abdomen and twisted the figure around. I whipped out my pistol and shoved it towards the side of his neck. With my limited senses, I could slowly see more and more dark silhouettes approaching as the writhing figure let out a loud howl of fury. *There was no time.* I took a deep breath and pulled the trigger.

I waited for the loud bang to sound – but it never came. I cursed under my breath. My pistol was out of bullets!

The dark figure let out an evil snicker, twisted my arms that have now lost their strength and stuck his gun onto my throat.

I heard a loud bang, and felt my body melt away from the darkness and the seething pain, up and away from the modern metropolitan city of Shanghai.

II

It felt like my soul rushed back inside my body after a short glimpse in time. My eyes snapped open. Where was I? In hell? Ready to rot away after trying to kill someone?

The dim landscape slowly came into view. I blinked, blinked once more, and saw two figures sitting alongside a mahjong table, lit by a dim lamp above them.

“Oh, Mr. Lin, there’s no need for you to act this heroic.” A deep voice boomed.

I blinked again, hoping that my eyes would be able to focus.

The figure (probably Mr. Lin) replied flatly. “Brother, I’m just doing my job.”

The other figure shook his head. My vision slowly cleared as I saw the gash and beard on his face. The scar must’ve hurt. Was this a dream?

“Well, then at least let me get 50 shipments of *ahpenyen* through!” The other figure sniggered sarcastically as he shot Mr. Lin a smoldering glare.

Wait, *ahpenyen*? That’s opium. Drugs don’t exist in heaven or hell, right?

Mr. Lin, with his back facing me, let out a small breath quietly. “Fine.” He nodded. “You must not inform anyone of my presence in Shanghai, however. Just the two of us.” He whispered.

Shanghai? I was still in Shanghai? I thought I got shot! My fingers moved slowly to the spot on my neck where the dark figure had shot me before. There was a depression, but I wasn’t bleeding a single drop of blood. The sense of danger and ambiguity clicked something in me. My eyes slowly widened as the contents of their dialogue sank into my mind. I was listening to something I wasn’t supposed to.

“My brother Zexu, you have my word on that.” The man with the scar exclaimed and roared with laughter. “Now, let us drink to this beautiful night full of –“

The large oil barrel gave a loud clang as it fell onto the floor. I had just knocked over a barrel whilst trying to climb out of a window. *Perfect stealth, Qiao.*

“Who’s there?” Lin Zexu yelled as he stood up abruptly from his seat.

I swung myself out of the closest wooden window I could find and dashed straight towards the first thing I could see in the already darkened night – the woods. Suddenly, I heard a thundering sound and felt a sharp pain shoot up my shoulder. I groaned as I touched the wound. I had been shot. For the second time in the day. But I was still up on my feet, running. I didn’t black out, I just kept on running.

After a few stops and wrapping my hand with a bandanna from my precious motorcycle jacket, I finally saw light ahead. *Land ahoy!* I sprinted towards the light.

I had already lost my chasers when I reached it. It was the nearest town from that isolated cottage. There were lots of men dressed in big cloaks and women in tight dresses with slits at the side. The streets were filled with the noise of chattering customers in the market streets.

I looked around once again, just to confirm my suspicions. The streets were filled with signs that had large red Chinese characters on them.

I sighed. I was back in old Shanghai.

III

The wet sting of blood pulled me back into reality. I groaned when I felt my legs weaken, immediately pressing on the wound harder. I needed a hospital, if not, a clinic of some sort. I might travel back in time again if I faint because of this.

I gritted my teeth and walked into the nearest hospital-like structure that had a huge sign written:

Liang Apothecary: Consultation, Selling and Healing!

“Sorry, we’re closed for – “ The voice of a friendly female answered as I staggered in, stopping abruptly.

I looked at her awed face as her eyes trailed to the dripping trail of blood.

“Help me, please.” My voice came out as a rasp.

The young girl rushed towards her stock of bandages as she gestured me to sit down near a table. Her hands were shaking as she took the bullet out of my wound.

“When, when did you get shot?” The girl asked as she dipped alcohol on my wound.

“20 – 30 minutes ago?” I wheezed breathlessly. Ah, thank the heavens I had worked hard in my classical Chinese when I was still in school 5 years ago, or I wouldn’t be able to understand what she had said.

"You don't look like you're from these parts." She mumbled as she cleaned the wound.

I nod slowly. "I don't know where I am. What's the year now?"

"It's almost the 30th Daoguang Emperor year now." She said, obviously amused, "There. I finished patching up. I guess you can stay here for the night. You're not in any condition to travel farther."

I smiled and thanked her, since I had no place to go anyway. Ah, I was in the year 1850. This time travel life is really taking me by storm!

The next morning, I woke up nice and early in her father's room. She had told me her father had left the shop-house for to visit his parents in Hangzhou. She was to stay in the shop.

"By the way," She started, "I've yet to know your name. I'm Liang Bianque. That ancient famous doctor, I was named after him."

I smiled. "That's a nice name. I'm Qiao."

Right after we got to know each other, the first customers came into the shop. Men dressed in long cloaks, small caps. Those faces look strangely familiar, though, because they were those of Lin Zexu and bearded figure I saw last night.

"What brings you here today, Officer?" Bianque asked, almost with a sarcastic tone.

"We're here for a young man, who got shot last night." Lin Zexu said in monotone.

I swallowed. I shook my head ever so slightly as I kept my eyes low, hoping she'd get the hint.

"...No." Bianque stuttered. "Never seen him."

"Search the place." The bearded man barked at the men standing behind him.

I gulped again. I had caused the girl enough trouble just by barging into her house in the middle of the night, leaving a trail of blood and sleeping in her father's room.

"Wait, wait." I stepped forth in embarrassment. "Leave her alone. I'm yours."

Lin Zexu said sternly. "Come with me then." He whipped his cloak and left the shop.

I took a look at Bianque and her wrinkled eyebrows. I gave her a weak smile and followed Lin Zexu.

IV

"Do not be afraid." Lin Zexu started as he drank a cup of rice wine, "We simply want a deal with you."

I took a deep breath again. “And what’s that?”

“I do not know how you ended up there last night, but we agreed to spare your life for eavesdropping on us on one condition.” Lin Zexu smiled. “And that is for you to act as an undercover agent for us. We saw your skills last night, and I must admit I am rather impressed. But still, going to the apothecary is really not the nicest thing...”

“What?” I asked again.

“Nothing special, collecting information about shipments and running errands.” He said flatly.

I nodded because remembered I learned that Lin Zexu strongly tackled a lot of smuggled opium during the Opium Wars in my Chinese history classes. But there was one thing I vaguely remember I didn’t understand.

“Didn’t you say you would allow a few shipments through Shanghai last night?” I lowered my voice.

His expression had a slip of sourness. “So, I guess you agree upon our deal?” He muttered under his breath.

I shrugged, trying not to show I was a bit agitated with my life on the line. “I have no choice but to, anyway.”

He nodded in satisfaction. “Let’s be honest here, I’m turning into more of a politician than a police officer now. That’s why I have to claw my way through with deals on *ahpenyen*. They are more of a commodity than a harmful substance to the body now.” He laughs. “But, of course, I must admit that I’m fully aware of my public image as a strong police officer. That’s why I needed you.”

I smirked. So much for my previous respect for this living historical figure. He was destroying himself. No wonder he received criticisms from historians.

V

“Thank the heavens you’re safe.” Bianque said as I explained everything Lin Zexu said to me. “I must say, he isn’t the nicest person to work for.”

“I can tell.” I laughed and continued. “You seem to have history with him.”

“My father... He was aware of Lin Zexu’s corrupt morals, and had evidence too. Lin Zexu has probably been planning a way to get rid of us ever since. I’m not sure of the details, but last time he came, things didn’t end well. Father had a huge blow dealt to his face.”

I sighed. It seemed like she’s had enough injuries in her life to deal with already. “Sorry for asking you that.”

She waved her hand. “Would you like to stay here though? I... I’m worried you might get hurt again if you travel. Are you headed somewhere, though?”

My eyes lit up immediately. “I’d love to stay here! I’ve... really got nowhere else to go.” I forced a smile, trailing off. “But, I’ve got to get going...”

Bianque padded over to me and touched the bullet wound while I winced in pain. “You should be fine. Take care of yourself, and... don’t hurt people, okay?”

I nodded. “I’ll be back soon.”

VI

My first three tasks were easy and straightforward. I had to gather information for shipments of opium in the black market. With lots of experience as an agent of the future, I was able to pull out lots of information thanks to the training I got before. The hardest part was actually writing a report with ink brushes and horribly thin and fragile paper. It took ages for me to get used to using ink brushes. The paper tore every time I got too frustrated. I guess that’s why Bianque told me calligraphy was an art when she taught me how to hold those brushes properly.

I was now sitting in the same cottage I first met Lin Zexu. Even though he was reading over my horrendous handwriting, his face showed no signs of amusement or contempt. He was probably more concerned with the content than the presentation.

“Qiao, you have assisted me greatly. You continue to impress me.” Lin Zexu continued. “But that is not enough. Are you ready for your next task?”

It normally felt nice to earn someone’s trust, but I didn’t feel right with him. “I’m sorry, but when are you going to let me off the hook? You aren’t going to keep me forever, are you?”

The wrinkles on his face deepened as a smile formed. “Alright.” He said. “I shall let you go if you complete this task. Your last task. However, if you fail me this time, you shall pay with your head.”

“Hm. Let’s hear it then.”

“According to all the intelligence I have, we can conclude one thing.” He uttered. “That all the *ahpenyen* in this town comes from the Liang’s.” He smirked as he noticed the change of expression on my face.

Liang’s Apothecary. That’s Bianque’s family shop!

“There’s no way the *ahpenyen* comes from there.” I shook my head. “The shop is perfectly –“

“Kill her.” Lin Zexu declared. I could see his eyes giving off a bright flash of bloodlust.

“Prove it to me.” I demanded. “Tell me all the evidence you have.”

“Strictly confidential.” He shrugged nonchalantly. “I cannot tell you.”

“But why?” I whispered. “Why?”

Being asked to kill a person that saved my life. Should’ve realized a step earlier so I wouldn’t have gotten myself into this mess.

Lin Zexu continued to fan himself with his calligraphed fan.

“Give me some time. I need some time to think.”

“Be quick with that. I will be taking my leave a few *shichens* later.” He nodded, eyes emotionless. I turned to look at his face as I took my leave. For a second, that face, wrinkled and old, with a thick mysterious beard, looked so hateful I couldn’t bear to glare at him for a heartbeat longer.

I dashed out to the woods, hoping that someone will shoot me and I’ll perhaps end back up in modern-day Shanghai. I never felt this helpless before, but the best way to deal with these kinds of storms were to calm down and think rationally. I strolled passed the apothecary, dismissing the thoughts of discussion with Bianque, who I always ended up talking to up till now. My heart ached a bit when I saw her talking to some troubled patient and I knew I needed some space to think. And maybe a tint of hope.

I gazed into the enormous waves, ebbing along the sand line. The sand slowly dragged down and pulled up, following the direction of the powerful waves. My lips slowly curved into a smile. The Shanghai beach? Of course, nature healed me from my worries.

I rushed back to the Apothecary, and asked Bianque to start writing the letter.

VII

A few days later, I stopped by the Town Hall with Bianque, for the second time in my life to look at the Bulletin Board.

And there, scrawled in messy handwriting, was the notice I had longed hoped to see:

OFFICER AND ANTI-OPIUM ADVOCATE LIN ZE XU EXECUTED DUE TO DRUG SCANDAL

“Who knew you’d think of something as absurd as this when you looked at the waves!” Bianque exclaimed, then murmured sarcastically under her breath. “Serves him right. He was never a virtuous man, and that’s what’s gave him his ignorance towards the harm he was inflicting on himself.”

I nodded in agreement. “Well said. Still, thanks to you, we were able to write up that letter to the Governor.”

She smiled and gave a squeeze on my arms. “No, you were better. You pulled this off without hurting anyone, remember?”

I felt my face soften as I pulled Bianque into a tight embrace. Somehow, I felt as if I was dissolving into thin air...

“Oh right,” Bianque murmured as she touched the bullet scar on my neck, “We’ve still got another mystery to solve, and another wound to heal.”

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Heep Yunn School, Lam, Happy – 15

‘The Qiu mansion, which is rumoured to be haunted by the spirits of the former owners the Qiu brothers as well as their many exotic pets, has been demolished by the construction company Bob the Builder, who have released an official statement deriding the rumours as ‘fantasy’ and will begin construction work today.’

I turn off the radio as I pull into the parking lot, and turn to Tim, who is working on our construction blueprints.

My face breaks out into a confident grin. ‘See? All this business about the land being haunted is bringing in publicity for us! Do you think we could capitalise off it somehow, maybe build a temporary ‘haunted house’ while we figure out the construction details?’

Tim nods distractedly, eyes glued to his laptop. He’s looking a bit off today, and keeps scratching at insect bites on his arm. After giving several monosyllabic responses, he finally notices my gaze and realises that I want an actual proposal. He hurriedly slams his laptop shut and begins rambling.

‘M–Maybe we could have outdoor screenings of horror films at the construction site– that’d be more cost–efficient.’ He suggests, fidgeting with the buckles on his safety suspenders nervously.

I nod approvingly, and Tim looks relieved as he goes on, taking out a leather–bound schedule planner from his shirt pocket.

‘Our construction application’s been approved, and Mary picked the permit up yesterday.’ He pauses briefly, shifting uncomfortably in his seat, before continuing, ‘She’s called in sick today because of an infected insect bite, but we’re free to start work.’

I force a chuckle to hide my annoyance. ‘Either our crew is particularly susceptible to insect bites, or you young people are coming up with new creative excuses to slack off.’

‘I–I doubt it’s the latter, sir.’ Tim took out a file from the glove compartment, with ‘Henry Lin’s Medical Report’ scribbled hastily on the front, and handed it to me.

‘Henry Lin?’ I scratch my chin, ‘The kid who went all ballistic on his manager last week because he wasn’t offered a raise?’

‘Yes, and he was sent to the emergency room shortly after, because he started sweating profusely and passed out on the streets. It’s rumoured that the lizard that possessed him. Even the doctors seemed clueless, but I suspect he got bitten by something venomous in the construction site.’

‘Wow, what type of insect bites are these?’ I asked as we got off the van and headed towards the city.

‘Well, it seems that the same kind of insect’s been biting everyone, including Henry – the same rash, the same raised bumps, the same stingy itchiness. The medical team from our company says it’s probably biting midges.’

I hold up Tim’s arm to examine the wound and frown. This is an unforeseen inconvenience, but so long as it doesn’t delay production, there’s nothing I care to do, or can do, about it.

I take a sip from my coffee. ‘What’s on the itinerary for today?’

‘Well, we have meetings with residents to sort out any issues they might have with the construction process, and after that we’re going to check out the site first–hand.’

‘That means a long day of negotiating and diplomacy for me, trying to keep the locals happy while protecting the company’s interests. Sounds like fun.’ I mumble with a scowl, packing up the box files.

Little do we know what we have ahead of us.

The first meeting is with a group of local elders, and Tim quickly runs them through the construction schedule and compensation, finishing by asking for questions.

An old man stands up to speak, and the others, who had previously been discussing quietly amongst themselves, immediately fall silent.

‘Mr. Tim, are you not aware of the local... beliefs concerning the now–demolished Qiu mansion? Has the glaring fact that this place is haunted not occurred to you yet?’

Tim looks wary, and replies with as much respect as he can garner, 'I am aware that the locals believe some sort of haunting takes place at the grounds of the Qiu mansion, yes. I do not see how this affects the construction process—'

The man cuts him off with a clear, strong voice, which sounds rather jarring coming from such a frail, old man.

'You know nothing, young one.'

A kid no older than five besides the man chimes in, 'The Qiu brothers were migrants who got rich and then spent their money on all things extravagant. They were well respected men before they went insane. They vanished at the peak of their madness, and their exotic pets were eaten by locals.'

The man places his hand on the kid's shoulders approvingly and continued. "Nobody knows what happened to the two, but the spirits of the brothers and their dead animals have haunted our area since the mansion was torn down.'

He stares unflinchingly at Tim, challenging him to a response.

'Sir, surely you know that this is all rumours and speculation. There's really...' Tim starts cautiously, only to be cut off mid-sentence.

The man looks energised now, speaking urgently. 'It is not speculation. Locals living in the area have suffered from these mysterious insect bites that refuse to fade. The consequences of enraging the spirits are always severe. Just last month, an employee from your company attacked his manager because lizards possessed him. I myself have seen dragons prowling the construction sites at night. It is unsafe to work here, I urge you to abandon all construction here.'

I manage to fight the urge to laugh at this absurd statement and look over to Tim, only to find him staring transfixed at the old man as he rambles on, as if he's been consumed by their bogus story. Impatient, I take over from him.

'Look, the company will be providing a generous amount of money for compensation for any inconveniences caused by construction. We are trying to do our best to minimise disruption to locals.' I explain in stern tones, 'Other companies would have gone ahead with construction without even consulting locals— be grateful it's us who bought the site. We won't reconsider such a large project because of some cock-and-bull story about hauntings and insect bites, so I'd advise you to stop wasting your time, and more importantly, our time.'

I stand up, and Tim and I leave the meeting without another word.

Throughout the day, it's the same situation. All the locals, old and young alike, tell us to abandon construction and avoid angering the spirits of the Qiu mansion. Every five minutes, an uneducated fool comes up to me and asks for a word, and every single time, despite Tim's eagerness to engage in their useless interactions, I dismiss them with a wave of my hand. I grow gradually irritated as the day wears on, and it's with relief that I get in the car to visit the construction site, all interviews conducted.

Tim is unusually quiet during the car ride, scratching so hard at the insect bites on his arm that they start to bleed. His furrowed brows and pursed lips tell me that he's dying to say something but is hesitant to, so I stay silent, watching him out of the corner of my eye, and wait for him to tell me what's been bugging him.

'Sir,' He finally blurts out, and I notice that he's trembling a little, "m...maybe we should put off construction for a while and check out the rumours a bit more thoroughly. I just don't know...'

'Tim, don't tell me you actually believe that haunting nonsense.'

'Well, isn't it worth investigating?'

I shake my head decisively, incredulous that Tim would believe something so ridiculous.

Tim falls silent, and we walk towards the pile of rubble that is the demolished mansion.

The sun is setting, and the sky darkens as we walk around the site. It's unnaturally silent, and the crunch of the rubble under our boots echoes around the mansion, bouncing off the crumbling walls.

Tim and I walk among the ruins of this splendid mansion, and find ourselves standing in front of the only intact wall. It's crumbling, but appears structurally sound, which is perplexing. This wall should have fallen down years ago, just like all the others.

Tim frowns, as confused as I am.

'What's with this wall? It should have crumbled by now...'

He reaches out and tentatively runs his hands over the stone, and all of a sudden, the ground drops out from beneath our feet and we fall into darkness. There's two seconds of disorienting fall before I slam against an unyielding stone floor, the breath punched out of my lungs by the impact. Slowly, I stand up, helping Tim get to his feet. There's only one way forward, and we slowly venture towards the archway in front of us. It's lit by a single hanging candle that somehow radiates malice. Shadows dance along the crumbling walls, rising and falling with the flame. Darkness and melancholy pervades every inch of this room. Tim visibly gulps, but there's no way to go except through the archway. Walking closely to each other for comfort we make our way forwards and plunge into a darkened room.

“Boss?” Tim’s voice croaks out in the silence.

“Yes?” I reply, squinting to make out the dimly lit surroundings. We’re in a living room of sorts, an airy space that was obviously the height of opulence, but due to the wear and tear of time and abandonment, has become decrepit and filthy. Dust coats every surface, and the gilded sofas have been gnawed on by mice. Cockroaches and other vermin swarm around our feet. Tim flinches as a mouse patters over his designer shoes.

Home sweet home.

“I told you! I told you, didn’t I? I knew something like this would happen! I knew it!” Tim bursts out screaming in hysteria, his cries echoing around the chamber, “I warned you that the manor was haunted, and you bastards didn’t believe me! Now we’re going to die here and – ”

His whines are quickly transformed into blood-curling screams with a snap of my fingers, a sound sharp and harsh that pierces the silence. Spindly limbs wrap themselves around Tim’s writhing body, tightening until his skin turns dark purple. The old stone mechanics beyond the walls begin to rumble as the ground beneath us rotates apart, the creature that is choking Tim slowly rising from the floor. Bubbling venom starts to ooze from the pores of the creature, the liquid seeping into Tim’s clothes, into his blood. Tim’s cries come from deep within his chest, rabid, animalistic pleas that morph into hoarse whimpers of agony. He claws at his chest desperately, trying to loosen the grip of the tentacles, but to no avail. Soon, every guttural cough is sending a splatter of crimson red blood onto my clean white dress shirt as he begs breathlessly for my help. I cock my head and wait impatiently for the whole ordeal to be over with, though I cannot deny feeling surges of vindication and ecstasy watching this failure of a human get what was coming to him.

Eventually, his groaning dies down, and I look up to see Tim, his eyelids swollen shut and limbs dangling, hanging motionlessly from the ceiling. Satisfied, I lower him to make a closer inspection of his body. I can barely make out his face from the violent disfiguration, but from my recollection, he was a healthy and handsome young man. The perfect host.

I snap my fingers again, and torches ignite, illuminating the room. Shadows dance along the dimly lit walls, and the air is filled with foreboding. With much effort and cussing in ancient Chinese in the comforts of my own home, I manage to prop Tim’s body against the decaying marble pillar and wait, staring through the jagged cracks in the ceiling and watching the silver moonlight cast its spell over the ritual. I take my assigned place before the pattern etched onto the floor boards and consult the the roll of yellowed parchment before me and began my chanting, feeling the syllables flow out from deep within me and entwine every fibre of Tim’s being. Soon, his body starts shaking and writhing violently, as if it has a mind of its own. Black spots dance in my vision, a mocking reminder of the inadequacy of my 52 year old, diabetic host body, and my intestines feel as though they’re being forcibly pulled through the eye of a needle. I’d forgotten how physically taxing this was. Dark figures start soaring overhead, their presence disrupting my concentration, but I maintain my balance and press on, a cold sweat breaking out on my forehead due to the exertion.

Eventually, the chilling July wind blows out the candles on the table and I am once again engulfed in darkness.

The ritual has been finished, and I wait in tense silence. Suddenly, I am pulled into a tight embrace, and when he finally withdraws, Tim, or rather his body, is standing before me, clean and unwounded, with a wide, lop-sided grin plastered on his face.

“Welcome home, brother Qin.”

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Heep Yunn School, Leung, Angie – 15

Bygones

*O*ur first meeting was one that had happened by pure accident.

It took place in the 1900s exhibit in the Shanghai museum, where I had wandered into after our little group of teenagers had split up into pairs and drifted off aimlessly, in search of a comfortable spot where we could use our free time to type on our phones, excitedly complaining to our friends about how bored we were.

Talk about a waste of a learning trip.

It was also by coincidence that upon entering, I spotted two boys from our group hovering suspiciously around a small antique vase. Their dialogue became more distinct as I approached them.

“I dare you to touch it,” the first one hissed.

“Are you out of your mind? You do it,” the other replied.

“I dared you first,” person one answered. The second person hesitated, then sighed in defeat. “Fine,” he muttered. “But keep a lookout for me.” Then to my horror and complete exasperation, he stuck out a tentative finger to poke the vase.

“What are you doing?” I snapped, striding over to the two morons, who had frozen like deer caught in headlights. “Get away from that vase! Do you want all of us to get into trouble?” In my haste to bat his finger away, my hand knocked against the vase in the most ironic twist of events ever known by mankind. As we watched, stricken, the vase wobbled precariously and fell over with a loud *clunk*.

I bit back a curse and looked around in a panic, then realized that I was all alone. There were no other visitors, and the security guard outside hadn’t heard the sound. The boys from before had already vanished into thin air. *How responsible*. Gritting my teeth, I grabbed the vase and carefully tilted it back upright, grimacing at the dust and ash that clung to my palm. Glancing around once more to check that no one had seen me, I was about to heave a sigh of relief—

“Miss?”

“AH!” I screeched, whipping my head towards the person frantically. “I’m sorry, it was a mistake, I swear! Please don’t send me to jail—”

“Miss, why are you holding my hand?” the little girl asked, staring up at me with large, inquisitive brown eyes.

Where did the kid come from? What hand? I looked down to see a tiny hand slipped into my own.

“Miss?” the girl asked again, looking just as confused as I was. “Are you lost? And why are you wearing such strange clothing?” she brightened. “Oh, are you a foreigner? Is that why?”

What do you mean ‘strange clothing’? My fashion sense is perfectly fine, thank you very much, I thought, slightly insulted by her remark. However, on closer inspection, she was garbed in what seemed to be traditional Chinese clothes. Weird.

“If you’re here to do sightseeing, I can show you around! Come on!” she said, tugging at my hand.

“W—wait!” I cried, stumbling after her, “What sightseeing...” I heard my voice fade away as I stared up, gaping in shock.

I was either no longer in the twenty first century or the museum had *extremely* realistic special effects.

On my left, buildings of gothic architecture rose up, stone fortresses decked with ribbed vaults and sheets of glass, topped with sharply pointed spires that spiraled into the sky; to my right, the lake was a shimmering blue underneath the sun. Small boats were tethered to where little wooden docks were set up, and I could hear the fishermen chattering away as they hopped onto their boats and sailed out into the ocean.

“Watch out!” the little girl tugged me back as I nearly crashed into someone else. “Be careful,” she scolded, “I don’t know what it’s like back at your hometown, but Shanghai is a very crowded place!”

“Wait, um...” I was jerked back and forth as she wove expertly through the throngs of people that swarmed around us, all in traditional clothing, the men with hair braided down their backs and women with theirs tied up in buns. “Hold up, wait, what’s—what’s your name?” I asked her, struggling to catch up with her. For such a small child, she was impossibly fast.

“My name is Ai-liu,” she answered. “What’s yours?”

“Emily,” I replied.

“Ai—mee—lee,” Ai-liu tried it out, then giggled. “I’ve never heard of an Asian with an English name before!”

Once again offended, I opened my mouth to inform her that I, too, was Chinese, then decided to ask another question.

“So, uh, Ai Liu. What year is this, exactly?”

She smiled at me bemusedly. “Why, it’s 1929, of course!”

1929 Shanghai...my mind went blank. Was I dreaming? The edges of some buildings and the faces of the passersby were blurred too, and I couldn’t even make out the features of some. Yet, the lively chatter of the people, the occasional laughter that rose up as swiftly and suddenly as a balloon set free from a child’s hand, the carriages that rumbled past and the neighing of the horses and Ai-liu’s hand in mine; they were all too realistic and alien to be concocted by myself.

“Come on, we’re almost there!” Ai-liu shouted over the noise. “Up ahead is a shop that sells the best steamed buns around.” With her leading, we slipped through the crowds quickly—

“Ow!” I collided with a wall that wasn’t there a few seconds ago. How did that suddenly appear in the middle of the street? Rubbing my forehead, I looked up and saw the sign: 1900s exhibit.

“What?” I mumbled and spun around, coming face to face with red walls and display cases. “Ai-liu?” I called out uncertainly, and when no one replied, I was once again within the exhibition, left alone in a stunned daze.

Our second meeting happened through an unsatisfied curiosity.

I had been haunted by the incident ever since. Rather, I let it haunt me. After all, time travelling wasn't an everyday occurrence, not for any normal being and *certainly* not for me. But did it really happen? I decided to go back and check.

Picking a weekday, I travelled back to the museum, back to the exhibit, and waited for Ai-liu to appear with a pounding heart. Nothing. I frowned in disappointment. Was it a dream after all?

Or perhaps...I strode over to the vase. Reaching out towards the vase, I stroked it nervously. Then, as I watched, the air above my palm gradually shivered into the shape of a hand.

"Ai-liu?" I gasped, and nearly doubled over at the sight of a nine year old.

"Who are you?" she asked. I could detect a hint of wariness in her eyes that wasn't there before. "How do you know my name?"

"I'm Emily," I said weakly, "The foreigner you met three days ago? It is still 1929?"

"What are you talking about?" Ai liu replied. "That was three years ago..." her eyes widened. "You're Emily!" she gasped, "But you— you haven't changed at all! What are you?" she tried to pull her hand away.

"Wait!" I implored. "I'm not a monster, I swear!"

"Let me go!" Ai-liu cried, struggling against my hold.

"I just want to finish the sightseeing!" I begged.

Ai-liu stopped struggling. "Fine." To my delight, she finally agreed, "I'll show you around, just this once."

This time, she led me away from the harbor and onto a smaller road with Tong Lau on both sides, banners hanging down and signs in Chinese put up, carriages on the road pulled by grunting workers.

"This is Nanjing road," Ai-liu explained.

"N-Nanjing," I gawked. "How?" The sight that greeted me was nothing like the large malls and skyscrapers on the twenty first century Nanjing road.

"I never got to treat you to steamed buns, right? I'll do that today," Ai liu said. Wow. The kid had a good memory.

The rest of our day was spent strolling along Nanjing road, visiting shops to eat or purchase goods, sometimes stopping to talk to a friend or relative of Ai-liu's. Our spirits continued to soar as we laughed and traded stories under rooftops that were no longer blurred, and everything was vivid and real.

As the sun gradually sank below the horizon, we left Nanjing road behind, walking hand in hand.

"I want you to meet my family," Ai-liu giggled. "What should I tell them though?"

"Maybe you could tell them that I'm Casper the friendly ghost," I hummed. "Oof!" I grunted as I tripped over a bump in the road, letting go of her hand while I flailed my arms about.

"That was close," I laughed. Silence.

“Ai-liu?” I asked, turning around—and groaned in frustration as I found myself between red walls yet again.

Our third meeting happened all on its own.

I wondered if the ticket administrator recognized me by now.

I didn’t even need to touch the vase this time. As soon as I found the exhibit, her hand was in mine, significantly larger than before.

“Oh, look, it’s you again,” Ai-liu’s voice reached my ears, but they no longer had the squeak of a child. Her face came into view.

“You’re as tall as I am,” I blinked. “How old are you now?”

“Fifteen.” Ai-liu grinned. “We’re the same age.”

“Physically,” she added after a moment’s thought.

“What do you mean?” I huffed. “Why would you say that?”

“Because I’m inclined to believe that you’re a ghost,” Ai-liu stated calmly.

“Or I’m simply blessed with youth and beauty,” I joked and both of us laughed.

Making our way towards an unknown street, we smiled and talked like nothing had changed. Yet, there was an undercurrent that I had never felt before. I saw it in the tension of the people around us, heard it in the low and urgent tones that they discussed with. I even saw it in Ai-liu’s eyes, constantly flitting to and fro nervously. It was as if the entire city was on edge, grimly waiting for some kind of disaster to approach.

“Ai-liu,” I interrupted.

“What is it?” Ai-liu replied, turning serious as she caught onto my mood.

“Is something about to happen?” I asked, and her face turned dark.

“It’s—” she bit her lip. “We shouldn’t say this in public. I’ll tell you all about it when we get to uncle’s place.” And she said no more until we reached a little wine-selling shop in a corner of the street.

“Ai-liu!” A man called out from behind the counter.

“Uncle!” Ai-liu replied. “This is my friend, Emily.” I waved awkwardly.

“Hello, Emily,” her uncle greeted me, pouring water into our cups. I liked his kind expression and crow’s feet, yet the deep lines on his forehead told me that didn’t do a lot of smiling anymore.

Ai-liu said, “Uncle, Emily wants to know what’s happening around here.” Her uncle frowned at her request, and he immediately looked like a weary old man who had seen too much of life.

“What’s happening, you say?” he muttered, pouring wine into a much larger cup, “Nothing, really. Nothing has happened yet,” he downed the wine in one go, “But the Japanese have nearly conquered all of the North, and soon they’ll be

heading this way. And what can our government do? What *have* they done? Nothing,” he ranted, pouring yet another cup, “They’ll be here in the blink of an eye, and everyone knows it—” at this point, I was starting to worry for his sobriety, “I’m considering—no, I’m going to flee to the south before they hit this place. Ai-liu, have your parents said anything about it?” he asked, and Ai-liu shook her head.

“They said that business is too good to leave,” Ai-liu said, clutching her cup tightly.

“There’s no point in conducting business if you’re dead!” her uncle spat, slamming the bottle onto the table. In his fury, the bottle shattered into a dozen shards that flew in different directions, one narrowly missing my head.

“Oh my god! Emily, you’re bleeding!” Ai-liu gasped as her uncle quickly came back to his senses and paled.

“Good lord, I’m so sorry, Emily,” her uncle flew to my side, wiping my forehead carefully, “I’m sorry—my actions were inexcusable—Emily?” I couldn’t reply.

The 1941 incident. Ai-liu would be there.

After thirty minutes more of constant fussing, picking up the glass and her uncle apologizing to me later, we finally left the shop.

“Ai-liu,” I turned to her. “I think I know what’s going to happen.”

Ai-liu stared at me with wide, frightened eyes. “What is it?”

“I can’t tell you,” I mumbled, having watched enough time travel movies to know the first rule of no futuristic spiel allowed while visiting the past. “But you must convince your parents to leave, Ai liu. Trust me on this one,” I repeated, “You *have* to go.”

“But even so, where will we go?” Ai-liu squeaked. “Everywhere has been colonized by other countries.”

“I don’t know,” I groaned, “Perhaps Hong Kong? I don’t know, but you have to leave!”

Ai-liu opened her mouth, then snapped it shut. “I’ll try,” she replied firmly, and I could see her fighting back her fear.

“Hong Kong sounds like a good option. Business there is good too.”

“Good luck,” I said softly.

“I guess you’re going now?” she asked miserably, and I nodded sadly.

“I’ll see you in a few years,” I promised her, and she smiled. “Goodbye for now.”

We let go of each other’s hands, and I didn’t bother to look around before leaving the exhibit, only touching my new wound once and wondering how I should explain it.

Our fourth meeting was an unavoidable tragedy.

Could I have done anything to prevent it?

I doubt it.

Sometimes, things are just not meant to be.

I had probably realized that already, even as I dashed into the exhibit, surprising some other visitors.

I didn't care, even though it was a Sunday and the museum was crowded. I didn't care that all eyes would be on me if I touched that vase.

I had to make sure my friend was fine; I needed to ensure that Ai liu was safe.

In the end, her hand appeared before I got to touch the vase, along with the choking scent of ash and dust. I flinched as the sound of a gunshot rang in the smoke filled air.

"Emily?" A voice whispered. I turned to see the young woman that Ai liu had turned into.

"Ai-liu!" I gasped and she shushed me agitatedly, motioning for me to crouch. Squinting through the grey air, I was able to make out a fruit stall and realized that we were hiding behind a few overturned boxes.

Another gunshot split the air, accompanied by an agonizing scream. I was trembling all over and Ai liu had squeezed her eyes shut, tears running down her cheeks.

We waited there, in a terror-stricken silence, until the footsteps and the shouts in Japanese faded away.

Ai-liu poked her head out timidly, and whispered, "They're gone."

"What happened to Hong Kong?" I whispered back, and she shook her head in a frenzied manner. "They wouldn't listen, and this isn't the time to talk. Come on!" She tugged me up and we ran in the opposite direction.

"Where are we going?" I hissed as we ran, my dread mounting as the fearful heads of people poked out from behind their hiding places to watch us pass by.

"Home," Ai-liu panted, "We have an underground shelter there, it should be safer—"

I yanked her behind a pillar just as two soldiers appeared through the powdery mist. Neither of us moved an inch.

Eventually, they decided that everyone had already been wiped out, and I could feel the whole street relax for the slightest bit as we all watched them leave.

Ai-liu tugged on my hand, and we continued to run.

I learned that war was nothing like the media's portrayal of it.

There was no glory. There was no crusade. There *was* excitement, a horrified, nauseous one that bested anything in thriller movies.

For a long time, we kept running, hiding from soldiers and freezing at the sound of footsteps. We would wait until there were no signs of immediate danger, then up and run again. We were like hares caught in a wolf hunt.

Finally, somehow, we managed to reach her house.

Ai-liu flung open the door and started pushing away the furniture. "We're nearly there, we're nearly there," we chanted as our frantic hands pushed and pulled away the obstacles. "We're nearly th—"

A sharp command in a foreign language. Both of us froze, and slowly turned around to face a soldier with his gun pointed straight at us. He barked at us in something we couldn't comprehend.

"Emily," Ai-liu suddenly said. Her voice was calm, and her hand was no longer trembling.

“Ai-liu?” I whispered shakily. The soldier shouted something that sounded like a threat.

“You’re not a ghost, aren’t you?” She asked, smiling at me.

“I’m not—what are you trying to say?” I whimpered as the soldier shouted again. This time it was definitely a threat.

Ai-liu ignored him, and kept smiling, tears welling up in her eyes. “Goodbye, Emily.”

“Ai-liu, wait—” the soldier screamed at us and cocked his gun.

In a flash, Ai-liu moved in front of me before any of us could react.

She released my hand, and a loud *bang* ripped through my eardrums.

“No!” I screamed, reaching out to her—but she was no longer there. “Ai-liu!”

The muttering of the visitors sounded so distant.

I let out another scream, this one filled with desperation instead. She was still there—in that living nightmare— I had to go back!

“Ai-liu—” I scrambled towards the display case and grabbed the vase, ignoring the shocked gasps all around. “*Wait! Please!*”

Sometimes, things are just not meant to be.

Our fifth meeting.

But there was nothing left except for the ash and dust from the 1940s sky, and the lingering scent of gunpowder.

The Forbidden Dance

Holy Family Canossian College, Leung, Jocelyn – 15

Her 80s:

My grandmother who enjoys her early 80s with a bountiful of vitality often admires the yard that is more comfortable than most people in town know in her wooden carved rocking chair, sipping coffee with style. The afternoon of August 14th is warm and clear. The yard is often a unique one to me. The profusely blossoming summer flowers are covering the extent of land of richly green grasses. Ranging from reddish roses to the yellowish chrysanthemums, the lawn provides a soothing environment where anyone can come and sit and look up to the azure sky and wait for the breezes that is filled with an irreplaceable mellowness of summer to comfort their soul.

“Hey, Grandmama! Would you like to go to Tsim Sha Tsui and get a glimpse of the glamorous harbor?” I said abruptly this afternoon after staying in the yard, witnessing the infinitesimal change of the clouds which no longer dispel my extreme boredom.

She agreed without hesitation. “The pearl of the Orient...glows in the darkness, like my fading...past.” I looked at her with growing wonder, genuinely carried away by the possible reasons behind the pitiful smile so visible on her faintly beautiful face as she muttered the words “glow” and “past”. When she walked into her bedroom, I saw a ruffle dress as I peeked into her chamber. The ruffle dress has been hung in Grandmama’s bedroom for ages. The grand white dress is like an edifice that covers numerous unrevealed matters that often possess me in my wildest imagination.

After getting dressed, Grandma walked out of the room with her new white hat which covers her fluffy white curly hair, that often flutters due to the wind, in her hands. She was almost ready to set off, standing before the mirror, putting on her hat. “Should I wear this hat? Does it look good on me?” No wonder why my Granny was so self-conscious like a young girl with a buoyancy interest in fashion and stuff, I made a quick response to her question “It looks just fine and you are superb gorgeous.” Her innocent eyes flashed and looked into my face with the warmest smile ever. It is absolutely adorable as wings of grey hair stick out from her florid face after putting on the little hat.

We were at the harbor, gazing the skyscrapers with gleaming lights. The harbor with the densely built high-rise buildings, a sophisticated fusion of east-west culture, showed great pride for standing so static for decades with all these dazzling light rays lighting up the dim sky. “It’s just like the old Shanghai. The mixing culture, the shinning lights in parties, the glamorous harbor, ...” She spoke in a soothing, delightful tone, belying her deep obsession with her past as her eyes rolling around with the blue and purplish lights ahead of her and begins revealing those romantic tales in her 20s.

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Youth:

From 1930s to 1940s was the Second World War, the immigration of Jews, the attack of the Japanese Navy which literally killed tens of thousands of student protesters against Japanese Occupation and the decline of the European countries made the Old Shanghai a messed up place. Not until the end of the war when the scandalous invaders surrendered, was the Old Shanghai free from the Japanese and the foreign concessions. Shanghai immediately ushered into a new and extraordinary era.

Shanghai was famous for its ubiquity of dance halls and ballrooms including those classy and glamorous ones and raucous and jazzy dance clubs. The life of taxi dancers, courtesans and tycoons of the bygone age were filled with a frantic gaiety. The bright, solid city was doomed under the Japanese in the 1940s. It all started peacefully until the big enterprises like the power company, the tramway and gas company were all taken over by the invaders. It was not the bombs and fires. It was the harsh, bitter reality of being trapped in a fool’s paradise creating the gay atmosphere. “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” was the only thing people had in their minds.

It was also due to this common philosophy, creating Shanghai a place with an abundance of taxi dancers. Grandma was one of the many young gals who were hired to dance with customers. Customers bought tickets to dance. The price of a ticket depended on, without a doubt, the quality of the venue and the popularity of the dancer. Granny was born in 1932, a year before the Paramount was opened. She was not born from some wealthy family. She didn’t receive any education. She couldn’t read. She couldn’t write. Rather than doing strenuous job, she went to dancing halls like most of the gals to make

a living for the sake of her family. My 3 uncles used to work in my Great-grandparents' food stand while my aunt was too young then to work when Grandma was only about 17. While the upper class could easily acquire wealth by understanding the implicit rules of decorum and making social connections that could make them rise to the top, the poor got tired. They did not want much, just a simple, dignified life with their family.

"I was indeed very lucky to get a job in Paramount which was the most famous dance hall in Shanghai thanks to her dear friend Lan's mother who was one of the well-known dancers." As she continued, her pure smile showed innocence, untouched and unaffected by experiences, as it had been when she was enjoying her life in the 1950s. "I was happier as ever as"

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Paradise:

She was happier than ever as she was in her white ruffle dress, not too long, just nearly covering her juicy thigh. She had on a silver Latin dance shoes from England with crystals on it. With each rhinestone being applied individually by hand, the elegant and absolutely unique shoes not only caught attention but also admiration from the younger dancers who had always looked up to her, the 18-year-old dancer. Working in this dance hall, which became popularized and vulgarized over the year as some dancing girls, started going out with some rich customers for more than just dancing. The gaudy dresses, the gold shoes, the red lips, the blond bob hair, sparking necklaces which were probably romantic gifts from the passionate customers and the blue lights were all accentuating the purity of the absolutely clean girl. Her white face with a desirable red lip, her white dresses, white flower-like feather accessories next to her hair bun created her unique style. White, almost everything, she was so pure, like the colour of Lily flowers. She made up a name for herself- Lili, making her no less charming.

These taxi dancers earned even more than the Chinese professionals working in firms and could make up to 20 times more than the factory workers. There were foreign dancers, mostly Russians and Japanese. The dancing industry was developing so rapidly. Even famous film stars joined the fancy community for the attractive income. The popular and lucky ones could afford clothes that were fancier and lavisher than that worn by the daughters of some wealthy families. Yet, materialism was not filling her mind like a nickel sized dye diffusing through a once pure cup of water. From only a tiny little drop of color, to numeral blooming flowers as the drop separated, the once small dye eventually monopolized the whole glass of water. Just like the gals, given expensive golden necklaces which were only small pieces of metal that could neither give you eternal joy nor wealth, were all blinded. They spoke both English and little French so as to sort of communicate with their "targets". They could get married to proper men like respected compradors or some well-educated men who still frequented dance clubs and halls after the marriage. Some felt their dreams being unraveled and got divorced. Some just do not even care as long as they have a mansion to live in and delicacies to enjoy every day.

There were always exceptions. Lili and Lan were best friends. Lan became a dancer because of her mother who believed Lan could get married to wealthy man by socializing in dance halls just like she did in the past. Lan's father, however, died due to some dark underground criminal connections which was a rather common thing in Shanghai then. After all, Lan's mother just wanted her daughter to lead a better life in which being a taxi dancer was the only way. Their career did not start easily as most people could imagine. They had to learn a lot like foreign languages, Western manners and sports to entertain the lavish men and entrepreneurs who were just wealthy enough to invite the dancers for horseback riding in a "simple" date. They were friends with the jazz band in which the members were so into music that they could play their instrument for the whole night.

Saxophones, oboes, clarinets, trumpets, trombones...were performing as one on the stage every night. With the jazz music echoing the hall, customers danced with the girls with gaiety. First came the clarinet solo, with bunch of trills. There went the accompaniment from the horns and trombones, softly, smoothly. Then, there was the trumpet solo. A more jazzy tone was projected as the player was using his ball-like copper mute, being attached to the bell of the instrument, creating a sharp, unique sound. The pianist moved his hands swiftly, manipulating the piano as he used almost all the energy he had to play the accented chords. The pace of the music was just right, not too fast for some dancing dummies who came for the first time, dancing with the sensual girls under the lights with glistening rings on their ring fingers.

This high class place did not only fling the customers and dancers together but also Lili and a saxophonist whose mother was French. Due to his lineage, he inherited his mother's blond hair, curly and smooth to touch, holding Lili spellbound. Two years older than Lili, Seb started playing in the band for his passion for music and the dance hall was the perfect place for him. His clear jaw line, his curly short hair, his rosy cheeks, his shiny brown eyes and his cute dimple as he smiled genuinely attracted Lili. The squad enjoyed performing on stage, singing and playing jazz music. The squad was one of the reasons why Lili would not get out from the hedonistic, vulgar place. The relationship was said to be unfavorable to the

dance hall since those men would be highly disappointed, realizing their idol being monopolized by another young, uneducated, ordinary man who absolutely had no social status and whatsoever. The lovers had no choice but to date only at day time and enjoyed every moments performing on the gaudy stage, feeling their hearts sinking, melting into the music in the paradise.

“Night in Shanghai, Night in Shanghai,
You are a city that never sleeps.
Bright lights, the car’s sounds,
Peaceful and prosperous song and dance.”

★ ★ ★

Crackdown:

Men went home with bleary eyes at the breaking of dawn, lying to their wives about how tough their jobs were. Girls went home on rickshaws, overwhelmed by the amount of money they receive that day. The nightlife was expected to last forever until 1952.

Lan eventually got married with a guy she met in the dance hall. He is the son of some famous entrepreneur. Lili was the maid of honor, witnessing their wedding, she began thinking about her unknown, unstable future. She had made a great deal of money by dancing in the nightclub for 3 years. It might be the time she left the hall forever and settle down. On the other hand, the jazz band was forced to leave due to the imposition of a political campaign which banned the playing of foreign music.

Just when everyone was on the threshold of the next stage of their lives, The Communist Party outlawed Jazz music. Everyone was confused, as the sudden tide of darkness sweeping the men, the taxi dancers, the musicians, all the once gay and wild Shanghailanders away from Jazz. Things had never expected to get so worse after the takeover of the Communist Party.

The People’s Liberation Army had broken into every Jazz musicians’ houses and took their instruments away, describing them as pornographic. Seb’s saxophone was taken. Almost every instrument was forbidden even pianos. After that, Seb and the others were rehabilitated and interrogated. Watching their beloved jazz being demonized as forbidden and erotic music, their rage and remorse was impossible to be redeemed. The Communist claimed the city to be taken over by peaceful manners. Yet, people had no faith in the party. Wild rumours were circulating about the city where mass execution was said to take place with thousands slaughtered, western texts were describing the take over as “hostile”. People who promoted capitalism were tortured, wandering on streets and carrying the banner “I am a capitalist” in their hands. Hit by rotten food and eggs in front of the public, they were teased by the army. They were humiliated by those cruel men. Soon, foreign firms gradually moved their offices from Shanghai to Hong Kong.

Lili cherished her squad, her lover and her family. Her friends were arrested, so was her lover. The only thing she could do was to follow her parents. Under such dark bitter reality, a once extravagant paradise was tore apart, the dance hall protest got raucous and stunned most people when protesters were literally arrested. People dare not to make a fuss, dare not to stay...

Her sister in arms, she grabbed her bag and set off to the pier with her parents and her brothers before the sun had climbed up to the sky. Another monotonous, grueling day, no parties, no jazz, no laughter... There were no lights from the windows of the dance halls illuminating the dark sky. There was no “Tap! Tap!” sound which could once be heard as the dancing shoes of men and women hitting the dance floor. The midnight of August 14th was quiet, tranquil, the only sound was the soft breeze and mourns from stray cats. As she walked along the pavement, the once crowded street, a soft sound was calling. Stunned, she turned around with her dress fluttering. She gazed into the soft glimmer of his exhausted eyes passionately. “You came back!” she whispered fondly, their eyes were the only thing glistening under the dull moon covered by layers of cloud. As they enjoyed their unexpected reunion, little did Lili know that the thing happened in next minute would haunt her eternally for her dreams were falling apart.

They were running for Seb was a criminal, escaping from the “rehabilitation center”. Yet, things did not go as planned. Dawn was breaking, soft lights were starting to illuminate the sky.

“Stop right there! Stop....”

“There they came! Run!” exclaimed Lili’s father, taking his wife’s trembling hands.

Lili’s brothers were taking care of their younger sister while Seb and Lili held each others’ hands, running as fast as they could. They all continued to run as if they had not heard the warning from the army. All of a sudden, a gunshot had held them freaked out. As they looked at Seb, his chest was shot. He collapsed. As he looking into the orange sky, he cried with

a wry smile, regret escaping and implicating Lili's family in the crime. Tears on his face reflected the soft sunlight peaking from the clouds like sparkling dewdrops. She could no longer hold back her tears. Tears of compassion and love for the boy were trickling down her cheeks. Her two little cascades, however, could never slow down the pace of the coming army.

There was no time. Her bother grabbed her hands abruptly pulling her forward, pulling her away from the dying soul. "Sorry...." His voice was thin, merely a thread of sound. His hand was stretching towards his mistress, running away with her family towards the light, towards life. He, was lying there, waiting to be sacrificed for love, waiting and feeling his heart being pieced by thousands of arrows. So painful, as if the grim reapers were ripping his soul with a sharp scythe scornfully, vibrantly like the chasing liberation army.

★ ★ ★

Reignited:

"Hong Kong in 1950s was filled with migrants. Hong Kong had ushered into a new era where rapid economic growth took place. Fortunately, the British government was determined to keep Hong Kong as a capitalist outpost."

When grandma had finished telling all this, we had been walking along the harbor for half an hour. The youngsters were gathering together for a selfie with the glistening moon hanging above the skyscrapers. I was not too sure whether I should comment on the absolute tragedy or to just let it fade away as it was then. Witnessing the fast—pace growth of the two cities, she is after all an elegant experienced old lady whom I respect the most.

There came an old man, squeezing through the selfie addicts, and stood in front of us. He smiled embarrassingly as he almost made Grandmama fall when my hands held her waist immediately. She unconsciously moved back a pace or two and looked into the soft glimmer of his lucid eyes.

His curly short hair, his dull cheeks, his shinny brown eyes and his cute dimple as he smiled had held her spellbound

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

International College Hong Kong, Blain, Joseph – 15

The smog is coiling...

No, it isn't. It's smoke that coils, winding and settling amongst itself. Smog, however, grows sluggishly upwards out of the various maws of the city, stacking itself into large, bulbous columns before quickly thinning into a concrete haze. The best word for this smog, then, would be brooding.

The smog is brooding over the city. It curves, like a blackened, burnt out ceiling, to meet the city on the horizon. Buildings and roads all seethe orange as the sun slumps off to another part of the world. Silhouettes of steel spires plant themselves firmly against the light. They look like skeletal fingers, clawing their way out of the bedrock.

Shanghai can be beautiful sometimes, but only in the ugliest possible way.

The sky was a chilly blue. An afternoon sun hung, pale and bright, like an eagle amid wisps of frozen cloud. All the roof tiles of the Chinese City glowed like jewels beneath the force of the shining August morning. Birds zipped by close overhead, dodging around fluttering lines of washing and dangling signs to get from roof to roof.

Eddies of dust raced around a menagerie of feet, keeping the stone tiles covered in an ever-shifting layer of rough dust. Occasionally voids were formed by a constant sweeping at the doors of the fancier shops.

In the end, though, the dust always returned. It was difficult for things to leave the streets of the Chinese City. Far in the distance, looming walls of stark jade and brick made sure of that.

The knife edge digs into my skin. I lock my other hand into the gap between the girders, shaking the blood back into my wrist before carrying on. It hurts a little more, but I'm convinced it's the quicker way up. Boots is trying it the other way about six feet below me, threading his way up through the mess of scaffolds that covers the steel skeleton like a web. I think about turning my head to toss a playful jeer, but speed up instead. I'm not about to lose my lead.

Three minutes later I reach the top floor. Boots must be at least a minute behind, but when I pull myself up onto the work platform I sprint up to the top anyways, falling in a panting heap on the roof before the planks have stopped creaking.

Boots strolls up about two minutes later. By now, the sun has begun to rocket ponderously upwards, a flare of harsh sunlight flowering up beneath it.

"You missed the sunrise," I say, trying not to gloat right away. Boots is still standing. Pondering the flames that cover the city, as they melt into another pallid yellow day.

"No, I didn't."

Instinctively, with a derisive snort: "What are you talking about? I beat you by five minutes."

He looks at me with that smile, and I roll my eyes. I know what's coming next. "That may be true, but what we were debating was whether I missed the sunrise or not. And as a matter of fact, I didn't. I was watching it the whole way up." He turns to face me. "Were you?"

I can't help but laugh. Just when I think I've proven myself, he's managed to show me up with another philosophical monologue. He sits down next to me. "You always win when you don't play."

In no time at all, the maze of glass buildings that stretches out below us is gleaming. Rising heat makes the image ripple; it seems for a second that the rumble of coursing streets is making the windows themselves tremble.

Amid the climbing chaos, a single crag of steel and green debris netting stands out. Despite the

thrumming of the city below, we both sit and stare only at it, transfixed as ever. No plot of land in Shanghai is sacred; parks, roads, private property all succumb to the spread of concrete roots - except, of course, for the Old City. Or so I'd thought, until Xin Tower appeared.

Day began to melt into the paving stones, dragging heat beneath the ground with it like a net. The elements held me by the shoulders and began to shake roughly, sending shivers and wind convulsing around me. I coughed against a dusty blast of chilling air, but barely noticed.

He still wasn't back.

I'd stopped worrying about that after the first night. No, my apprehension was at what Mom had instructed me this morning: If he isn't back by sundown, find him.

"Son."

I kept staring out at the darkening street. Had I turned around, I would be compelled to run inside and huddle by the stove.

"I know. Have you seen my coat?" She came to my side. Her face was heavy.

"Here. I patched it this morning." A thick bundle of scratchy cotton fabric was pressed into my arms.

I got up slowly.

"This isn't fair. He's the man in the family." My complaint was petulant, half-hearted. I was delaying the inevitable. Then, for a second, I was suddenly enveloped tightly in familiar warmth.

"Saying it isn't fair doesn't change a thing," she said quietly. I drifted numbly out of her arms and onto the street. From behind me, there came a final call: "Don't come back without your brother."

I turned around one last time. Her face betrayed her tone: not a demand, but a plea. The lamplit glow of the house seemed to sag, growing bluer and heavier. With that, I retreated gladly into the rustles, creaks, and cries of the night.

"That thing shouldn't be there." I stop halfway down on a platform to stare at Xin Tower once again. The sun has crept up its spine like a ladder, to perch eerily at its apex. The glare hurts my eyes.

Boots swings idly from a steel pipe. "My auntie lives right next to the site. She's barely slept all month thanks to all the construction."

I say it again. "It shouldn't be there." My eyes compulsively trace a path up a jagged face. Either Boots spots me, or he just knows me well enough:

"The controversy surrounding that thing is no secret, and neither are people like us. It'll be swarming with guards."

My spit whirls down to the ground, eventually disappearing into thin air. "We can't let them push us around so easily."

"I never said we should." He smiles wearily. "I take it you have a plan?"

The wall grew bigger with every step. I faintly loathed the air of claustrophobia that emanated from it, but it would be the quickest and safest way to my brother.

Slums were crammed in at the city's edges, next to the wall. Streets grew thinner and darker, like corrupted veins strangling the houses in between them. Although the streets were less crowded at night, they still bubbled and seethed with the same energy. In every alley, the shadows of rats and men slunk past each other, dancing between shutters that flapped and rattled in the wind, stirring up an erratic cacophony that jolted me with every burst of sound. Through them all the wall grew bigger and bigger behind every corner.

Thanks to the deepening darkness, I was caught off guard when I rounded a corner and nearly collided with its monstrous bricks. It crouched, like a brooding giant mass, against the mottled black sky.

Night swallowed the world around me. As I progressed, all I saw was the endless arc of the wall, and the sky above me.

For now I was alone. The moon, the clouds, and the wall were all there was to witness me. I wondered whether if nothing had been there to affirm my existence, I could have simply walked into the darkness and disappeared forever. Amid mental flashes of what was still to come, I savoured the thought.

Up ahead, a commotion was making itself known through the ground. Stamping feet and rumbling carts drummed up through my feet, the air swirled with the smell of frying fat, and lights played along the side of the wall, growing stronger every moment. I was nearing the slums of the Eastern Gate. Before long, I would come to smell the sickly sweet stench of opium.

In Shanghai, the buildings stretch so high on every side, one forgets the night sky is up there, pressing hard on the tips of skyscrapers like a rubber sheet stretched over a forest of knives.

The story is different in the Old City. Casting my vision upwards, my eyes race further and further out into the blackness. The sensation of immensity sends my blood pumping; it reminds me of my times at the tops of the highest buildings. Weirdly, it also feels claustrophobic at the same time. The sky sags down over streets, brushing my head with the cold sensation of inky wind. Even in Boots' auntie's house, it peers in from behind the ground floor window. I shudder with a mixture of discomfort and exhilaration.

I return to eating quietly, straining not to puncture the awkward silence with the sounds of eating. On opposite sides of the table, Boots' auntie is subjecting him to a cold, unreciprocated stare.

My conversation-avoiding efforts are severed by Boots' auntie. "Why do you do this?" she says quietly

· Boots shifts in his seat - restless or frustrated? - before replying. "It's just for a bit of fun. You know how cramped it is out here - there's hardly space to think. Getting up in the open air does us good." He smiles. Auntie nods begrudgingly. "My brothers always used to play on the train tracks." She looks up at him.

“They only stopped when the neighbour boy was killed.” Here eyes are like glowing dishes of water. “Is it worth it to risk your life for a bit of fun?”

Boots inspects his chopsticks. I think about his auntie as I explore a drop of soy sauce on the plastic dishcloth. It must be hard for her, with so much changing. Kids don’t respect her the way she respected her parents; the air is thick and nauseating all of a sudden; her hometown is vulnerable to a plague of monstrous steel weeds. Even now, Xin Tower glints eerily through the window.

“Yes. Life is only worthwhile when you live it.” Boots is sat up straight, a wisp of emotion winding around his words. “And anyways, it’s not like we’re careless. There’s never been a fall in Shanghai that I know of.”

“It’s not falling I’m concerned with.” Auntie is standing up, leaning over the table. She speaks ur- gently, matching widened eyes with her nephew. “If you push too far, they will push back. And you have much farther to fall.”

Even through the haze of smoke, I saw cart upon cart of opium disappearing into the slums that thronged next to the gate. I gazed hatefully at the maws of colonial buildings that gaped from beyond the wall.

Despite being at the threshold of my greatest fear, I felt strangely calm. Suddenly, I shook my head clear. Was that awful venom drifting through the curtain taking hold of me? Faced with such a horrifying thought, I resolved to get this over with as soon as possible. I ducked out of the foyer, took a deep breath of the churning street air, and dove in.

A cloying, warm smell infected the entire parlour, working its way into my clothes and nostrils. Everywhere, wisps of smoke prowled from pipes held limply in the mouths of the customers. Their faces were gaunt and tired, and not a breath could be heard.

No matter how many times I came here, the sight of their empty, lifeless bodies shook me to my core. I staggered on, at one point knocking an addict to his feet in my rush. He simply lay there, mewling softly, before half-crawling to a cushion where his pipe lay beckoningly, like a smouldering snake.

I had reached the depths of hell. Now, to retrieve a lost soul.

Ahead, Xin Tower rears up like a demonic, gargantuan spike driven up from the core of the earth. Cables and floodlights dangle and spin from all angles. At its foot, the walls of the neighbouring houses look bent in- wards by its swollen frame. Within the windowless floors, flashlights roam across batons and boots that pace relentlessly.

Once again, blood rushes around my body. Real danger awaits. We look at each other. “Ready?” “Ready.”

Climbing takes us into the earliest hours of the day. Guards stud every floor and surface, poring over the best climbing routes with heavy torches.

I get the feeling that Xin Tower knows we’re here, somewhere, and it’s only a matter of time before it finds us and tosses us out.

I was beginning to get frantic. I had gone up and down the whole wretched place without finding my brother, and I felt the smoke filling my lungs by the second. I was close to tears when suddenly, I spotted it. An emp- ty cushion with a pipe, still smoking, beside it. A tray with a long bill and a handful of coins scattered on the floor.

My brother’s coat.

The back door thrown ajar, still swinging in the freezing midnight air.

A grinning crescent of blood, pulsing red on red carpet.

“Oh, no.”

We’re three quarters of the way up on some scaffolding.

Beyond a metre of yawning nothingness, a guard is staring right at us. My limbs jolt against each other,

burning as I rear up against a nearby pole; he reaches for his radio; my heart jumps from my chest; Boots turns to me; I stare at him; more guards explode from every doorway.

A harsh yell echoes around the whole of the Old City.

They've found us. We're doomed.

My panic was too great for screaming. All I could do was dive towards the back door, bursting into the night air. Sweat froze to my skin. Time slowed. Every detail of the scene unfurled before me:

A towering man with pallid skin stood before me. His fist, red and dripping. Blood stained his sand coloured suit. His face was leering; eyes wild; pupils dead. To my left, my brother lay on the wet ground, shivering. His shirt and jaw torn open. His eyes half-closed, drilled deeper than ever into withered dark sock-ets. His hair all tufts, thrown about by the beating. The contents of his pockets were littered around his broken body; scraps of paper, dust, not a single coin. Blood everywhere.

Time resumed, and I cannoned into the white man. He stank of soap and opium. He stumbled into a pile of firewood with a deep, harsh yell. I grabbed my semblance of a brother, barely hearing my own voice over the blood thrumming in my ears.

“We’re going to have to make a run for it.”

—

“We’re going to have to make a run for it.”

Boots takes off, blasting up the stairs that thunder almost as loud as our breathing. Cries flare up all over the tower; I curse the weight that sits like a stone in my pack as I look up at Boots. Pelting it harder than we ever have before, the top looms towards us, sky and guards bearing on top of it. One finds his way onto the scaffolding, but retreats with a growl when my shoe crunches on top of his grasping hand. Tears fly from my face.

I’d just wanted to make a statement, to have an adventure. Now I was to pay for that audacity with my life.

—

He groaned, a soft, broken groan. A veteran’s groan of imminent pain. I clutched my brother tight, hiding my sobs with his ghostly wails. Every alley reared up against us, closing in as I desperately twisted and turned amidst the flood of rain.

But it was no use. Deep yells and the smell of opium drifted in from every angle.

—

The sun is spinning angrily into the sky. We’ve hit the top. Boots is searching desperately for an escape route while I pull something from my pack. Feet thunder on steps just a few seconds away.

—

They glided from gaps in the walls like ghosts. With each fist, the things I held dear to me flitted past. Thump. Mother. Thump. House. Thump. Brother. Thump. Nothing.

My head rolled sideways to take in my brother. Blood streamed down, kissing the pelting rain. The white man stepped between us.

“You work for me now.”

—

The access door bursts open. A mass of guards surges towards us like a spear. Done fiddling with the object in my backpack, I let it loose, my back turned away.

Even from the other side of the Old City, people must be able to see it. A gust of wind descends like a torrent from the sky, picking up the end of the banner for all to see. The sun, so often perched atop Xin Tower, now illuminates my banner. A blazing message in the sky. A statement that no one could forget.

THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING,

it says. THE OLD CITY IS NOT GONE YET

Everyone stared in astonishment. Boots stared at me with eyes full of awe and sadness. His mouth stuttered, "You crossed a line, man. If they get you now, you're dead."

Suddenly the moment ends. The guards stampede towards us, their yells whipping up into a frenzy in the wind. Amid the chaos, Boots points frantically to an empty edge. Beyond it, a yawning chasm. Boots' auntie is down there somewhere, an ant facing the rising sun.

And beyond that, lies a single hope. Boots looks at me. Half his face is tired, tired beyond tired. but the other half explodes with sunlight. The crane sways in the wind.

"We have one chance."

For the first time, he implores me. His auntie's question returns again as guards close around us. "Is it worth taking?"

Scapegoat

International College Hong Kong, Chan, Alison – 15

1.

“You can’t tell anyone,” was the only hushed whisper I could comprehend in the filthy darkness.

There was a brief pause, before a muffled voice penetrated the dead Shanghai air in reply, as I squinted at the peeling ceiling I could barely descry in vain attempt to catch my older brother’s incoherent conversation. When Zhang Wun had told me he met the love of his life, Chen Guang was the last person I had expected it to be. I shoved the flimsy, roughed up blanket off my upper torso irritably.

There were rumours that Chen Guang had broken numerous laws; I once heard that she had engaged to a drug dealer. There was always gossip floating around our small town, and she seemed to be in the centre of it being one of the few businesswomen in our city. Apparently, she lost an enormous sum of our business money from investing into a scam, going to drastic measures like stealing and manipulating customers to earn back the money she had lost. Despite that, my brother was incredibly optimistic about their relationship and her ugly past, ignoring all the voiced suspicions when they had begun seeing each other.

I had once confronted Chen Guang, when my brother had first begun to ditch our dinners to meet up with her, making it clear that she could not manipulate my brother for money, although she protested against my accusation heartily.

The faint voice seemed to emit a sound of resolution.

I shifted my weight onto my elbows and ripped my plastered body off the bed as a subtle sheen of perspiration trickled down my neck. I heaved my legs out from under the gauzy sheet, as the thick air gravitated my blistered feet to the hard floor.

Although my ear was pressed against the door, I still couldn’t make out any of the whispers exchanged during this late night rendezvous. There was a momentary pause as my calloused fingers ran across the doorknob; they had been situated by my bedroom door for over a minute.

My cramped hand twitched in agitation, and my neck was growing unbearably stiff. With a tortoiselike retract of my hand I shifted my weight onto my other leg, but the scuffed floorboard underneath my soles let out an unfortunate whine.

The soft whispers fell silent.

Frozen, my tired body reacted out of reflex as I clambered into bed briskly.

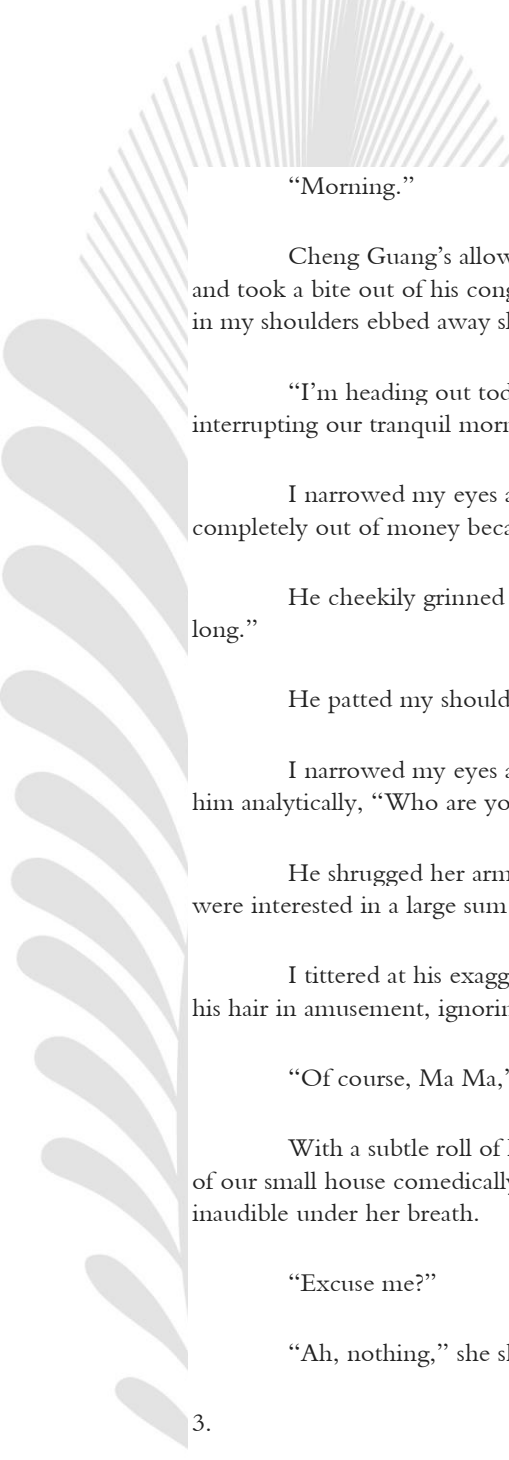
All the muscles on my back tensed up as I heard the shuffling from outside, “Zhan Ping?”

I remained silent with clenched eyelids and waited, my heart hammering against my chest. After a moment of cold silence the door was firmly closed, and I let out a shaky breath of air

2.

I tried to treat the next morning as I would any other. Grabbing three porcelain spoons from our utensil-filled cupboard, I set it by the bowls of steaming congee and knocked airily on Zhang Wun’s door as a routine form of unspoken communication as I passed by, before heading into the washroom.

He was sitting at the table in a casual manner, with his legs sprawled out and arm draped around Chen Guang’s usual battered seat, as I came out. It had where I used to sit before she moved into our home.



“Morning.”

Cheng Guang’s allowed a tight smile, accepting my greeting. Zhang Wun grinned lazily at my entrance and took a bite out of his congee, before patting the seat next to him in gesticulation for me to sit. The stiffness in my shoulders ebbed away slowly. I settled in my seat, and we ate in comfortable silence.

“I’m heading out today, I think we’ll finally make some progress with our business,” he started, interrupting our tranquil morning meal.

I narrowed my eyes at my elder brother and reprimanded him half-heartedly, “We’re almost completely out of money because you said exactly that several months ago.”

He cheekily grinned as he released a contagious chuckle, ignoring my remark, “I won’t be out for too long.”

He patted my shoulder and pulled me into a side hug, chest still vibrating in beguilement.

I narrowed my eyes as Chen Guang tugged on his sleeve timidly, gaining his attention as she stared at him analytically, “Who are you meeting with?”

He shrugged her arm off, and I hid a small smirk in response, “Someone I met several days ago. They were interested in a large sum of our antiques, practically our entire store.”

I tittered at his exaggeration, and I gave him a brief once-over, before adjusting his collar and ruffling his hair in amusement, ignoring Cheng Guang’s stare, “Be back before sunset.”

“Of course, Ma Ma,” he replied sarcastically.

With a subtle roll of his eyes and a smile playing on his lips, he bid me farewell and skipped his way out of our small house comedically, in an attempt to amuse me. Chen Guang forced a laugh, muttering something inaudible under her breath.

“Excuse me?”

“Ah, nothing,” she shot a massive grin my way.

3.

As children, Zhang Wun and I used to expertly stow away sweets we stole from the biscuit tin, figuring out what would get us caught and what wouldn’t, eventually mastering when we would sneak out of our rooms and where to hide the sugary treats.

I recalled how Zhang Wun placed the blame on me when we had gotten caught, and winced at the recollection of my brown bruised palm after a receiving a series of angry blows from my parents soon after a lecture about stealing. I hadn’t minded; I would do anything for him.

I approached the yellowed cupboard in his room, kneeling down beside it. I took a second to evaluate the peeling paint and short stubby legs, as a nostalgic feeling washed over me, recognising this as a childhood sentiment. With a small smile, I slid my hands across the familiar piece of furniture, before reaching the handle. It was always left unlocked because it contained all of our captured black and white adolescence, from my smiling face and my brother’s silly expressions. My heart clenched at the thought of Ma Ma and Pa Pa; it had been a while since I took the time to sit down and look through all my younger memories.

Grasping the protruding metal end, I pried gently, but it wouldn’t open. I paused, momentarily confused, before reaching out and tugging with a little more strength.

The cupboard wouldn’t budge.

I shouldn’t have been surprised; Chen Guang was always prying around.

4.

My ears pricked up, as I reached into my satin pocket to pay for the rice. There were shouts from the far end of the street. I shot a quizzical glance at the young boy I gave my coins to, and he shook his pale head in reply, equally as confused.

It wasn't soon before I peeked the shock of red, with glimpses of navy blue buttons rounding the corner and dark midnight following the planes of broad shoulders, finally leading up to set jaws and neutral expressions.

One of the few guards were trying to calm down an elder man, who was shouting angrily, while two were searching the pockets of a younger man, presumably the gray-haired man's son by the reaction given.

The wide eyes of the adolescent before me flickered to mine in fright, while I shot him a reassuring smile in response, "Don't worry about it too much, I'm sure it's nothing important. Just be careful."

He returned a grateful grin, although he wasn't convinced, and handed me my change.

"Don't touch me!"

The shout was audible, as I was pocketing the spare money.

My head turned back to commotion only metres away, curiously. The man was sprinting.

Before I could register what was happening, my shoulder was knocked over, and my side hit the ground hard.

I lifted my head as a guard offered me his hand, apologising briefly. I thanked him, but before I could ask about the man, he had run off.

5.

Chen Guang was seething when I had gotten home, "You imbecile!"

I was taken aback before realisation hit me, and I had to bite my bottom lip to hide an oncoming laugh. Cheng Guang smelt awful. Out of sheer boredom, I had mixed dirty toilet water into her shampoo earlier this morning as a harmless prank.

"If you think this is funny, you're completely and utterly wrong. Who do you think you are?"

She approached me with so much menace; I couldn't help but take a step back. My snickers fell short.

"This is the reason you don't belong in this house, you intruding prick!"

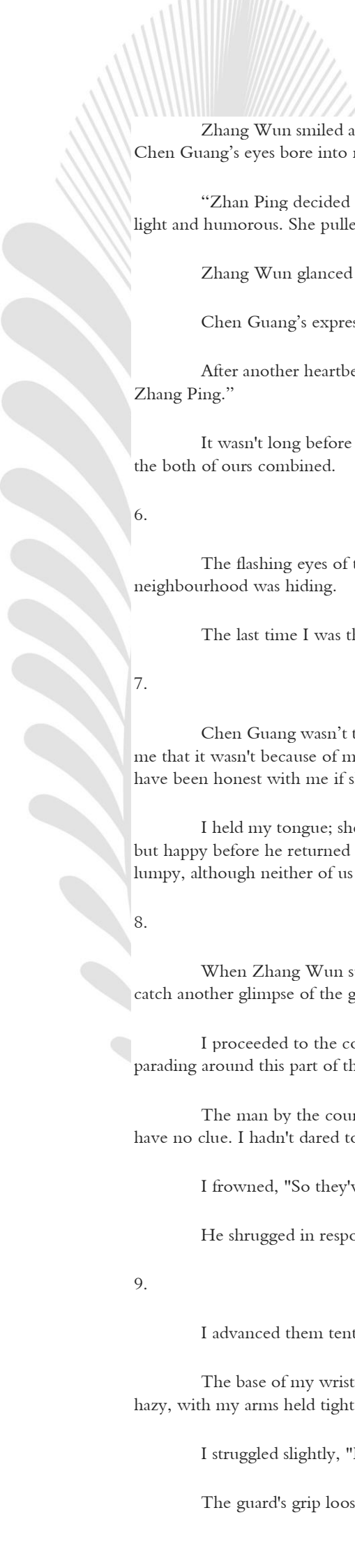
I flinched at her venomous tone.

"Zhang Wun can live without you, although you don't seem to think so. I have connections, and know dangerous people; you chose the wrong woman to mess with—"

The door slammed open.

Chen Guang paused before laughing manically, and I had whipped my head to stare at her incredulously.

"Honey, the funniest thing happened today!"



Zhang Wun smiled at us in greeting, before his eyes widened and adjusted to Chen Guang's gross scent. Chen Guang's eyes bore into mine; her dark orbs contained so much hatred that my oncoming grin had faltered.

"Zhan Ping decided to prank me, and now we need new shampoo," she said sickly sweetly, her tone light and humorous. She pulled her hair up to show her slightly stained skin.

Zhang Wun glanced between the two of us, as thick silence coated the room.

Chen Guang's expression was smug.

After another heartbeat, he convulsed with laughter, "You used toilet water again? That's so uncreative, Zhang Ping."

It wasn't long before I joined in on the guffaw. Chen Guang's shrill cackles soon followed, louder than the both of ours combined.

6.

The flashing eyes of the terrified man sprinting for his life kept me awake. There was something this neighbourhood was hiding.

The last time I was this unsettled, Zhang Wun had told me he loved Cheng Guang.

7.

Chen Guang wasn't there the next morning, although Zhang Wun didn't seem too worried. He assured me that it wasn't because of my prank and that she was probably talking a stroll around town, "She would've been honest with me if she were upset."

I held my tongue; she hadn't left the house since they had gotten married, and she had seemed anything but happy before he returned home. The bowls of congee waiting for us in Chen Guang's wake were cold and lumpy, although neither of us commented on it.

8.

When Zhang Wun suggested that I buy new shampoo to make up for my prank, I wasn't prepared to catch another glimpse of the guards marching past the little shop I was in.

I proceeded to the counter, "Excuse me, sir? Is there a reason why such a large sum of guards are parading around this part of the city?"

The man by the counter smiled kindly, the wrinkles by his eyes pulling his face taut, "I'm sorry, son, I have no clue. I hadn't dared to ask, in case they decided to search my pockets, too."

I frowned, "So they've been searching everyone? They aren't looking for anyone specific?"

He shrugged in response, "It seems like it, boy. If you're curious, you could always ask them yourself."

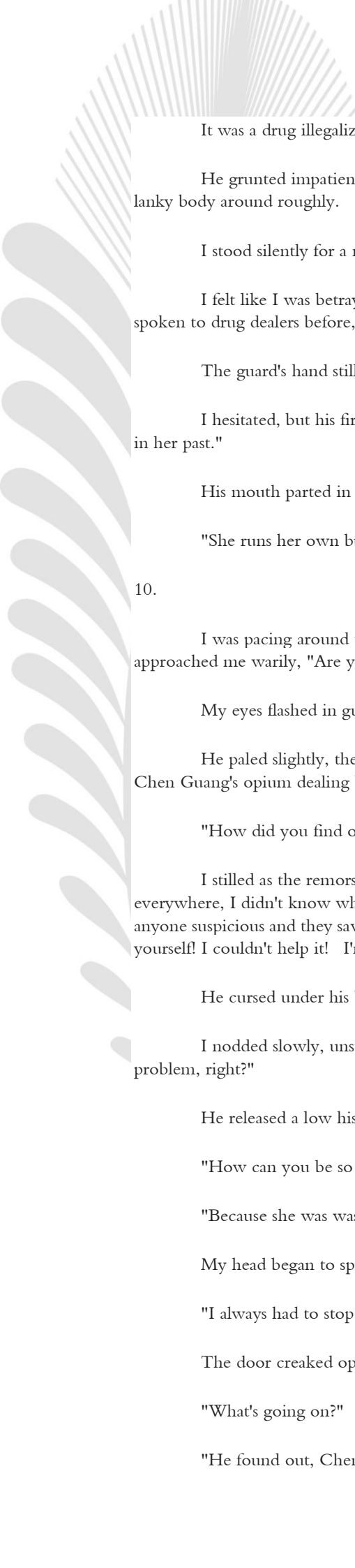
9.

I advanced them tentatively, "Sorr—"

The base of my wrists were grappled immediately. They spun me around so quickly that my mind went hazy, with my arms held tight behind my back, "You have any on you? Turn it in now and we'll be merciful."

I struggled slightly, "Have any what? What have you been looking for?"

The guard's grip loosened, "Opium, young man. Do you have any opium on you?"



It was a drug illegalized by the Government, "People here have been smoking that?"

He grunted impatiently in reply and began to search through my pockets, pushing my comparatively lanky body around roughly.

I stood silently for a moment, "Have you caught the dealers?"

I felt like I was betraying Zhang Wun when Chen Guang immediately crossed my mind. She had spoken to drug dealers before, and she was a woman running a business; wouldn't it seem suspicious to anyone?

The guard's hand stilled, "Why? Is there anyone you think could be one?"

I hesitated, but his firm gaze caused me to nod, "I think my brother's wife had come across drug dealers in her past."

His mouth parted in shock, although he recovered quickly, "A woman?"

"She runs her own business, as well," I added.

10.

I was pacing around the room, as the floorboards squealed in protest under my weight. Zhang Wun approached me warily, "Are you alright? You seem nervous."

My eyes flashed in guilt, "There are Opium dealers in this neighbourhood."

He paled slightly, the minuscule change in his posture caused my throat to hitch; was he involved with Chen Guang's opium dealing business?

"How did you find out?"

I stilled as the remorse caught up to me entirely. I began to speak rapidly, "There were guards everywhere, I didn't know what was going on, and you know how inquisitive I am! They asked me if I found anyone suspicious and they saw me hesitate; I had to tell then about Cheng Guang! You've heard all the rumours yourself! I couldn't help it! I'm so sorry! Please forgive me!"

He cursed under his breath, but spoke calmly, "You told them our address?"

I nodded slowly, unsure of how he would take this, "If she has nothing to hide, it shouldn't be a problem, right?"

He released a low hiss, "She doesn't have anything to hide—"

"How can you be so sure—"

"Because she was the one who told me to stop dealing opium!"

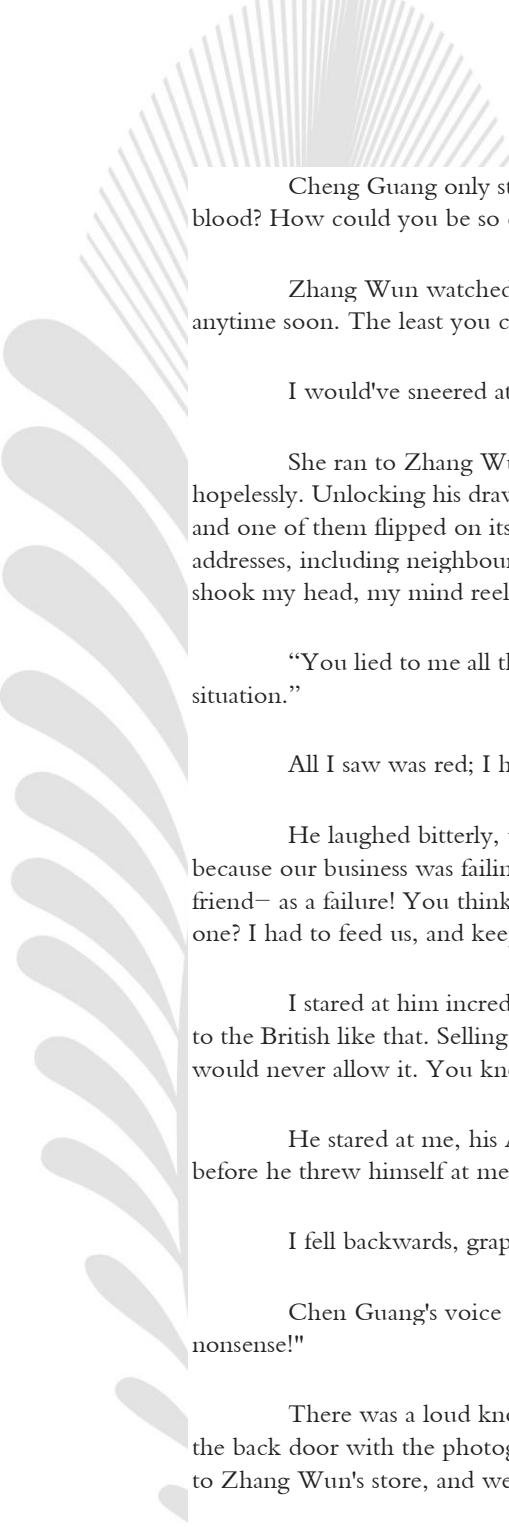
My head began to spin, "Y—you?"

"I always had to stop her from telling you."

The door creaked open, and ours head snapped toward the sound.

"What's going on?"

"He found out, Chen Guang, and he tipped the guards off."



Cheng Guang only stared at me, processing this new information, "You turned your back on your own blood? How could you be so cruel? We should've kicked him out when I told you to, Zhang Wun."

Zhang Wun watched the situation unravel helplessly. Cheng Guang straightened, "They'll be coming anytime soon. The least you could do is help your brother out, Zhang Ping."

I would've sneered at her condescending tone, but I knew she was right.

She ran to Zhang Wun's room, and I trailed behind, leaving Zhang Wun standing in the kitchen hopelessly. Unlocking his drawer, she pulled out glimpses of my childhood. She threw the pictures hastily at me, and one of them flipped on its pale backside. Words were scrawled messily at the back, notes of names and addresses, including neighbours I recognised. I furrowed my brows and began flipping all of the photographs. I shook my head, my mind reeling in an attempt to progress and piece together what I had just discovered.

"You lied to me all this time? I trusted you! And to think you used Ma Ma and Pa Pa to manipulate this situation."

All I saw was red; I had never been this livid my entire life.

He laughed bitterly, unflinching, "You are a blind fool! Can't you see? I wanted the store to myself because our business was failing. I was failing! I didn't want you to see me— your older brother and your best friend— as a failure! You think I want to watch each of my neighbours slowly become Opium addicts one by one? I had to feed us, and keep us alive!"

I stared at him incredulously, "You wanted to keep yourself alive. You're disgusting, giving yourself up to the British like that. Selling drugs to our own people! You knew I would have never wanted this; you knew I would never allow it. You knew I would sooner die! So don't tell me this was for us because this was for you."

He stared at me, his Adam's apple bobbing against his dark skin. There was a split-second of stillness before he threw himself at me, a fist flying toward my face.

I fell backwards, grappled onto the hard, damp floor.

Chen Guang's voice filled the room, "Get off him, Zhang Wun! We don't have time for this childish nonsense!"

There was a loud knock on the front door, "The guards are here! Zhang Ping, you need to sneak out the back door with the photographs, it's the only evidence of Zhang Wun's opium dealings in this house. Head to Zhang Wun's store, and we'll make sure the guards don't catch you."

11.

It happened so quickly I didn't have a chance to register it. I was suddenly on the ground, with a gun to my temple.

"You should have stopped running when we told you to, young man. You only made this more difficult for yourself.

I heard my brother's cry of protest as he caught up to us, running toward me as he caught sight of me. He spoke frantically, kicking and screaming when he was suddenly restrained, "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry, Zhan Ping! I don't know why Chen Guang told them where you were."

He knew why. They weren't going to give up until they found the dealers, why not place the blame on one?

I stared at his face, blurry through my clouded tears. I didn't need to see his face properly; I could trace it in my sleep. The planes of his jaw, the crookedness of his nose.

It was a shame that the last thing I heard was Cheng Guang's howl of laughter.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Chang, Yohan – 14

Four gentlemen sit, huddled around a low table in a vintage open 1930's pub in Shanghai, cards sharply poised in their hands, money notes scrambled across the circular poker table. The four players concentrate, zoning into the table, eyes locked, poker faced and they seemed to no longer be concerned of the chaotic stream of people ever so slightly brushing past them. Little did they know that there was already a clear victor. The man tilts his blue hat letting his eyes wander for a while before carefully studying the premade marks on each fifty two cards. Hidden within the crinkled corners of an wornout playing card, contained a carefully laid out code. As the sun starts to dip into the horizon a flutter of cards go up into the amber sky in protest, "Why can't I win ?!", said the man who sat directly opposite to the manipulator of the rigged card game. "Better luck next time", said the man with the blue hat. He stood up, skillfully swept up his deck of cards in a skillful manner and stepped out of the patio.

It had been a long day and he had got what he wanted, he strolled comfortably back to the apartment he had rented out. Before going home he always would pick a flower or two, pick up his mail and spend time by the portside gazing into the ocean. The flower woman handed him as he nodded gracefully, as he left the shop he dropped a strip of paper onto the floor, the woman having pretended to not have noticed picks it up and walks into her labyrinth of flowers. He jaunts to the port and stops by the a footbridge, pausing to lean across the railing and takes a deep breathe of the sea breeze. He loosens his tie and let's his collar loose, as he turns away he leaves his tie on the railing and proceeds to make his way home. He steps into the front yard of his stay and opens his mailbox. Inside contains a letter, a parcel and a note in a secret compartment at the back of the box. He pulls all three out and walks up the stairs, past the elevator and up 12 flights of stairs.

As he opens his front door he lays down his shoes and carefully inspects the floor around him, he walks into his living room and carefully sits down in a leather reclining chair. He pulls a small keypuncher out of the parcel and jots down the contents of the note and letter. Looking back and forth of his letter and note he pauses to make supper. While heating his premade food he tosses the note and letter to the flames and its contents were lost to the flame. He sits down on his bed, with a sigh of relief and tells himself through the mirror, "I'll be home soon, wait for me son". He closes his eyes and drifts into a deep slumber, while sleeping, as he turned over onto his back the old, withered and scars shine with the moonlight passing through the window pane.

As the sun rose and sunlight flooded the sunlight, the light crept into his eyes and pried them open. He got up and got dressed and prepared for his routine. He slipped his jacket one, placed a grey Fedora on his head. As he left his house he took his keys and threw them out the window, he slips on his well shined shoes and leaves his homestay. Unlocked. He make his way to his private mailbox and pulls out an envelope which he quickly tucks into his inside pocket within his jacket. He walks past the flower shop, past the bridge and back towards his local bar. As he walks the sun drifts to the middle of the sky, then it stops to take a break.

The man walked and sat down on a chair on the patio, at his usual spot and greeted his usual friends at the bar and proceeded to play another game of cards. "Good afternoon gentlemen", he said to the men. The men greeted him halfheartedly, however one of them did not say hello, he just stared intensely into my eyes and mouthed a silent threat "I know". The game went on as usual and as the game is rigged the man own once again, however at the very end when he announced his victory. One of his opponents pulled out a .357 and pointed it at his face, He was hit from behind the head and saw black.

"Ryunosuke Seita", you are accused of espionage, by spying for the Japanese. Seita looks up into the face of a battle scarred face, with unwavering fierceness. He looks around the room in a hazy daze as his vision deteriorated and lost focus, "Your country has sold you out, there is no longer any reason for you to help them, assist us for your vengeance." Seita realizes his surroundings and noticed blood stains on the floors and knives on the wall. He sat in the middle of an interrogation chamber. As it's prime specimen. He went through days of hellish torture, everyday waking up to the same barking voice, a splash of ice cold and water and the sharp pain of a whip on his bare scarred back. He had had enough, he could no longer return to his son as his final days emerged, he lost his will to live.

The next morning he woke up washed by sunlight, standing up and letting the rays of sunlight bless his skin. It was a beautiful day, he stood on a long field were presented to god, wrapped up in rope. He looked at the blue sky for almost an eternity. Then after a barrage of loud bangs, his body was penetrated with bullets the skies his skies turned crimson, then to grey then to a pitch black eternal darkness.

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Island School, Cheung, Janice – 15

“The old Shanghai was a rich and cosmopolitan mixture of East and West that exuded luxury, style and excitement.” This is what Mr Tyson said when he is giving each of us a copy of the book “Tales of Old Shanghai: The Glorious Past of China’s Greatest City” so that we can read it and learn more about the old Shanghai.

It’s finally the last lesson of the day. I usually walk to the library with my best friend, Bella, every day to do our homework and do some revisions, but she got into some kind of trouble earlier, plus I am exhausted today, I walked home alone and I was reading the book the Mr Tyson gave me just now.

There is no one at home, both my parents went to work so I went straight up to my bedroom and lay on my soft, comfortable bed. It just feels so great after such a long day.

I woke up, got up, I am about to leave the room but then I notice something different. I heard music playing from somewhere, but I remember that I did not play any music before I went to bed. I listen carefully, and realise it is not the kind of music I usually listen to, it is some Chinese song. Everything just looked different and it feels so weird. I don’t know where I am, I have no idea how or why I ended up in this place but I guess I am going find out. I took a look at the mirror before leaving the room and found myself in an old fashioned, classic vintage silk dress. It is so tight and I just don’t like the dress because it makes me so uncomfortable.

I left the room and walked down the stairs. On the street, I see men wearing Chinese long-sleeve jackets and some other women are wearing similar dresses to the one I am wearing. This place starts to look familiar, it’s like I have seen photos of this place but still I don’t know where I am. I hear someone speaking English, one of the only two languages I speak, and I walked towards that direction. I see a man, wearing a Chinese Jacket just like some other men around, talking to a beautiful lady and I walked up to them and ask them where I am and then figure out what I can do.

“Excuse me, sir? May I ask you where am I?” I asked the man. “I just woke up in a room I have never been to before and I have no clue where I am.”

“You are in Shanghai right now.” He said. “And I am Brandon. You can call me Brandy if you want. And this is Leila. You are...”

“I am Kristen. You can call me Kris.” I answered with a little grin on my face since I finally know where I am. I knew this place looked familiar, I am reading a book about Old Shanghai on my way home a few hours ago.

“Do you mind if I join you?” I ask them again.

“Sure.” They answered with a friendly smile on their faces.

I am so glad I don’t have to be alone in somewhere I have never been to before. I am just following them around. Suddenly, I heard a loud bang, like a gunshot, somewhere near. We walk towards the crowd, wanting to know what just happened. I see a man lying on the floor, unconscious. I stood there, frozen, not knowing what I should do, I don’t have a phone and I don’t speak Chinese so I cannot call the police for help. I hear Leila screaming the moment she saw blood on the floor. She immediately covered her mouth; she doesn’t want to draw any attention to her. The man with the gun started screaming, in Chinese which I do not understand, pointing the gun at random people. I am still processing what just happened. I have never come across any kind of major accidents before. I see Brandon taking out his phone from his pocket from the corner of my eye.



Before I could make a move, I felt a tight grip around my shoulder, pulling me back, I almost fell. I feel someone putting their arm around my neck and my heart is beating so fast as if it would jump out of my chest. What is going on? I felt a gun pressing against my head. Why me?

“Please don’t kill me. I have done nothing to you, I don’t even know you.” This is the first thing that comes to my mind. “Don’t kill me,” I pleaded. He groaned angrily as if I had done and said something. He pressed the gun against my head harder. Tears fell down my cheek and my heart thumped wildly at my chest. I was terrified, of the gun being so close to me. I see Brandon and Leila in the crowd, I see police around the scene, I see people walking away from us, they are scared, so am I.

He said something in Chinese, I have no idea what he said but I am pretty sure he is telling the police and other people to stay away. I froze and looked into Brandon and Leila’s eyes – they are the only people I know.

I don’t know why but all the good memories came flashing back, tears come flooding out. I can feel the pounding of my heartbeat in my ears and I was terrified. I was trembling, I feel like I was under water and I couldn’t breathe, my vision blurred. My legs feel weak and I fell on my knees. I passed out.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Ching, Mathew – 14

A mere observer. An agent of natural order. That is what I see myself as. My one rule is to never intervene. I have no name, though you humans have made many. Anubis, Vanth, Thanatos, Tarakeshwara, Grim reaper. You humans think I cause death. That I am the one that reaps their soul. The one that executes them. Misguided, for I merely wait. I wait for the last breath.

The last beat.

The last thought.

Only then do I approach, ferrying the soul to the beyond.

Tonight I am Yama. I sit myself upon a crate in a warehouse not far from downtown. This city port has always been a bountiful harvest. Tonight is no other. I wait as men of both sides scurried into the warehouse, ready to die. I have always found humans interesting. Why do you fight? Why are you so willing to die? Is it for honor? Rewards? What is there that can be more precious than the gift that the Absolute one has given you?

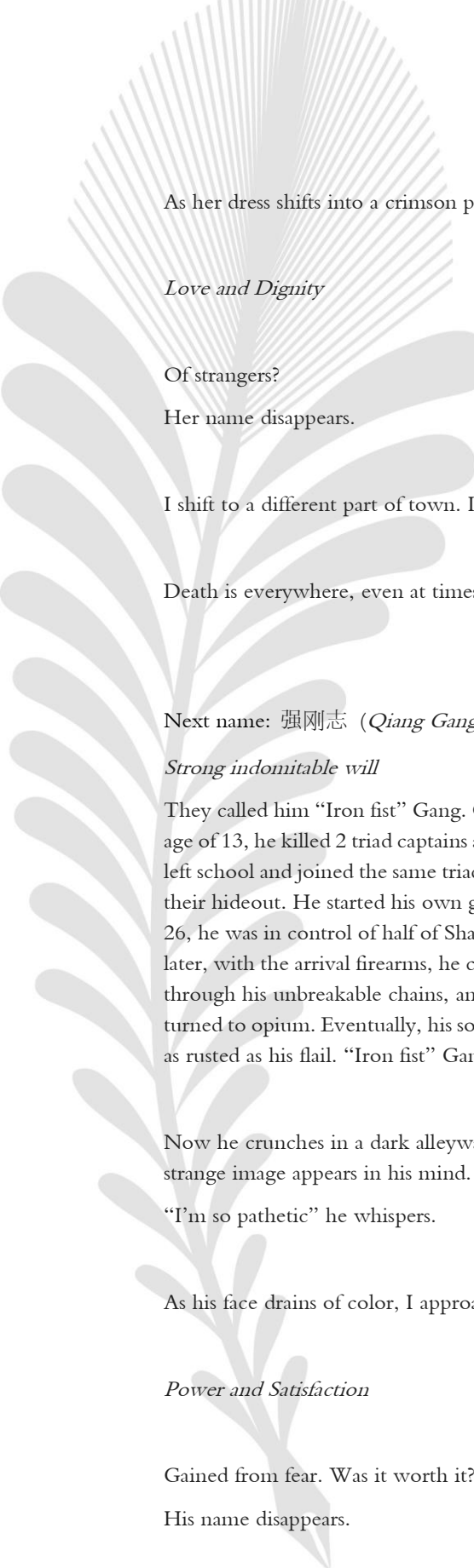
Gun fight ensues.

As I approach the fallen souls, I hear them whisper. They always whisper. To ameliorate their own deaths. Most, dying of old age and disease, would tell themselves they have lived a good life. Some spoke of love. Chivalry. Glory. Honor. I do not judge. I cannot judge. The passage of life and death is equal to you all, dear reader, unbiased and true. Whether you are good or bad, kind or cruel, all souls go through the same route.

Today I hear the same. These men, they had the chance to start over, to lead a good life. Instead they spent their years trying to find their boss. Their childhood idol. Trying to revive him. And When they discovered that it was too late, They rebelled. They echo to themselves that they are avengers. I look down, as 38 names disappear from the list. Each with their own life. Each with their own story.

Next on the list is Lily Chan.

藍玫瑰 (*Lan Meigui*). Blue rose, they called her. She always wore blue. Born to a hostess and a triad boss. Being pregnant was a no go for a hostess; she was given 2 choices: Abortion and stay, or keep it and leave. She chose the latter. Lily, being her favourite flower, became the daughter's name. Upbringing was hard. With the little income the mother got from prostitution she spent it on alcohol. Each night after school, Lily would be scowled at, sometimes beaten, with the occasional *Why didn't I abort you?* But Lily did not lose hope. She studied hard. Aced tests. Eventually, her mother screamed at her less, until one day, she died in a drunken fight. *My daughter* she echoed. Lily had no other family, and with nowhere to turn to and no hope to look upon, she went back to her roots. At age 15 she rose in popularity at record rate, and at age 20, was the richest hostess with in the area, marvelled by men and envied by women. So envious, that it transformed into anger. Tonight is Lily's 21st birthday. Unbeknownst to her, her drink, given by her closest friend, was spiked with cyanide. Death by cyanide is not a kind one. To those unfortunate enough to encounter it, I, will become a blessing. The convulsions. Desperate gasp for air. Blood froth rushing out of mouth. Only then, after minutes of suffering, comes unconsciousness. Lily is no different. The trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool.



As her dress shifts into a crimson purple, I approach.

Love and Dignity

Of strangers?

Her name disappears.

I shift to a different part of town. I shift to an incalculable amount of places. All at the same time.

Death is everywhere, even at times you are not aware of it.

Next name: 强刚志 (*Qiang Gangzhi*).

Strong indomitable will

They called him “Iron fist” Gang. Once one of the most powerful man in Shanghai, who now has fallen. At the age of 13, he killed 2 triad captains at the cost of his hand. His parents feared him. His peers worshipped him. They left school and joined the same triad. He listened. He learned. At age 15, he killed the entire gang by setting fire to their hideout. He started his own gang. With a bit of tweaking, he turned cuffs he found into flails. At the age of 26, he was in control of half of Shanghai. At age 35 he had most of the police force bribed and in control. 2 years later, with the arrival firearms, he considered them weak and cowardly. Gang Wars after gang wars power slipped through his unbreakable chains, and in the end, his strength was his downfall. With no friends, nor family, he turned to opium. Eventually, his sole purpose was opium. Doing anything to reach it. His pride was gone. His will as rusted as his flail. “Iron fist” Gang was no more.

Now he crunches in a dark alleyway, clutching the only thing that reminded him of his past. He looks up and a strange image appears in his mind. A girl in blue. Why? He wondered.

“I’m so pathetic” he whispers.

As his face drains of color, I approach.

Power and Satisfaction

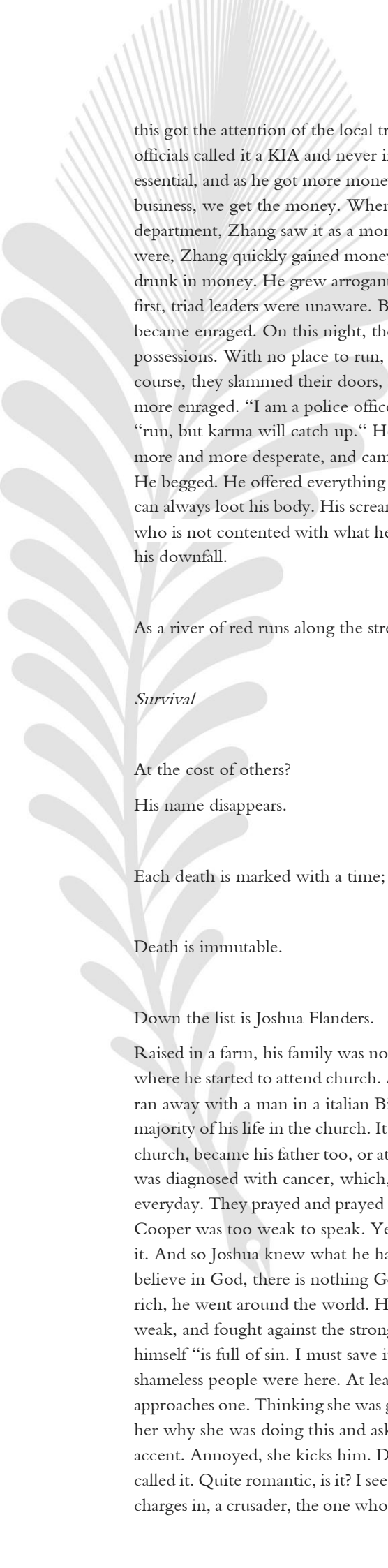
Gained from fear. Was it worth it?

His name disappears.

I am here. I was here. I will be here.

No matter what year, what century, what millenia is it is, Death is, was and shall be constant.

張仁生 (*Zhang Rensheng*) is a officer in the Shanghai Municipal Police force. Born and raised in Hong Kong, his father work in the police force, and thus wanted to become one himself. At age 16 he joined the academy, and after half a year finally became an officer. He and his partner, both held a righteous belief, and would patrol the streets, never taking bribes. People hated him. When usually a small bribe was enough, they were now fined. Eventually



this got the attention of the local triads. They captured his partner during control and tortured him to death. The officials called it a KIA and never investigated further. It was at this point that Zhang realised that corruption was essential, and as he got more money, the more he agreed to this system; it was a win win situation. They get their business, we get the money. When Shanghai Municipal Police force needed men from Hong Kong police department, Zhang saw it as a money making opportunity, leaped at the chance. With how rich the local gangs were, Zhang quickly gained money. Soon he was one of the richest in the city, though he kept it a secret, he was drunk in money. He grew arrogant, and began challenging people with more influence as he bullied the poor. At first, triad leaders were unaware. But as Zhang began to touch upon their territory, taking their money, they became enraged. On this night, they sent squads. Zhang, realising the situation he was in, quickly grabbed his possessions. With no place to run, he went to civilians. Those that he robbed from. Those that he oppressed. Of course, they slammed their doors, rejected him, overlooked him. With each door slammed on him, he became more enraged. "I am a police officer!" he screamed. "I PROTECT you!". "No you don't," they would respond "run, but karma will catch up." He tried offering them money, food, jewelry, but nothing worked. He became more and more desperate, and came upon a dead end. As men pile up behind him, he breaks down. He pleaded. He begged. He offered everything he had. But they would take none of it. Of course they wouldn't take it. They can always loot his body. His screams echoed throughout the alleyway as dozens of blades collapsed onto him. He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have. His greed was his downfall.

As a river of red runs along the street, I approach.

Survival

At the cost of others?

His name disappears.

Each death is marked with a time; I am but a timekeeper, who recalls those how have met their time. It is law.

Death is immutable.

Down the list is Joshua Flanders.

Raised in a farm, his family was not a religious one. It was through his catholic High School teacher, Mr Cooper, where he started to attend church. At this point in his life, the farm was bankrupt, his father a drunkard and mother ran away with a man in a italian Bianchi Landaulette, which frankly, Joshua thought was rather ugly. He spent majority of his life in the church. It became his second home. Mr Cooper, who also happens to be the father of the church, became his father too, or at least that was the way Joshua thought of him. When Joshua was 24, Mr Cooper was diagnosed with cancer, which, in a rural town like theirs, was basically a death sentence. They prayed everyday. They prayed and prayed until Mr Cooper was too weak to kneel on the floor. Still they prayed, until Mr Cooper was too weak to speak. Yet they prayed on. Mr Cooper's last words to Joshua was *Deus Vult*. God wills it. And so Joshua knew what he had to do next. He was determined to share God's love. If a man dying can still believe in God, there is nothing God cannot do. With the money he got from Mr Cooper, who was surprisingly rich, he went around the world. He made himself a missionary. Sent himself on a quest. He gave to the poor and weak, and fought against the strong and greedy. Eventually he ended up in Shanghai. "This city," he thought to himself "is full of sin. I must save it!". As he walked around he was disgusted by what he saw, how corrupt and shameless people were here. At least 30 women have offered sex for money since he arrived. Frustrated, he approaches one. Thinking she was going to get a customer, she was utterly disappointed when the white man asked her why she was doing this and asked her if she wanted to accept the lord and saviour Jesus Christ in a crappy accent. Annoyed, she kicks him. Disgusted, he walks on. The corruption was horrible. The Paris of the east, they called it. Quite romantic, is it? I see a worker held at gunpoint. Preposterous. Christ shall protect me, he thinks. He charges in, a crusader, the one who vanquishes evil. The robber notices him. As if this was routine, he shift the gun



towards him. “Stop! Violence is not nee—”. Gun shot. In the heart. People walk on as if nothing happened. His faith made him strong. But strength does not stop death. God does not stop what is planned.

As he finishes his final prayer, I approach.

Deus Vult

How naive.

His name disappears.

All things that start must end; all things that live must die.

Death is inevitable, dear reader.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Choi, Catherine – 14

A light, gentle breeze danced across the garden grounds, bringing with it joyful laughter of children, light-hearted chattering of people in the park and an assortment of whistles and tunes from birds residing in the luscious green trees. It fluttered past pebble paths, across a jade lake, between drooping willow trees, reaching a large, ornate tea house that was situated atop a large body of water. It knocked at the red lanterns that hung from the winged gables of the teahouse, leaving them to sway gently, as a cat would bat deftly at a feather toy. Finally, it quieted down, contented with the warm atmosphere of the teahouse.

Beautiful women wearing ankle-length qipaos clung onto the arms of handsome men wearing long, collared chang paos, laughing and talking as they walked over a zig-zagged foot bridge that led to the tea house sitting on the lake. The tea house was a large gabled two-storey building, with a midnight blue roof and quaint latticed windows.

People seeking refreshment found sweet relief inside the tea house, sipping fragrant tea and eating sugary steamed buns. Paper lanterns hung from the beams, creating a soft glow. The air was filled with the clinking of china and the footsteps of bustling waiters against the wooden floor.

The view from the tea house was picturesque. The lake sparkled under the sunlight. Golden koi glided smoothly through the water, flicking their tails, their scales shimmering. Rosy pink lilies floated above the lake, complimented by emerald green lily pads. Oriental stone sculptures decorated the gardens surrounding the tea house, along with swaying willow trees.

A large bird swooped through the sky and squawked. Its sudden cry broke the tranquility of the park, and it echoed through the gardens, to the mountains.

The New Relic of Old Shanghai

Island School, Chung, Ho Ming – 15

Bright, blinding beams of rays scorched the ground relentlessly; emitted by the blazing sun of June—the golden medallion of the sky. A sudden surge of wind rushed through the junction above the steep hill, and barged its way down the deserted streets of Xin Ma Tou. I shut my eyes and bent my legs a little as the wind blasted on me... I sniffed the air, and my nose twitched uncomfortably. The gust brought along the fumes exhausted from the factories... and something *else*.

Light started to fade and dusk kicked in. From far away the Pearl of the South could still be seen. Decorated with glittering LEDs, lighting its surrounding, but not close enough to light up this street. The temperature instantly dropped a few degrees, yet the sultry air of summer was still present. I took a glance at the Huangpu river. Its glistening surface, which once reflected a dazzling, almost painful beam off the sun now seems warm and calm. The beams of ray projected on the infrastructures narrowed down to one tiny strip. Shadows thickened. Darkness.

A gentle breeze blew, and moved the whole sky with it. Light penetrated through the pitch-black ceiling and slowly expanded throughout the sky; as it expand the intensity of the light got stronger. I shift my sight away and protected my eyes with my hands.

I peeked through the slit of my fingers – the lights got dimmer – I saw complete darkness. My pulse raced, the symptoms of my cardiac disease started to appear. I had difficulties breathing. I quickly take my pills out and consumed them with a gulp...

“YA—— HAHA——.”

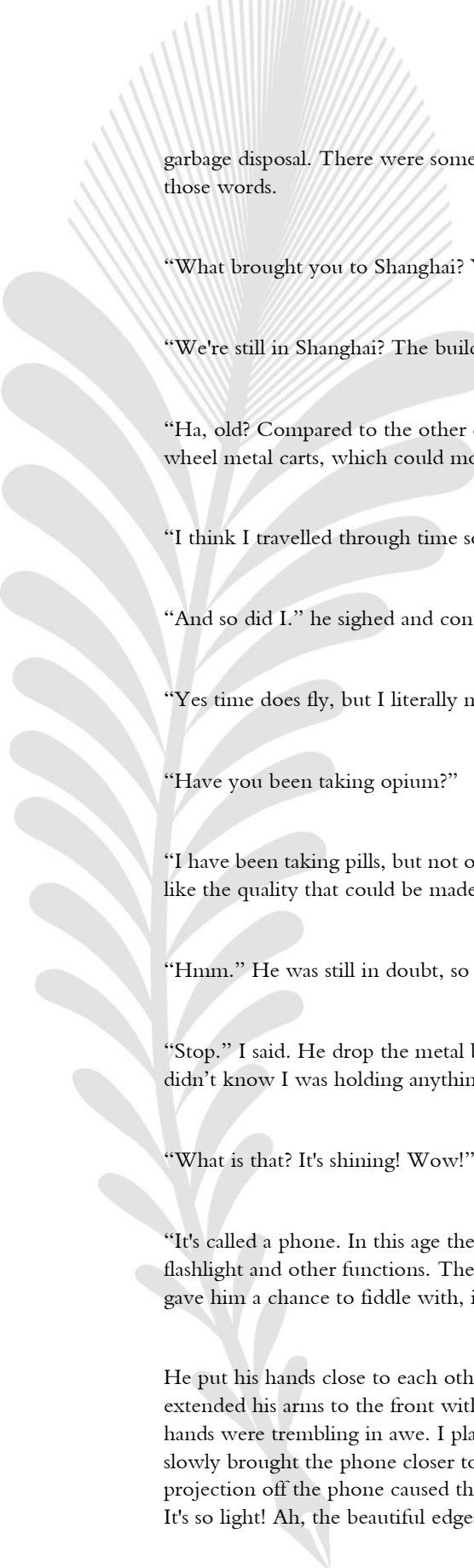
I placed my pills back to my pocket, finding a cheerful crowd near the river dressed in old-fashioned gowns with old-fashioned cars parked at the side. The infrastructure on the street has also changed, from the large expansive windows and tall buildings to smaller square windows and short brick buildings. “Hmm..” I instinctively shove my hands into the pocket on the right and took my phone out. There was no signal. “Strange.”

I started walking to the group of people, hoping for answers, but then a sudden array of colors exploded in mid-air. Turquoise, violet, indigo and lastly amber. I was mesmerised by the majestic view...

“Hey, you.” A rough deep voice grunted behind me. “What are you doing? Aren’t you coming?”

“Huh?” I turned around and an old man standing next to a rickshaw under the lamppost was waving at me. He had a straw hat tied to his neck hanging behind his hunched back, and a green dull T-shirt smeared with dirt and stained with sweat. “Ah yes,” I replied with hesitation, “sorry for keeping you waiting.” maybe he could give me some answer I thought, and I sat on the rickshaw.

With all his might, he lift the bar up to his chest and shift his body weight on it. “This road is especially rugged,” he warned, “please hold on tight.”. The rickshaw starting moving, but at a very slow pace. The street was nearly empty, most of them went to the bund to enjoy the fireworks. There were a few stalls set up along the side, selling accessories, seafood, vegetables, and even livestock, but there wasn’t a lot of customers. Lines of buildings were neatly stacked, and looked almost identical, but some were larger than others, and had more complex designs. Between the buildings were alleyways with an arched entrance leading to another building or street. Some of them were used as storage for the street vendors to keep their stall, while some were used for



garbage disposal. There were some old Chinese calligraphy written all over the place, but I could still recognize those words.

“What brought you to Shanghai? You don't seem local.”

“We're still in Shanghai? The buildings look so old.”

“Ha, old? Compared to the other cities, you could say we are further ahead of them. We even have those four wheel metal carts, which could move without horses.” He looked over his shoulder and smiled.

“I think I travelled through time somehow.”

“And so did I.” he sighed and continued, “Everything seems like yesterday, but unknowingly I'm already 60.”

“Yes time does fly, but I literally mean time travel.”

“Have you been taking opium?”

“I have been taking pills, but not opium. Either way, look!” I pointed at my shirt and said, “Do they even look like the quality that could be made in this time?”

“Hmm.” He was still in doubt, so I decided to show him a phone.

“Stop.” I said. He drop the metal bar to the ground and turned around. The surrounding was gloomy so he didn't know I was holding anything, I pressed the button and his eyes were lit.

“What is that? It's shining! Wow!”

“It's called a phone. In this age there are also phones but not ones like this. It has a touch screen, camera, flashlight and other functions. The most significant thing, is that it has colors. Here.” I unlocked the phone and gave him a chance to fiddle with, if he knows how to.

He put his hands close to each other and curled his long bony fingers. It formed a cup shaped container and he extended his arms to the front with his head down, like he was ready to receive a present from God. His veiny hands were trembling in awe. I placed the phone on his hand and he bowed down in signs of gratitude. He slowly brought the phone closer to his face for a more specific inspection. His face was *glowing*. The light projection off the phone caused the wrinkles and age spots on his face to be more significant and visible. “Oh! It's so light! Ah, the beautiful edges and the neatly rounded corners. What is t——.”

Cruck

He dropped the phone to the ground in shock. “Oh my, what was that? I could see through the phone?”

I smiled in amusement and said, “you turned on the camera function...” I got off the rickshaw and bent down to pick up my phone.

“You believe me now?”

“Ok,” he nodded, “ yes I do believe you.”

“Bring me to the bund. It’s gonna be nice to take a few photos before I somehow time travel again. If it does happen.”

I quickly got back on the rickshaw, and the old man started pushing again. Once we passed through the streets of Xin Ma Tou we turned right, to the gleaming source of light and noise. We stopped at the entrance of the street, staring at the loud and lively street, not knowing what to do next.

I took out my phone and took a few pictures, but before I could, the scene captured me first. The big red lanterns dangling above the streets—it was like stars at night, but brighter and more attractive to the eye. The glowing rose-like red colors and the warm orange flame dancing inside, everything is just so high-spirited; especially, with the street performers playing a nice Chinese traditional music adds upon a really intimate vibe.

Street vendors were raising their voice higher each time they shout, trying their best to get more customers, but no matter how hard they try it won’t change a thing, because it just gets cancelled out with each other and all their efforts goes to waste, leaving a duet of the Erhu accompanied by the commotion created by the crowds.

“Looks like we can’t go this way,” said the coachman, “I’ll turn back around and find another route.”

“No, it’s fine. I’ll walk through the crowd, seems like there’s a lot of interesting things going on.” I waved at him in signs of dismissal.

“Indeed, there is,” he gave me a wink and said, “but be careful, there are a lot of pickpocketing lately.

I nodded my head and took off my watch, “Here, it’s called a watch and will keep you in time. It is equally valuable as the phone I showed you, so please keep it safe.”

“Thank-you, thank-you.” he kept on bowing with his whole body tilting up and down.

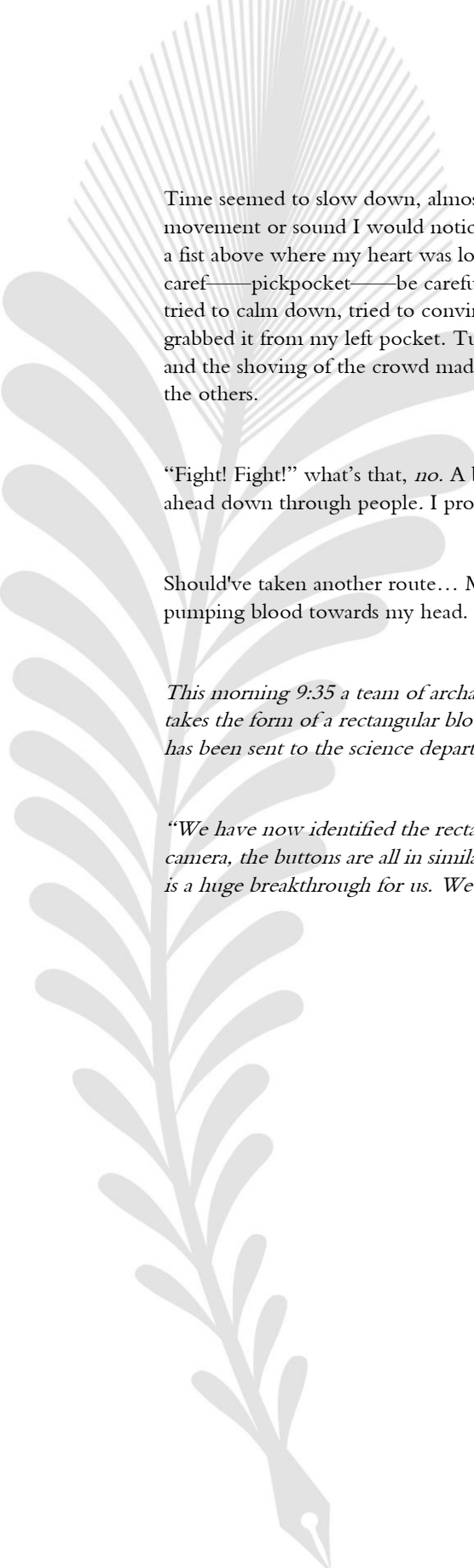
I stood in front of the crowd and tried to look for a spot that I could slip through, but as soon as one is available it gets filled in again. I took a step back and reconsidered: maybe I should take a different route. “Ugh” A sudden force pushed me from behind, and plop I’m in.

It was like in a raging sea, where the waves pushing you around non-stop; like a puppet tied to a string with no control of direction at all; sometimes left, sometimes right, and sometimes, I don’t even know where I’m being dragged to. I’m just standing on my toes allowing the crowd to “guide” me through. The space I was in was still shrinking and shrinking.

“Kghkk”

A loud tearing sound came from under, I felt my pants being dragged to the bottom with great effort. I hastily hold it back up and checked my pockets. It’s gone. My phone . The only thing left behind was a hole...

I quickly looked around. This won’t help!



Time seemed to slow down, almost to a stop. I was unusually conscious of my surrounding, any slightest movement or sound I would notice during the few seconds. It's happening again. I gripped my shirt and formed a fist above where my heart was located. My breathing intervals got quicker. Tighter. "but be careful—pickpocket—be careful—lots of pickpocketing..." the coachman's voice echoed in my mind. I tried to calm down, tried to convince myself it was just a phone, I tried, but it wasn't working...Pills! I quickly grabbed it from my left pocket. Turned the cap and a bunch tumbled out. My hand was trembling intensively, and the shoving of the crowd made it worst. A few jumped out, I immediately got hold of my hand to contain the others.

"Fight! Fight!" what's that, *no*. A brawl was about to begin. I qui— *NO!* Like dominos the impact received ahead down through people. I propelled back and lost the pills. *No...*

Should've taken another route... My sight was flickering. I could feel my heart thudding rapidly, vigorously, pumping blood towards my head. It felt heavy. Nause—.

This morning 9:35 a team of archaeologist discovered an ancient relic in the excavation site of XinMatou. It takes the form of a rectangular block, and It is believed to be some kind of book used in ceremonies. The relic has been sent to the science depart for further examination...

"We have now identified the rectangular block. It is a smartphone, similar to the ones we are using now. The camera, the buttons are all in similar places. We have excluded the possibility of forgery. From several aspects this is a huge breakthrough for us. We will be continue excavating the site in search for more possible 'relics'..."

The Old Shanghai Hotel: Room 101

Island School, Daswani, Sohan – 15

24th of November 2016, the day I first set foot into the bustling city called Shanghai. As my Chauffeur elegantly opened the door of my hired Chevrolet Bel Air, I admired each of its stunning details from bumper to bumper. I planted myself onto the warm seat and rolled down the window. I rested my arm with my palm on my chin as we zoomed by cars and buses. Inhaling the fresh air of Shanghai was sweet and compelling like splashing cold water on my face on a really hot day.

As we were approaching the hotel I was staying in after an interesting hour long ride, I looked up at the shimmering stars in the clear dark night sky. Quietness, all forms of life sleeping, birds chirping wistfully. For some reason I felt an unpleasant feeling engulf me. It was almost like an ominous feeling. The striking structure of the hotel gave an impression of a long, abandoned and empty prison that was once luxurious long ago. The doors and windows were coated with dust and looked back at me like the eyes of an empty soul.

I gently got out of the car, slightly shivering with fear. I politely thanked my chauffeur as he drove along passed the hotel. I felt terribly isolated and deserted, standing on my own in front of a spooky hotel. I took a few more steps forward and I could finally see the huge imposing door at the entryway to the hotel.

I heard this hotel was one in a million and simply one to experience! Maybe, just maybe it could be better on the inside? I took a deep breath in and let it all out hoping that this is not as bad it looks. I walked forward to the colossal ancient door and pushed it to go inside. The rusty hinges of the old door squealed like fingernails on a dusty chalkboard. My heart just skipped a beat when I peeked on both sides of the building and saw nothing but pitch black darkness.

Seeing nothing but darkness frightened me terribly. I started to question myself; Should I even stay here any longer? Why am I forcing myself to go one more step further? I should just run away. No wait, no way. I need some place to stay. I really wanted for this trip to be memorable and so far it doesn't look like it at all. We'll just have to wait and see right? I can't come all the way here and go back home without doing anything! I'm going to experience and learn something new. With each step forward I was trembling more like a leaf. My heels clicking on the glass floor. Or maybe wooden. Out of the blue, I heard a ding. Was it me that did that? All of a sudden, a light turns on. One single bulb.

"Ni hao wo neng wei ni dedao shenme?" I really didn't know what this meant. The lady in black stared back at me with her piercing dark brown eyes. I started to explain to her, in my own language that I'm staying in this hotel and I've come for a vacation although it's not seeming like one. All I heard was just chinese responses, until she said "Vacation, I see..." She eventually gave me the keys to my room after a number of attempts of convincing.

I don't know why, I felt like I was the only one here. Like I was the only one staying in this hotel and this started to terrify me more. I could squint all the way to the end of the hallway on the first floor. The couple of dim lights let on overnight reflected off the freshly waxed tiles and the clicking of my heels and echos of my breathing made me feel uneasy. I felt exposed with no room to duck into and no stairs to take. I got chills and coldness crept through my spine but I still pushed myself farther and farther until the room right at the end. Room 101.

Right before entering my room, I froze and scanned my surroundings. Instantly, I heard glass rattling and the whistling of the wind and then footsteps behind me. I was debating whether to turn around or not. But before I could even move my head, I felt a tight grip around my wrist. In a blink of an eye, I collapsed. Paralysed with terror.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Kawano, Mary-Joy – 15

In which a girl can hear people's thoughts and the crowds of old shanghai elite show her that not everyone has good intentions.

She walked across the halls of her family's mansion, her black shoes clicking against the white tile floor. All the rich elite of the city filled her home for a lavish ceremony she was forced to attend, despite her many disagreements about the guests. As she walked towards the main room, she heard voices. She stopped directly in front of a door, dark and often overlooked. A small study that she hardly ever enters.

She tried to listen in, but there were no voices. Just silence. Then footsteps pacing around inside. The voice perked up again. A man's voice who she recognized as a man her father wanted her to wed. The son of a rich businessman who she didn't trust. He would do anything for money, and she didn't know what he would do to her.

"I lead him to the pagoda, where the knife is ready," He spoke almost manically. She could almost see his wide eyes, his hands clenched.

It was then that she realised that he wasn't speaking. He was thinking. There was no one else in the study with him. She inhaled deeply and sighed quietly; This always happened. Others' thoughts invaded her own in a mess of opinions and emotions and she had slowly learnt to handle it over the years.

The voice rambled non-stop, his thoughts getting louder, the footsteps pacing in the room got faster.

"I need to do it, I need to do it, I need to do it." He rambled, repeating the phrase obsessively.

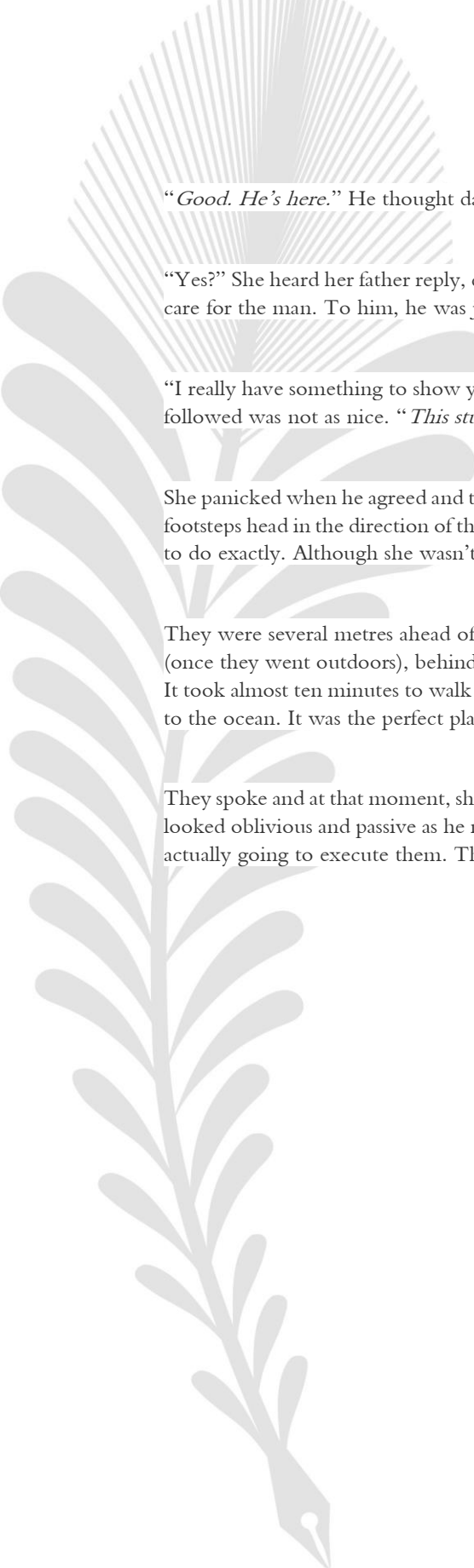
She wasn't sure how to react, she was frozen in place. She decided then that she wanted to know what he was planning to do. She stood up straight and focused on listening. Not to his voice, or the pacing footsteps, or the loud chatter coming from other guests, but to his thoughts. She wants to remember it. Wants to be able to focus on it and hear it whenever she wants.

She heard the pacing footsteps get closer to the door and she started walking away, not wanting to get caught. The door opened quietly when she was already a few steps away, the man stepping out casually with a cigar hanging from his hands.

He smiled at her and a she felt a chill run down her spine, making her shiver. She always thought something was not right with him, he was always too solicitous, always standing too close for comfort and staring too often. From what she has just heard, she thought right. He brushed against her as he walked away and she stood there, just staring at him.

"Now where is he?" She heard him think. She had an alarming thought; he was gonna do what he was thinking of doing. She had to do something.

She followed him silently through the halls and before he reached the main door to the dining room where everyone else was, he turned a swift left. She realised her shoes were loud and huffed, rolling her eyes. She didn't even know why she had to wear these stupid shoes. She took them off and threw them to the side. She ran to catch up to him and went into a room that was very familiar to her. Her father's study. A sense of dread dropped to her stomach and she listened from outside the room.



“*Good. He’s here.*” He thought darkly. “Oh, sir!” He said out loud, feigning a surprised tone of voice.

“Yes?” She heard her father reply, cold and uncaring. He maybe liked him to be her husband, but he really had no care for the man. To him, he was just another spoilt son of a rich man.

“I really have something to show you, if you could give me a bit of your time.” He said nicely. The thought that followed was not as nice. “*This study will be mine soon.*”

She panicked when he agreed and the door opened slowly and she hid behind one of the tall pillars. She heard their footsteps head in the direction of the pagoda, just as he had planned earlier. She wanted to know what he was going to do exactly. Although she wasn’t sure if it would be good for her to know.

They were several metres ahead of her as she walked slowly right behind them, hiding behind pillars, chairs, and (once they went outdoors), behind trees and bushes. The pagoda was all alone in an isolated part of the mansion. It took almost ten minutes to walk to where it was. The big pipes in the bottom of the lake next to it lead straight to the ocean. It was the perfect place to murder someone. They’d never be found.

They spoke and at that moment, she didn’t think she needed to know what was going through his head. Her father looked oblivious and passive as he normally is. She had hope that he was just thinking of dark thoughts and wasn’t actually going to execute them. The small glint of the knife shot that hope down.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Lee, Jerrick – 14

Hey there! Yes you! Welcome! To the old Shanghai! It's been quite a rough ride but I've been assigned to show you around here and to give you the best experience possible! Hello?

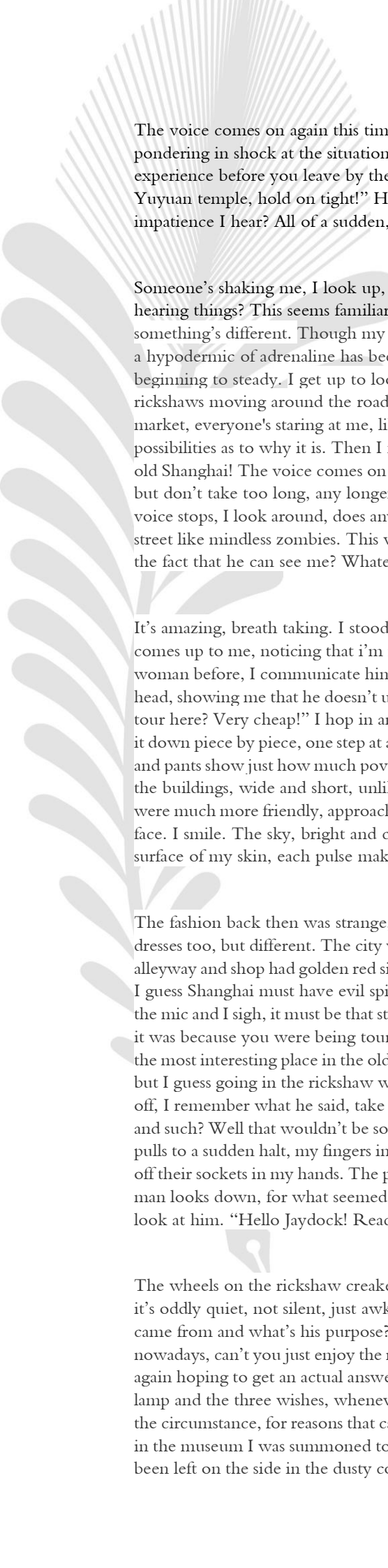
I'm shook, literally I'm being shook. I try to open my eyes, they shutter, flickering like a dusty old camera coming back to life until finally. I take a deep breath in, air flushes my lungs with oxygen in a deep satisfying motion, there's this calm ambience that I can hear all around me, humming in a manner which I cannot describe, it's calm. Soothing, like a lullaby. "Hello? Can you hear me down there?"

I look around immediately scanning the strange white landscape I'm in, there are no corners to this thing, no end. Almost like I'm stuck in this cage, I start to panic, my breathing speeds up at the speed of a car engine, I consciously force my breathing to slow down, to relax. "Jaydock, that's your name isn't it? I've been waiting here for quite a while now." I get up and look in the direction of the sound, I walk towards it, slowly, cautiously, like prey hiding from the hunter I make sure every step isn't my last. Hopefully no hands come out of the floor and drag me into the underworld. What am I saying this isn't real.. Is it?

"Young man you're not going to be able to see me, or touch me, I think you realised that now, but I'll send a hologram for your reassurance and also to make sure you know where you're going. Now follow along, we have much to see!" This man, thing, whatever it is there's this certainty to it, this reassurance like I'm talking to a parent. I decide to trust it. A hologram rises from the floor in front of me, it's a man, with no features to his body and strings of words and programs pulsed in the rhythm of a heartbeat, flashing against his skin in sync with every pulse. It's quiet, deadly quiet. I reach my hand out to shake it, as a friendly gesture but I'm ready to run the moment it threatens me. I wait, time seemed to pause as I question if what I'm doing is the right choice. Should I trust him? Where is he leading me? What am I even doing here? And before I realised he shook my hand, a steady firm grip even though it's just a hologram. It walks away and motions for me to follow, I heed.

We walk along a never ending corridor, each step echoing of the invisible walls in a never ending trance. Good thing I bought these jet-black Nike trainers or else I wouldn't have been able to make it this far. Then all of a sudden the hologram stops, it stops with no trace of momentum just like its feet have suddenly been sucked into the ground. I hear a snap of a finger and it's gone, the hologram I walked with for what seemed like a century just vanished. The voice comes back on, this time happier than the first. "Well now that the main part of the journey is over I'd like to welcome you to Gabato's luxury dream tour!" Then it hits me, faster than a speeding bullet, faster than the speed of sound, it practically knocks the air out of me! This was a wish I made on the most recent trip to the history museum! I remember, we were walking through the halls when I saw this strange machine which 'claimed' that it could answer all your dreams and I wished to visit the old shanghai! I call out to this mystery man and ask him if what I'm theorising is actually true. "Yes Jaydock, this is real and you really have gone back in time! Now, time to get on with the tour, may I warn you though that things will get a bit strange." Strange? I wonder what could be so

I'm suddenly falling, falling faster and faster as I accelerate at speeds which I could not comprehend. Then all of a sudden wind blasts against my skin and body forcefully, my body is stretched thin as I enter free fall. I turn around and look up, clouds? I was in the clouds? Then suddenly my back hits a soft object, squishy, almost as if I landed in a pool of jelly, it was bouncy and smooth. I stand up and stumble a bit as I try to get out of this strange pool of green glob, it's just like standing on a trampoline! Well... a really big trampoline as a matter of fact. I wandered around as I looked down at what seemed to be a birds eye view of the whole city. And it wasn't one of those live moving wallpapers you find on a Windows desktop, it was a real, living, breathing city. Smoke drifted out of the kitchens of the restaurants into the alleyway, following was an alluring fragrance that drifted up my nose. The buckling and groaning of the dated rickshaw equipment echoed throughout the streets. I know it's real, I know because it's right in front of me, but for some reason I just can't seem to believe it. Trust my eyes or trust my other senses?



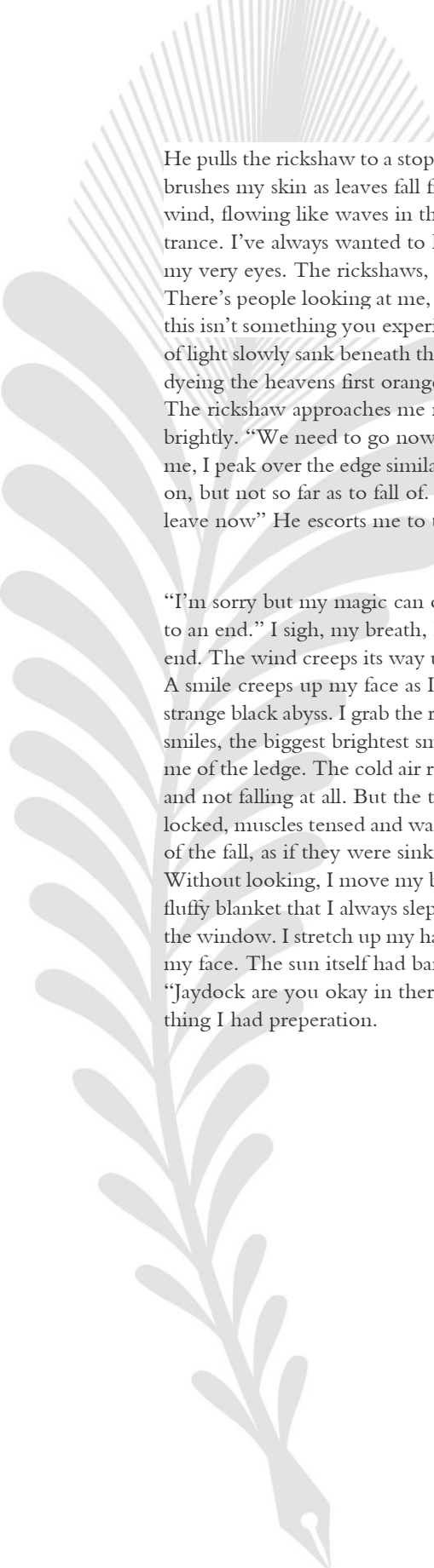
The voice comes on again this time as loud as a speaker in a deserted town. “Whilst, you’ve been sitting there, pondering in shock at the situation at hand I’ve been planning a route for us to go on so that you can get the full experience before you leave by the end of today! Are you ready? Now first we’re going to be dropping in to the Yuyuan temple, hold on tight!” He seems to be looking forward to this eventful day, or is that a slight tone of impatience I hear? All of a sudden, in the blink of an eye, darkness.

Someone’s shaking me, I look up, into her concerned eyes. She’s speaking an inaudible language, or am I just hearing things? This seems familiar, to a while ago, but different. It’s almost as if i’m experiencing déjà vu, but something’s different. Though my eyes are open I can’t think of why; my heart is pounding, mind empty. It’s as if a hypodermic of adrenaline has been emptied into my carotid. I strain into the utter darkness, breathing rate beginning to steady. I get up to look around, phasing in and out of reality as I get a grasp of my surroundings, rickshaws moving around the road as if it’s a highway, people taking a stroll through what seems to be like a market, everyone’s staring at me, like i’m the elephant in the room it’s very unnerving as I try to figure out all the possibilities as to why it is. Then I figure it out, I must have dropped through the sky and landed on the streets of old Shanghai! The voice comes on again. “Yes, Jaydock you have arrived! Now take your time to wander around but don’t take too long, any longer in one location at a time and you just might faze out of reality! Haha!” The voice stops, I look around, does anybody else hear this? It appears so as everyone continues wandering around the street like mindless zombies. This voice really bothers me, I’m not sure if it’s the fact that I can’t see him, or if it’s the fact that he can see me? Whatever, i’m going to take a look around this bedazzling city.

It’s amazing, breath taking. I stood in shock and awe as I became one with my dreams, it’s stunning. A rickshaw comes up to me, noticing that i’m foreign to this place, offers me a lift again in the same inaudible language as the woman before, I communicate him with a handful of sign language along with very strange english. He shakes his head, showing me that he doesn’t understand. I get it, afterall I don’t really belong here, then he speaks “You want tour here? Very cheap!” I hop in and he starts running. I finally can sit back, take all this information in and break it down piece by piece, one step at a time. The rickshaw clothes flowed in the wind, the distinct holes in his clothes and pants show just how much poverty there was back then. Shoes that came straight out of a old chinese film. And the buildings, wide and short, unlike the monstrous skyscrapers that tower above us nowadays, these buildings were much more friendly, approachable, each one having a similar design which seems to be some form of a smiley face. I smile. The sky, bright and clear, covered the city in a blanket of sunlight. Rays of heat pulse against the surface of my skin, each pulse making this dream seem even more real than it should.

The fashion back then was strange, almost alien. Men wore some form of dress and the women would also wear dresses too, but different. The city was immersed in shades of red and gold, every corner, nook and cranny of each alleyway and shop had golden red signs all over it. I know why, it was because it symbolises luck and ward off evil, I guess Shanghai must have evil spirits everyday considering the amount of red in this city. I hear the crackling of the mic and I sigh, it must be that strange voice again. “I was wondering why you were not teleporting back to me, it was because you were being toured by a rickshaw! Smart I must say..” I call out to him and to ask him where is the most interesting place in the old Shanghai. “Oh funny you ask young man! I was going to take you there myself but I guess going in the rickshaw would offer you the full experience so I shall take control of him!” The mic cuts off, I remember what he said, take control of him? Isn’t that something that only happens in fairytales and movies and such? Well that wouldn’t be so hard to believe since I am in a living fairytale myself. In an instant the rickshaw pulls to a sudden halt, my fingers instinctively grip onto the side of the chair so forcefully that they threaten to pop off their sockets in my hands. The pain holds me back as I slam back into the chair gripping my fingers in pain. The man looks down, for what seemed to be eternity until he slowly turns his head, in a very spine chilling manner, I look at him. “Hello Jaydock! Ready for the next best stop in Shanghai?”

The wheels on the rickshaw creaked under my weight as the man pulled me through the streets to the next stop, it’s oddly quiet, not silent, just awkwardly quiet. I break the awkward silence by asking him who he is, where he came from and what’s his purpose? “Hmmm... I never seem to understand what it is with you kids and curiosity nowadays, can’t you just enjoy the ride and this magical dream trip for what it is?” I persist and ask him the question again hoping to get an actual answer this time. “A genie, yes a genie, that’s what you can call me. Just without the lamp and the three wishes, whenever the machine is used for a wish I am summoned to grant the wish no matter the circumstance, for reasons that cannot be explained. So when you made the wish on that machine the other day in the museum I was summoned to grant your wish. It has been a while since I came out though, the machine has been left on the side in the dusty corner of the museum, I’m surprised you found it to be honest. Ah we’re here!”



He pulls the rickshaw to a stop and turns towards me, holding his hand out. I take his hand and step out. The wind brushes my skin as leaves fall from the green trees. I feel at one with nature as the birds chirped on the trees, the wind, flowing like waves in the ocean. There's something calming about standing here, in a dream like world or trance. I've always wanted to know what it felt like to live in the past, and now, i'm experiencing it right before my very eyes. The rickshaws, the buildings, the stalls, the people everything here is what I dreamed it to be. There's people looking at me, standing on this gargantuan hill, looking like i'm going to suicide, but I embrace it, this isn't something you experience everyday. It was sunset. I watched with an unwavering gaze, as a fiery red orb of light slowly sank beneath the horizon, and threads of light lingered in the sky, mingling with the rolling clouds, dyeing the heavens first orange, then red, then dark blue, until all that was left of the sunset was a chalky mauve. The rickshaw approaches me nonchalantly, his smile filled with content, and his hazel eyes blinking ever so brightly. "We need to go now, look down" I take a peek over the hill, and I see this great black hole lying below me, I peak over the edge similar to how a dog sticks his head through a car window, far enough to see what's going on, but not so far as to fall of. "Are you ready?" I question him. "Ready to go? Because it's sunset and we must leave now" He escorts me to the edge of the cliff. "Now jump"

"I'm sorry but my magic can only last so long, every good thing comes to an end and now, your story has come to an end." I sigh, my breath, heavy with sorrow but happiness. Afterall, what makes the tunnel is the light at the end. The wind creeps its way up my nose and the whole city flashes to life as if it's giving me a goodbye memory. A smile creeps up my face as I get ready to jump, the rocks crumble under my weight as they fall down into the strange black abyss. I grab the rickshaws hand and tell him how honoured I am and I will be forever in his debt. He smiles, the biggest brightest smile I've ever seen, it's almost as if he's laughing but without sound. And he pushes me of the ledge. The cold air rushed past as I accelerated faster and faster. Then after a time I felt like I was floating and not falling at all. But the trees on the ground were getting larger and closer and closer. My eyes shut, breath locked, muscles tensed and wait for the inevitable. Then impact. I feel my bones being crushed under the pressure of the fall, as if they were sinking into the floor. My skin feeling pressured by multiple layers above my body. Without looking, I move my body, contrary to my belief, I'm met with the silky smooth sheets of the bed and the fluffy blanket that I always slept in. I open my eyes to find myself in bed, I open the curtains and take a glance out the window. I stretch up my hand to the sky. The soft amber glow of the sunrise pour through my fingers and onto my face. The sun itself had barely risen and the city had the subdued quiet of dawn. Someone knocks the door "Jaydock are you okay in there?" I call back answering I'm fine. I remember I have my history test today. Good thing I had preperation.

Rain

Island School, Lee, Priscilla – 14

The rain was cold tonight, pinpricks of numbing needles piercing my flesh, bone and marrow. A deafening silence ensued, broken only by the pitter-patter of droplets, gracefully tumbling onto the ashen cobblestones below. Warm droplets rolled down my cheeks, and instinctively, I raised my hands to my face, the scalding sorrows a clear contrast against the cool droplets.

“Cigarette, xiong di?”

I turned abruptly, surprised at the sudden intrusion.

“I just thought you looked sad.” A boy no older than 10 approached wearily, soot and grime smeared all over his face. “So, cigarette?”

I sat down with a heavy sigh. “Sure, why not.” Rummaging my pockets for spare change, I dropped the coins in the child’s palm, exchanging it for the temporary relief I desperately craved. My fumbling fingers eventually lit the damn thing alight, and I took a long drag of the poison, exhaling gray wisps of smoke that dissipated in the cool air. The boy plopped down next to me. “So, policeman huh?”

I didn’t respond, taking another long drag.

“Where are you from? Ying guo?”

“Why are you crying? Is it because you’re homesi—”

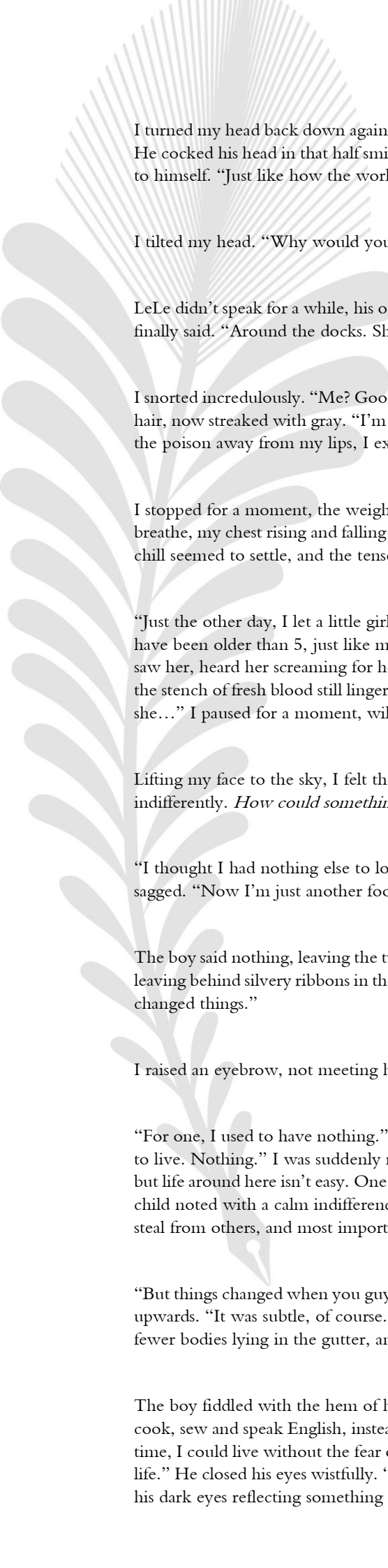
“Look, kid, I’d appreciate it if you would just be quiet for a moment.” I snapped back, my patience wearing thin. The boy shrank back, his dark eyes flashing with a mixture of fear and apprehension. “Sorry, sir.” He mumbled.

I grimaced, a twinge of guilt nipping at me. “Yes, I’m from England.” I spat, lifting the cigar to my lips for another drag. “I’m here because I thought I had nothing else to lose in this bloody country.”

The boy grinned as if he hadn’t heard me. “See? I knew I could get you to answer me!” He clambered round, his cheeks wide from obvious delight. “I’m glad you’re so nice, Mr. Policeman! I’m LeLe, by the way, and if you’re sad, you can tell me anything you want to! Mama said that I’m the best at keeping secrets!” He gestured to himself proudly. “So you can tell me anything!”

I snorted, turning my gaze up to the dark sky, littered with specks of silver lights filtering in from the dark canvas, wrapping the world comfortably in its embrace. The pinpricks of light blinked, its dim presence a stark contrast to the ethereal beauty of the moon. Unlike the stars, her beauty was radiant, casting a silvery glow across the dark world below.

A shining beacon of hope for all those who needed it.



I turned my head back down again, to see that LeLe was still staring at me intently with those wizened eyes of his. He cocked his head in that half-smile of his and turned back to the stars. "They are beautiful, aren't they?" He said to himself. "Just like how the world should be."

I tilted my head. "Why would you say that?"

LeLe didn't speak for a while, his onyx eyes fixed upon the glittering orbs above. "I've seen you around here." He finally said. "Around the docks. Shanghai is certainly no place for good people like you."

I snorted incredulously. "Me? Good? You should get your brain checked, kid." I ran my fingers through my sandy hair, now streaked with gray. "I'm nothing but honorable. In fact," I lowered my head. "I'm deplorable." Pulling the poison away from my lips, I exhaled, watching the grey wisps ascend.

I stopped for a moment, the weight pressing against me growing heavier with each passing second. I struggled to breathe, my chest rising and falling in short shallow breaths, hands trembling from the effort. Closing my eyes, the chill seemed to settle, and the tense atmosphere dissipated.

"Just the other day, I let a little girl die." The words slipped past my lips before I could stop them. "She couldn't have been older than 5, just like my little girl back home, had she lived." I let out a half-smile, half-grimace. "I saw her, heard her screaming for help, but my legs just wouldn't run fast enough." I buried my face in my hands, the stench of fresh blood still lingering in my nostrils. "By the time I got there, the attackers had already gone, and she..." I paused for a moment, willing my limbs to remain still. "She was too."

Lifting my face to the sky, I felt the numbing cold seep beneath my skin, whilst the moon peered down indifferently. *How could something so beautiful, be so cold?*

"I thought I had nothing else to lose, but I was wrong. I'd lost my humanity in that moment." My shoulders sagged. "Now I'm just another foolish man who thought he could change things."

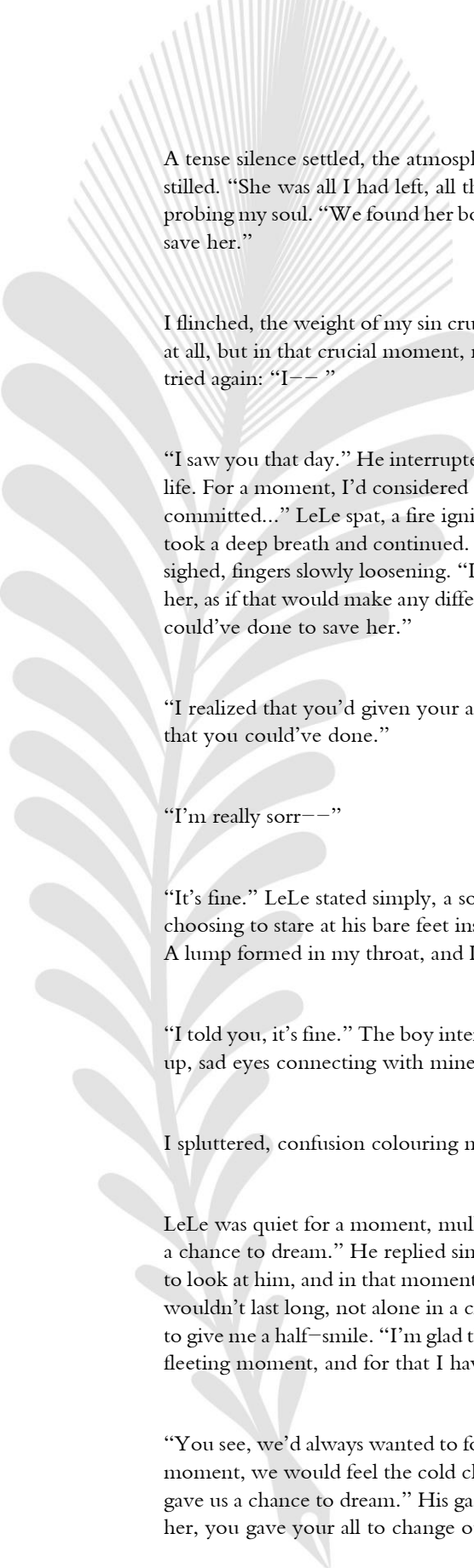
The boy said nothing, leaving the two of us sitting in silence for a while, watching comets streak by, their long tails leaving behind silvery ribbons in their wake. "Is that so?" He finally responded. "Personally, I think you policemen changed things."

I raised an eyebrow, not meeting his eyes. "How so?"

"For one, I used to have nothing." Lele continued staring at the stars. "No parents, no home, no hope, no reason to live. Nothing." I was suddenly reminded that he was just a boy, no older than ten. "You probably know this, but life around here isn't easy. One slip-up, and you'll end up as another body in the gutter. Like la ji. Trash." The child noted with a calm indifference. "I learnt how to survive, growing up in the slums. Learnt to cheat, lie and steal from others, and most importantly, I learnt to run away."

"But things changed when you guys got here." I risked a glance over at the boy, whose mouth had begun to curve upwards. "It was subtle, of course. The old man at the corner shop would look slightly happier. There would be fewer bodies lying in the gutter, and gradually, the nights felt warmer and safer than they had ever been before."

The boy fiddled with the hem of his tattered shirt, stained sweat and tears. "I stopped running away. I learnt to cook, sew and speak English, instead of lying and cheating for a living. I could eat a meal per day, and for the first time, I could live without the fear of being butchered in my sleep. And for the first time, I could see the beauty in life." He closed his eyes wistfully. "For the first time, I could hope, and I could dream." He paused for a moment, his dark eyes reflecting something indiscernible.



A tense silence settled, the atmosphere thickening. “That little girl you saw that day? She was my little sister.” I stilled. “She was all I had left, all that I had ever loved.” He directed his gaze towards me, his weary dark eyes probing my soul. “We found her body by the docks the next day, and that’s where I saw you, the one who couldn’t save her.”

I flinched, the weight of my sin crushing down on me. I opened my mouth to speak, to apologize, to say anything at all, but in that crucial moment, my voice failed me, and I was left gaping, like the coward I am. Swallowing, I tried again: “I—”

“I saw you that day.” He interrupted, fingers clenching into tight fists.. “And I had never felt so angry in my entire life. For a moment, I’d considered ending both my life and yours, so that we would all go to hell for the sins we’d committed...” LeLe spat, a fire igniting within the depths of his onyx eyes. It was soon extinguished though, as he took a deep breath and continued. “But then, I realized, that you felt just as guilty, if not even more so.” The boy sighed, fingers slowly loosening. “I could tell from the way you stood there, for hours on end, just watching over her, as if that would make any difference. Even when everyone else left, you stayed, even if there was nothing you could’ve done to save her.”

“I realized that you’d given your all and failed.” LeLe red rimmed eyes downcast. “And there was nothing more that you could’ve done.”

“I’m really sorr—”

“It’s fine.” LeLe stated simply, a soft snuffle escaping his lips. “No one’s perfect.” He averted his gaze again, choosing to stare at his bare feet instead. “I really do miss her though. She would’ve loved to meet a policeman.” A lump formed in my throat, and I swallowed, masking the silent sobs racking my chest. “Jesus, kid, I’m so s—”

“I told you, it’s fine.” The boy interrupted, albeit more firmly. “I’m not here to pin the blame on you.” He looked up, sad eyes connecting with mine. “I actually wanted to thank you for something.”

I spluttered, confusion colouring my features. “For what? I didn’t— No, couldn’t save her.”

LeLe was quiet for a moment, mulling things over in his head. “...For giving your all in everything. For giving us a chance to dream.” He replied simply after the tense silence. “For giving us a hope for a better future.” I turned to look at him, and in that moment, the smiling child I had met seemed like a faraway dream. “We both knew we wouldn’t last long, not alone in a city like this, at least. It was just a matter of when, where, and how.” He turned to give me a half-smile. “I’m glad that she at least got to experience joy and the beauty of life, if even just for a short fleeting moment, and for that I have to thank you.”

“You see, we’d always wanted to forget the time limit on our lives, forget the fact that with every living, breathing moment, we would feel the cold chill of death pressing against us. You helped us forget. Helped us to escape, and gave us a chance to dream.” His gaze softened. “For once, I saw that she was happy, and even if you couldn’t save her, you gave your all to change our fates for the better. Thank you for that, Inspector.”

Brushing the imaginary dust from his wrinkled shorts, LeLe stood, his dirty hands making his shorts all the more filthy. “I’ll be taking my leave now, I have to start work in a few minutes.” He turned to leave, before he swivelled round again. “Thanks for taking the cigarette by the way, it’s always nice to make a little more money.”

From the distance, LeLe waved, a childish grin sneaking up to his face. I couldn’t help but wave back. As his silhouette disappeared into the darkness, I lowered my hand, my fingers still clutching the remains of my cigarette. The tip glowed brightly in the dark night, dying embers flickering briefly before it blinked once, fizzing out. I

sighed, discarding the stub carelessly onto the ground. I lifted my head to the skies, feeling the soft pitter—patter of raindrops land on my cheeks.

Perhaps the rain isn't as cold as I had thought it would be.



New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Mctamaney, Nelly – 14

It's been 35 days.

She didn't leave, she didn't leave.

I woke up again, from another nightmare. Lifting myself off on the right side of the bed. The sun shining warmly through the hollow window frames, raising itself up against my cheek. The window frames casting a dark shadow on the stretch of the room. It must be dawn. No noise runs through the house during early morning, so it must be.

Looking around, it's the same old room, the same old place. The bed sheets draped on the side of the bed while I endeavour to get up. The bell on the wall starts to sound, surrounding the room with each of its rings.

The sunlight pierces slightly through the interlaced hangings, just giving barely enough light to see in the room. The aroma of freshly brewed tea fills up the air as I walk down the hall into the kitchen. The clay pots all in line.

A seat is left out in the open, proposing someone has already sat there. Various chunks of bread lay visible around the pantry, while empty baskets also start to reveal themselves. The hunger in my stomach started to grow.

It's been 40 days.

40 days.

Outside our isolated house lays a valley. It's vast greenery envelops our little hut, making it separate from anything surrounding us. My father and I grow our own food. Father would tend to the plants, growing fruit, and vegetables for the village. It's a way for us to afford our house and valley. We both need to work. We may not have as much as we used to, but it's all alright.

I see him across the fields of pasture. Ploughing the earth with his hoe and straw hat. Starting work early today I presume, like always. The sun rays hitting the side of his face as sweat rolls down his cheek.

He hears me and turns for a few seconds with a glimmer of a smile on his face. An arm goes up as a signal he heard me. Smiling back, I raise my arm as well and make gesture to say I'm leaving to town soon. A quick glance we make to each other, then part ways.

“

It's been 60 days

对不起， 但是你的妈妈去世了。



I went into the village today, across the river from our house. The smell of hot buns and dumplings making its way across the docks. The cobblestone streets widening to engulf the many people of the town making their way across to work, to farm, to *live*.

I remember when she left. I remember it all.

The howling of the storm visited each house with strong gusts of wind. Blowing huts into the ocean and paddy fields into nothingness. I was in my room that night, patiently waiting for my parents to come home after a long day of work. I made my way to the front of the house, looking outside the door frame. The wind brushing against face, while the clouds darkened. I remember the feeling of being scared for the first time. Father's radio at the table started to make noise. The weather man was on and he started talking about a storm. A storm really big, swarming around the city of shanghai and all of its provinces.

Fung

Island School, Montajes, Anthony Joseph – 14

I grew to become who I am today because of the frigidly cold Chinese winter of 1983, the day the empire of the rising sun set across the south consuming the lives of 60 million innocent men, women, and children. And I realize that after 50 years those words still come back to haunt me. At night I can still hear her screams echoing down the corridors of my mind, driving me to the brink of madness till I wake up in a cold sweat my hand grasping the scar down the length of my arm. And so I have dedicated the past 50 years of my life tirelessly reminiscing on a past that no longer exists. My name is Fung Xing and this is my story.

The early days of my childhood were alright, I lived in the slums of Shanghai on the outskirts of the city, away from the bustling crowds and politics of the European districts. Life was good enough, my father was able to provide however feeble his job as a fisherman was, he still came back every day with enough fish for dinner, and once we finished whatever was leftover was traded to the farmers for rice and vegetables the next morning, sometimes even chicken. But that was before the war when all the food wasn't rationed off for the effort against the Japanese. I never knew my mother, some prostitute from the inner parts of the city. My father rarely spoke of her but when he did his voice was bitter, full of regret and sorrow. However despite all these hardships we were able to live in peace.

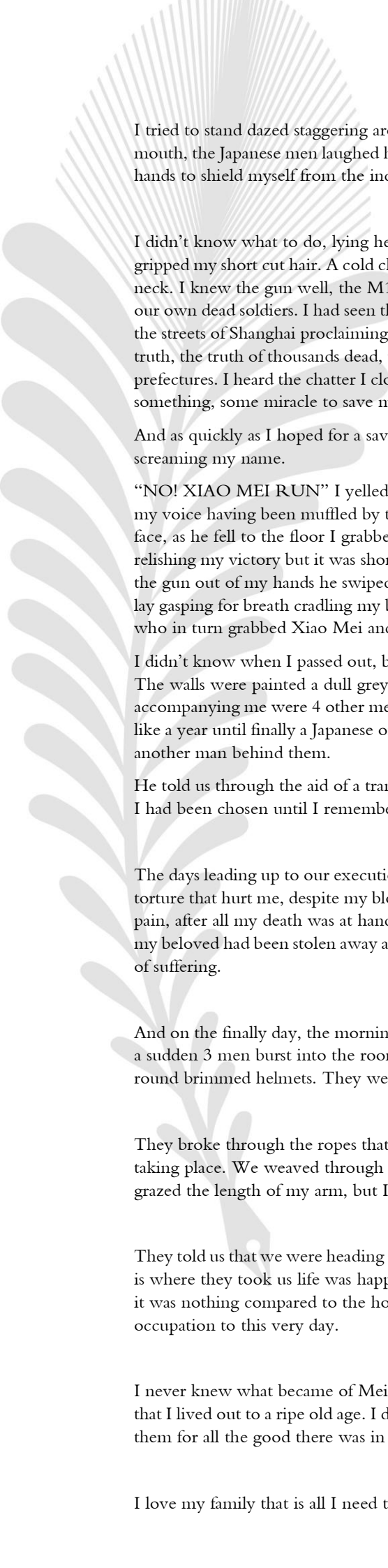
I was a regular yet odd looking boy, with the typical features of any young boy but with only one difference the deformed twist of my mouth, I remember how one time when I was 3 years old the neighbors would stare and the children jeer whenever Baba and I walked through the streets as if I were some freak show some grotesque spectacle like the monsters in the stories Baba had told me as a child. And one day I couldn't take their abuse anymore and I hung my head down my eyes welling up with tears, but Baba just glared gripping my hand in a vice. "Don't mind them Xing Xing, you are far handsomer than any of them" but he never knew that it wasn't my looks that saddened me but rather my isolation, the fact that I would never be like the other children.

However despite how harsh the comments were I always had an ally a guardian angel to watch my back, and her name was Xiao Mei. We had been friends since birth both our fathers being fishers and all. I never thought much of her at first but as the years went on our bond strengthened. We spent most of our days playing in the water, building rafts so that we could sail for what seemed like an age before we finally arrived at our homes soaking wet. One spring day on the eve of my 14th birthday we lay together in the sand talking about each of our own mediocre lives and about what we planned to do in the future and if someday we might marry and live together the rest of our lives, she bent over and gave me a kiss. she was so happy then. And I never knew that it would all change.

January 1938. The winter came, a cold unforgiving wind blew through our village unbeknownst to the far greater storm that lay ahead. I woke on the morning of the 28th of the first month to the sound of long high pitched squeal. I stood annoyed having been woken from my peaceful slumber and walked out into the street. And as I set foot out into the street a sudden burst of heat and sound went off as I was literally blown off my feet. I felt as if I had been kicked by a shaolin grandmaster my stomach and chest was aching, my head throbbing with pain.

As I came to my senses all I could hear were the screams of people as the screaming sound of a dozen black dots as they circled overhead. Little did I know that those dots in the sky were the infamous IJAAS Nakajima KI – 49 heavy bombers notorious for their destructive power. Another explosion went off this time about a 200 feet away, I watched as a building seemed to throw itself into the air lingering there for almost a second before crashing back down to earth in a fiery mess of rubble and timber. I ran. That was all that I cared about as my survival instinct took over. I ran despite the chaos, despite the suffering, despite the death I ran and ran and ran until I collapsed in a heap on a pile of rubble.

When I came to I found myself surrounded by men in uniforms, at first I was overjoyed the nationalists have come to save us. But my joy was short lived as I saw that the men bore a flag with a red sun on a white sky, I knew what it meant these men were Japanese soldiers.



I tried to stand dazed staggering around like a drunkard in the streets dirt and grit mixed with the blood in my mouth, the Japanese men laughed hysterically. One of them approached me raising the butt of his rifle, I raised my hands to shield myself from the incoming blow but it was in vain as he struck me back to the ground.

I didn't know what to do, lying head down face buried in the ground. As the man planted his foot my back and gripped my short cut hair. A cold chill went down my spine as the muzzle of his rifle rested itself on the back of my neck. I knew the gun well, the M1 Garand 9.5 pounds worth of steel, wood, and death likely taken from one of our own dead soldiers. I had seen the guns often enough with the nationalist militants parading themselves around the streets of Shanghai proclaiming their victories against the Japanese invaders in the south, but all of us know the truth, the truth of thousands dead, the truth of the slaughtered men, women, and children that lay in the northern prefectures. I heard the chatter I closed my eyes tears bleeding through my bruised eyelids as I hoped for someone, something, some miracle to save me.

And as quickly as I hoped for a savior, my heart was full of dread as I heard the voice of the wonderful Xiao Mei screaming my name.

"NO! XIAO MEI RUN" I yelled my at the top of my lungs, but nothing came out but an exasperated mumble my voice having been muffled by the dirt. As the guards were distracted I stood and decked the soldier across the face, as he fell to the floor I grabbed his gun and turned it onto his friends killing both of them. I stood gasping relishing my victory but it was short lived as the soldier I had punched earlier tackled me to the ground, wrestling the gun out of my hands he swiped the butt of his rifle across my face once again drawing blood from my nose. I lay gasping for breath cradling my bloody nose in my hands as I watched in horror as he called out to 2 other men who in turn grabbed Xiao Mei and dragged her away.

I didn't know when I passed out, but when I came to I was chained to a wall in what appeared to be a classroom. The walls were painted a dull grey, with wooden desks piled high in one side of the room. I wasn't alone, accompanying me were 4 other men all chained to the wall by thick strands of rope. We sat there for what seemed like a year until finally a Japanese officer walked in 2 of his bodyguards following suit dragging what seemed to be another man behind them.

He told us through the aid of a translator that we were to be executed within a week. At first I didn't realize why I had been chosen until I remembered that I had attacked and killed a high ranking officer in the Japanese army.

The days leading up to our execution were filled with pain, as the Japanese tortured us. But it was not the physical torture that hurt me, despite my bloody exterior, burned hands, and crushed fingers I was still able to shrug off the pain, after all my death was at hand. But no it wasn't these types of torture that hurt me, rather the memory that my beloved had been stolen away and likely abused by the soldiers. My nights were full of sorrow, and my days full of suffering.

And on the finally day, the morning of my execution. I woke to the sound of gunfire in the courtyard. And all of a sudden 3 men burst into the room guns in hand. Their faces were pale almost shining. These men had long, round brimmed helmets. They were the Australian marines of the European quarter coming to rescue us.

They broke through the ropes that bound us to the wall, and took out into the courtyard where the firefight was taking place. We weaved through the courtyard running past bullets. However I was unable to react as a bullet grazed the length of my arm, but I kept on running until we were finally liberated.

They told us that we were heading south, to Hong Kong where the Japanese hadn't yet occupied the city. And that is where they took us life was happy for a few months until the Japanese occupied the city, however despite that it was nothing compared to the horrors I experienced in Shanghai. And so I lived my days out past the Japanese occupation to this very day.

I never knew what became of Mei or my Baba, all I know is that they must be happy that I survived the war and that I lived out to a ripe old age. I draw my strength from loss, my resilience comes from them and I want to thank them for all the good there was in my hell of a life. They are the reason I am alive and I am thankful.

I love my family that is all I need to say, that is all I have to say.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Murdoch, Afton – 14

It's been 365 days. 365 days since I almost died and 365 days since no one noticed. I was only 15 when I fell into the ocean. My parents could never afford to pay for my education, even if they could they would never bother, I was always a burden to them no matter how hard I tried to impress them. They were fishermen raising as much money as they could by catching fish on the junk that we all used to live on. They never really saw me anyways, always working, ignoring my presence yet treasuring my brother. My brother was 2 years younger more athletic than I ever was and somehow always managed to get my parents attention, probably because he was destined to be the "man of the house" when he was older.

It happened so quickly, my foot slipping on a knotted pile of rope in the corner of my father's boat. I saw concern, than a hint of relief, flash across his face as I slipped into the dirty green harbor and sank to the bottom...They say there's no sound underwater, but she heard me. She heard thoughts screaming. Sirens are supposed to be evil but she was memorising, perfect flowing hair, clear blue eyes and her clothes made from different shimmering shades of sand. She heard me. She saved me from death, but that doesn't mean I'm really living. When she spoke she gave me a choice stay forever at the bottom of the ocean or stay with her.

She made me one of her own. Raised in Shanghai, then traveled around the world being a slave for the ocean. Trapped to work for her for 100 years, singing for her. I try to spend as much of my time as I can in Shanghai, I live there most of time treasuring the architecture, the culture and the people. Overhearing people's conversations, remembering how wonderful it was to talk, my voice now is just poison to anyone that hears it, luring them to jump into the ocean.

I used to roam the streets everyday wishing I could say a single word to the locals, wishing that I could have a single conversation, but now that I'm used to it I linger in the shadows watching everything, overhearing everything that I can. Watching how the women's clothes have changed since last year, how the women are still treated below everyone else and how the city is slowly starting to get bigger. The number of junks in the harbour slowly increasing, people buying or building boats from scratch to go fishing through the night and sell what they caught through the day. Earning as much as they can, every penny matters to them. I don't need a home, as a siren the ocean is my home, I don't need to eat drink or sleep to survive.

It's been 365 days since I haven't spoke and It's been 365 days since I regretted choosing to stay alive.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Saunders, Anya – 14

Night had fallen in in eastern Shanghai, silent and swift like a curtain drop. There was a humming in the air, sending electric shivers up the spine of anyone residents of the neighbourhood. As such, any and all windows and back doors had been tightly shut and barred. The streets were almost entirely deserted. It was one of those nights when humans say you can smell the trouble in the air.

From his perch on a high up clothes rack, Kayr the dragon could tell you what this night really smelled like; stale piss, baking rubbish, and dead rats. At least in the absence of the humans, us outcasts can hunt in peace, he thought bitterly. A cool gust of wind brushed his mane, momentarily distracting him as he leaned into the breeze. For a second, he imagined what it'd be like to fly. It'd be the most perfect freedom. To go anywhere, to not be tied down ever by anything. He knew it used to be possible; his parents had told him stories about their glorious past. Their species had once been symbols of power, revered for their grace and intelligence. They had lived with humans in harmony, and served the emperors as advisors for millennia. They had been gods.

Pain stabbed at his stomach again, sending him out of his fanciful spiral. He was getting philosophical again. Must be the hunger, he thought with a humorless laugh. That's the real reason he was up here. His clan was starving. Already several of the oldest and youngest had died, and the rest wouldn't last long. Glancing down at the clustered group waiting below, Kayr took in their pitiful appearance. Their ribs protruded sharply, while skin covered in dull scales hung low from their bellies. Dirty piles of hair laid around the nest from their molting manes. Some lay curled around themselves on the floor, too weak from sickness to stand. With a sharp pang, Kayr realised he would do anything to protect the clan. As leader, he had to find them something.

If it came to it, he knew the clan would eat each other to survive, but he really didn't want it to come to that. He swiveled his head slowly, looking for a fresh dumpster, or some living movement in the alleys. A new smell was drafting towards him, something bitter mixing with something sickly sweet. Alcohol, he realised, and some kind of awful perfume. He looked around, searching out the scent's origin. There, he spotted it. A human.

Oooh did he look appetizing. He wore a fine suit jacket lopsided on his shoulders with the sleeves unbuttoned, and shiny shoes getting more scuffed by the second with as he swayed through his steps. His shirt buttons strained with the effort of containing his overflowing stomach. He was the perfect mark. Clearly rich and clearly pissed, and likely smoked too, meaning he was probably an arrogant fool who would barely fight back. He could feed the whole clan for weeks. Kayr weighed the risks of taking a human against the benefits. They could be found out by the police and exterminated like rats, but then again, if they didn't find other food they'd probably be dead soon anyway. And he was a foreigner. That settled it.

He scampered down the pipe as fast as his weakened body could take him, jumping the last few feet to the ground. The other dragons collectively turned to him with large, expecting eyes. Kayr addressed the crowd, "I saw a human down on 23rd. He's big, but drunk. Should feed us for a while." There was silence. Kayr paused, confused. He'd expected cheering, or at least some indication of their relief. The clan just stared at him.

One voice spoke out, "A human? We're all hungry, but that seems insane. They're dangerous." Others in the cluster chorused their agreement.

"I know that," he responded and I know we won't last long if we don't get food. We need this. Besides, he's a foreigner."

A young dragon raised their voice, "Maybe, but isn't it kind of... wrong to kill a human? They have minds and everything."

Kayr actually laughs at that, a cold harsh sound. "So do we. And do you remember what they did to us? Someone tell me what they did to us." One of the older dragons stepped forwards, a dark look in her eyes. She spoke in a low voice filled with fire, "When the new people came to Shanghai, they treated us like dogs. They paid the right people, and then they shot at us and poisoned us and forced us out of our nests onto the street."

Inspired, another dragon stepped forward, "When the foreigners took over, they cut us out of our rightful place in the government and stopped our food supply."

The clan began to shout out their abuses.

“They put us in cages like pets for their entertainment, and kept us there until we lost our wings.”
“They killed and skinned my brother and made him into a watch.”

Kayr let the angry voices reach a crescendo before he held out a paw. Instantly, it was silent.

“The foreigners never cared that we had minds, that we were even more intelligent than them. They just took it everything we had without a thought. Now we have a chance to turn the tables on them. We can take something back.” This time, when he searched the clans’ faces, their met his gazes squarely with a blazing eyes and set jaws.

With a predatory smile, Kayr beckoned to the alley’s mouth. He growled, “Let’s go.”

Completely oblivious to the danger he was in, Charlie Thompson sauntered through the pavements. Charlie wasn’t worried. He knew the area well enough, he had these lovely chemicals dulling his senses, and he felt confident in the empty streets. Nobody here would dare screw with me, he thought to himself, I’m a powerful man. He had a wad of cash in his pocket fat enough for most problems, and he’d bought a brand new automatic pistol for the others. He chuckled to himself. So Charlie didn’t notice making 3 wrong turns in a row, and he certainly didn’t notice the shadows silently creeping up behind him.

A sharp crunch under foot finally cut into his stupor, sending him stumbling to a stop. “Where am I?” he wondered aloud. The acrid smell of urine and rotting garbage rose from the concrete ground and stung his nose and throat. Broken glass and trash littered the floor. As he realised the graffitied walls trapped him on 3 sides, a twinge of fear began to sprout in his stomach. Then Charlie noticed the eyes. Dozens of slitted eyes watched him from every side. A muffled voice in his head told him to run now, to get away from all this, but his legs didn’t seem to be working. He couldn’t even reach for his gun.

Then, to his horror, the eyes began to move. His vision still hadn’t completely adjusted to the dark yet, but with the movement he could see them. They were dragons. Their strange, snake-ish, cat-ish bodies couldn’t be anything else. He was so confused; dragons were supposed to be nice, they were supposed to be pretty and harmless. These things looked terrifying. A soft echoed around the narrow alley as the dragons clinging to the walls began to drop to the ground. At that Charlie’s fight or flight instincts kicked in and he started to run for the mouth of the alleyway, stumbling in his rush. Just a few feet into his escape, multiple pairs of fangs pierced his calves and ankles and he fell face forward onto the sticky concrete.

He thrashed about on the floor desperately, kicking his legs and twisting around as more and more dragons piled on top of him, stabbing their claws deep into his flesh. Finally, he managed to pull the gun out of his trousers, and fired blindly into the mass of bodies. He heard something shriek and a collective roar filled the alley. Suddenly his hand exploded into pain as jaws tore through flesh and severed bone. His vision clouded as he screamed into the night, feral and uncontrolled. The last thing he saw was a flash of teeth, the murderous smile of a dragon. Then jaws clamped down on his throat and blood poured into his lungs, silencing him forever.

Kayr lay limp beside the dead man’s body. The bullet had burned a hole through his ribs and into his mid section. He was dying and he knew it. At least, he thought to himself, he’ll have a something nice to look at as he dies. From his position on the ground he had a perfect view of the carnage his clan was wreaking on the body. The thought of dying didn’t bother him too much. Really it’s a good thing for the clan. One less mouth to feed, and now that they had taken down one foreigner, they might do it again. As his breathing became more laboured and he began to cough out blood, he smiled. The clan would survive, and the dragons would have their revenge.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Tsui, Ida – 14

Distance is all that mattered. I am far away from a successful escapade. But all I need to do is run. My feet pounded into the ground repeatedly, foot after foot. I could feel a tingling sensation through my thighs, my shins, burning worse and worse by the second. I struggled for every breath, tearing out in short gasps, my lungs searing like hot ash penetrating my chest. I couldn't go on for any longer. I had to stop. But every time I hear the nearing sound of thuds, it brought a fresh wave of fear and panic into my heart. I can't die at the hand of him. Yang Bin. I don't know what I was thinking, helping him succeed at the time. I should never have believed him, when he promised me to save my mother in return for the life of another. It was pure evil, what I'd done to Qiao XiaoHua. No one deserved to die such a terrible death, death by poison.

I watched him die, drinking the tea I had planted, his lips swelling, burning a fierce red, a bewildered expression blooming upon his face. His neck started to swell shortly after, and his hands grasped at his throat, small ragged gasps escaping with his feeble attempts to breathe in air. I could feel the pressure building up in his face, his veins popping out with immense effort he was putting in; his eyes bulging with fear, now understanding the full extent of the situation.

He tried to get closer to me, climbing out of his seat just to collapse on to the floor, his entire body spasming and jerking like a fish out of water. Outstretching his arm – beads of sweat trickling down his face from the effort – his hands, his fingers, trembled as they extended towards me helplessly, whilst I couldn't do anything to help. I caught a glimpse of his face that night, moments before he died and I would never be able to forget the look he had on his face. His eyes stared up at me into my soul, begging, pleading for the mercy I could not give; his face morphing into an expression of utmost pain, and the lone tear that fell down his face before he crumpled to the floor and didn't move again.

But I couldn't have left my mom to die. She was the only family I had left, the only person I ever knew who loved me for who I was. No matter what I had done there, it was for my mom. The sin that I had committed, the regret I had for committing this crime, could be overlooked. For the greater good. But my mom would never have approved of this; all throughout my childhood, she has continually told me '*Shàn è dào tóu zhōng yǒu bào*'. Good and evil will always be rewarded, it is only a question of time. If she ever found out I did this terrible act, she would be heartbroken, and as a result, I would be too. I should've listened to her teachings, but I was in despair, in fear of losing my mother forever, that I made this decision that may end me for good. I didn't listen to her. And now I regret.

I brought myself back to reality as I forced my arms and legs to keep moving. My arms were pacing back and forth, but it took a lot more effort to move them every stride I took. My shoulders started to feel weak, as if they would collapse into my body, my head rolling forwards in time with the movement of my legs. I was coming to my limit. I needed an escape. My eyes swept the bordering streets, taking in the shabby crumbling houses, with faded red roofs caving in, destroying what was left, crashing down onto the cracked tiles smothered in years of grime. Bullet-sized holes, the mementos from a gruesome gang fight, decorated the houses like second nature: the windows, the walls, the doors – everywhere.

I searched for a getaway, a shortcut, a way out. But time was running out, and the footsteps were getting louder. "Where are you? I know you're here. Stop hiding and come out. I will find you," hissed Chen maliciously. His voice was laced with a murderous and evil undertone, and I felt my blood run cold. I ran into a dark alleyway, my head whipping back and forth anxiously, trying to catch a glimpse of where he was at, how much time I had left, until I hit the wall. Gasping for breath, I looked up. I couldn't believe my luck. Of all the alleyways I could've ran into, I ran into one with a dead end. This was bad. I was trapped, with no means of escape. I was prey for a monster prowling on its hunt, an easy target, vulnerable to all of the elements around me. I scanned the area for somewhere to hide, for something to use as a weapon, but there was nothing. There was nothing I could do.

“HA!” Chen’s voice echoed down the alleyway, “I have found you at last.” He strode down the alleyway, the sound of his boots striking the floor resonated around the channel, *click-clack-click-clack*, and the fear within me grew at an astonishing rate as the sounds grew. Louder. And louder. Until they stopped. My eyes trailed upwards slowly, until they landed upon a face, the face I had hoped to never see again, but the gods were working against me.

Chen’s face slinked into a condescending sneer; a baring of teeth, top lip pulled back into a thin line, devoid of all warmth and humor. This was more than enough to intimidate me, and a fresh wave of fear washed over me, blanketing me, petrifying me. Chen saw this, and he let out a maniacal laugh, a cackle that sent chills down my spine and the hairs on my arms and legs raised in response. “What do you want?” I mumbled fearfully, my eyes fixated on the ground, avoiding his gaze at all costs. “What do I want? Well... there’s a lot that I want, but for today, there’s one thing I need to complete.” Chen hinted. He grabbed the bottom of my face, and wrenched my head up, and I heard the cracking of my neck bones as they grinded together, inducing sharp shooting pain through the full length of my neck. “Look at me.” He tapped the sides of my cheek with the backside of his palm, but I refused to look at him. “Look at me.” He repeated again, this time with a little more force but I kept my face turned, fixing my gaze on the corner of the wall, refusing to yield to his requests. If I was going to die, I might as well die with my dignity intact. “Look at me!” Chen bellowed into my face, and I jumped in fright, cowering away from him.

“You fool! There is no use to hide away from me. You will die tonight, whether you like it or not! But the question is, how?” He paced around me, and took out his knives, my eyes fixated on them, as the blades flashed and clanged together while he slashed them together, preparing for what was to come. I gulped. My heart suddenly seemed like it was going into cardiac arrest, beating almost 5 times its regular speed. My pupils started to dilate, and I began to struggle for breath. Every breath felt like death to me; piercing pains shot up and down the entirety of my body and I shook in fear of what was yet to come.

“What should I do, why don’t you tell me? I’m feeling generous today, I will give you a choice. Death by gunshot, or death by knife. Pick one. Now.” Chen’s steely stare bore into my eyes, and I stared back. A million different thoughts ran through my head at that moment. The cowardly nature of Yang Bin, the life I could’ve lived if I didn’t make that choice, the life I had destroyed to get what I wanted..... It finally registered to me that I was going to die. I was bound to. It was final, and I had no way out.

“Hey Chen! I’m going to die, no matter what I say, *dui ma?*”

“Yes. It won’t make a difference, no matter what you say.”

“Then listen to what I have to say. People will found out what Yang Bin had done, and they will expose him as what he truly is to the rest of the world. *Shàn è dào tóu zhōng yǒu bào*. Good and evil will always be rewarded, it is only a question of time. That is what my mother told me. I am suffering because of this now, I have committed a sin, and I will pay for it with my life. And it will be your turn next. That I am sure of.” I laughed emotionlessly. For the first time in what seemed like forever, I was certain of what I was doing. I think my mother will be proud of me, in this moment.

“Well, you are incorrect. For it is your time to die.” And with that, Chen reached into his pocket and pulled out a gun, pointed it at me, and pulled the trigger.

I saw the moments of my life flickering beneath the lids of my closing eyes, reminders of what I had done with it. My mother and I playing in the garden, a broad smile plastered upon our faces, our laughter resonating through the air. The time when we found out my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. The moment when Yang Bin offered me the job. And the moment when I agreed to do it.

Chen’s mocking face was the last thing I saw, as black filled the edges of my vision and I saw no more.

Wǒ duì bù qǐ nǐ, māma. Zhēn de hen duì bù qǐ.

Escape from the Past

Island School, Uttamchandani, Vedika – 14

Perched on the top of a tree I sat quietly, not daring to make a sound. I observed the how the soldier moved carefully, he appeared almost mechanical, his movements so robotic it was inhuman. All the army guards seemed to be programmed. This was the fifth guard I had observed today and he, too, like the others had the same movements. This one however was a slightly less robotical, he was obviously tired which proved that they were humans. I knew the routine by heart now. I got ready as the guard made his next turn, loaded my blowgun and blew a dart at him. The dart flew steadily with speed and accuracy as it reached and launched itself in the soldier's neck. I held my breath as I waited for him to react, the last one called out for backup when he got hit. Luckily I had made this dart even more powerful than a normal one. The soldier gasped and his hand instantly reached his neck but before he could pull it out he collapsed. Breathing out a sigh of relief I smiled. *Finally.*

Finally I could get out of the old walled city of Shanghai. My family had been falsely accused of murder and had been sentenced to severe punishment. My mother and father had been killed. I was forced to go on the run, trapped in this torture chamber of Shanghai. I wasn't allowed to leave Shanghai as I was considered a fugitive.

Knock. Knock. Knock. My mother's voice called out to me to open the door when I saw two guard officials standing there. My mother walked into the room and stopped short when she saw them, she firmly told me to go to my room. However I didn't and I stopped to listen to the conversation at the door.

"Mr Wong claims you have killed his wife."

"What? I haven't killed anyone!"

"Your family has been accused of murder. There is evidence leading up to this."

"Murder? But we haven't..."

"You have a trial to prove your innocence on Thursday at 4 o'clock sharp."

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*I walked into the room to find my mother crying in my father's arms. I ran to her and cuddled up next to her.*

*"Whats wrong?" I asked concerned for my mother.*

*"W—we lost the trial." She sniffed.*

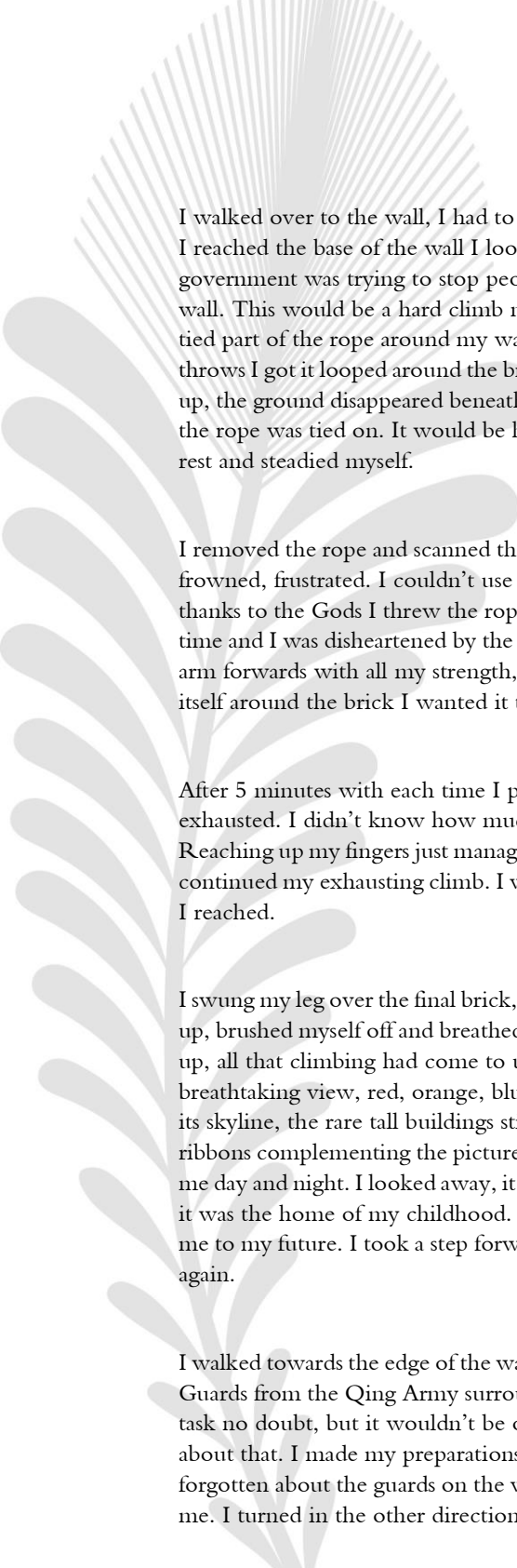
*"Trial?" I questioned innocently.*

*"Xiao Wen go to bed." My father ordered.*

~~~~~

I was sitting at home playing with my dolls and my mother was knitting. She had barely left the house since the trial. A sharp sound of a gunshot ripped through the silence of the air making both of us jump. She looked around fear present in her eyes and called me close to her. I sat on her lap when the door got broken down. Guard officials stormed into the house and grabbed my mother. I fell off her lap as they dragged her out of the house. I ran after her just in time to see her on her knees and them shoot the bullet in her head. I ran out my eyes swarming with tears, I may have been young but I knew what had just happened. I leant over her and then realized she wasn't the only body there. My father's body was also outside the house, his eyes were closed and there was a bullet wound in his forehead. He wasn't breathing.

The soldier was lying on his side with his mouth open in the most undignified way. I chuckled as I passed him. I quickly checked through my bag for my equipment and dropped my rope on the floor next to a puddle. When I bent down to pick it up I looked into the crystal clear water and saw my own reflection. I saw my short brown curly hair, cut in the latest fashion. With waves it flowed down the back of my head. I saw my eyes, cold and hard, brown chocolate orbs, filled with determination and hatred. I remember when my eyes use to sparkle when I laughed, but after the government ruined my life I didn't laugh anymore. I gently touched the water, feeling the cool surface beneath my finger, sending ripples through the mirror of liquid, breaking the image.



I walked over to the wall, I had to be quick and quiet. Another guard would come in around 20 minutes. When I reached the base of the wall I looked around. Thankfully I had chosen the least guarded place, and anyways the government was trying to stop people from illegally coming in, not going out. I looked up at the 10 meter high wall. This would be a hard climb no doubt, but I climbed things everyday. I could do this. I took a deep breath, tied part of the rope around my waist, tied another knot and aimed at a brick sticking out at the wall. After a few throws I got it looped around the brick and tightened it. I then looked for gaps in the rusting wall and pulled myself up, the ground disappeared beneath my feet. Higher and higher. I did this well until I reached the brick on which the rope was tied on. It would be harder here as I didn't have a stable grip. I put my foot on the brick to give it a rest and steadied myself.

I removed the rope and scanned the wall above me for another loose brick. I found one a slight distance away and frowned, frustrated. I couldn't use that one it was much too far. I looked up higher and saw one. Giving a quick thanks to the Gods I threw the rope up, making sure not to lose my balance in the process. It took me longer this time and I was disheartened by the eighth time. Gritting my teeth in frustration I tried even harder and pushed my arm forwards with all my strength, I watched anxiously as it flew through the air. Quickly and quietly it looped itself around the brick I wanted it too. I smiled and continued my climb upwards.

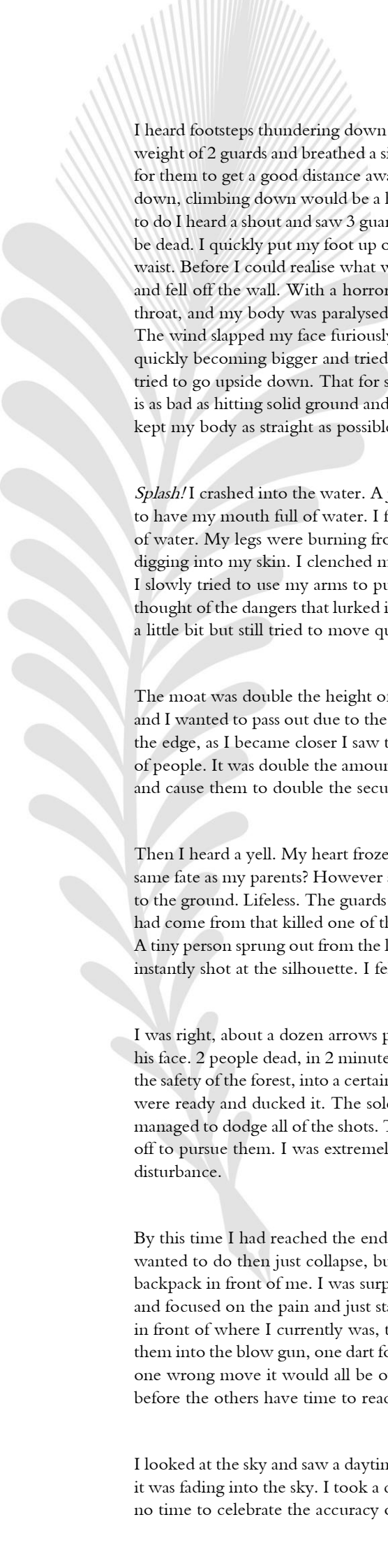
After 5 minutes with each time I pulled or pushed myself up I lost more energy and soon I was panting. I felt exhausted. I didn't know how much longer I would be able to climb. By now my arms barely had any strength. Reaching up my fingers just managed to grasp a brick in the wall. I stopped for a while and regained my energy and continued my exhausting climb. I was more motivated each time I got closer to the top. Finally after a few minutes I reached.

I swung my leg over the final brick, pulled myself up and fell face flat onto the stone wall ungracefully. Then I stood up, brushed myself off and breathed the fresh air, still panting. The air surrounded and clung onto me. I was finally up, all that climbing had come to use. I was one step closer to freedom. I looked out at the city behind me, a breathtaking view, red, orange, blue, green. No wonder it was called the Jewel of China. Curved roofs that built its skyline, the rare tall buildings sticking out like a sore thumb, rivers flowing through it, streaks of blue like ribbons complementing the picture full of memories, some fond that I would treasure forever and some that haunt me day and night. I looked away, it was in the past now, my past, a part of me that I would never be able to remove, it was the home of my childhood. I looked away. Now I looked ahead, towards the bright sun that would guide me to my future. I took a step forwards, threw one last glance behind me and never looked at the city of Shanghai again.

I walked towards the edge of the wall and saw a moat surrounding it, it was definitely home to dangerous creatures. Guards from the Qing Army surrounded that, looking off into the distance. I sighed heavily, this would be a hard task no doubt, but it wouldn't be one of my failures. In fact it would be my greatest success, I would make sure about that. I made my preparations to climb down when I heard a shout. I mentally smacked my forehead, I had forgotten about the guards on the wall! I saw a guard running towards me, clear determination in his eyes to catch me. I turned in the other direction and thankfully didn't see any other guards in sight and ran.

Step after step I sprinted forwards, running yet pacing myself. I had to tire this guard out otherwise there would be no hope of me escaping and he would catch me and I would face the same fate as my parents. *No*. I would go at all costs to make sure that didn't happen. I would live up to my parents name, not die in it. I gritted my teeth and continued running. I climbed the steps to the next guard post and if I hadn't been in my current situation, would have laughed at the sleeping guard on his chair. I took quieter steps as I passed him, slowing my pace down a tiny bit, then ran full speed ahead.

When I was about 10 meters away from the guard post I heard yelling. It was the definite sound of the guard who was pursuing me yelling at the one who had decided to take a little snooze. Taking advantage of this I ran even faster, I had to hide. I had to get them off my trail, it was most unfortunate that this chase was on a wall with nowhere to hide. Then I stopped, the most unobvious thing to do would be to stop running. I turned back instantly and ran back towards the guard house and hid under the descending steps.



I heard footsteps thundering down the steps I was under and prayed that the stairs were sturdy enough to hold the weight of 2 guards and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw them running off into the distance. Waiting impatiently for them to get a good distance away I finally came out of my hiding spot. I scurried towards the edge and looked down, climbing down would be a huge risk. I would almost certainly get spotted. Before I could think about what to do I heard a shout and saw 3 guards glaring daggers and running towards me, if looks could kill I'd most certainly be dead. I quickly put my foot up on the brick wall and pulled myself up. I grabbed my rope and tied it around my waist. Before I could realise what was happening I felt the weight of the guard smash against me, I lost my footing and fell off the wall. With a horror I realized I was falling straight down to the river. A scream was stuck in my throat, and my body was paralysed with fear. I was falling and falling and falling. My stomach rose to my throat. The wind slapped my face furiously as I fell and knotted up my hair. I looked down at the body of water that was quickly becoming bigger and tried to make myself be in an upright position. But I kept turning sideways, I then tried to go upside down. That for some reason was easier but then I realised that hitting water from a great height is as bad as hitting solid ground and forced myself to be in a standing position. After many struggles I managed and kept my body as straight as possible, keeping my arms by my side and feet together.

Splash! I crashed into the water. A jolt of pain went through my legs as I hit the water and I screamed in pain only to have my mouth full of water. I frantically swam upwards and reached the surface. I gasped for air like a fish out of water. My legs were burning from the impact and every time I moved it, it felt like thousands of needles were digging into my skin. I clenched my fists in an attempt not to scream and tried to keep my legs as still as possible. I slowly tried to use my arms to pull myself towards the edge of the moat. Then fear crept through me as I thought of the dangers that lurked in this water. I looked around me and saw no sign of movement, I calmed down a little bit but still tried to move quickly.

The moat was double the height of the wall thus resulting into a longer swim. My legs throbbed with each stroke and I wanted to pass out due to the pain but the fear of drowning and death kept me going. I slowly swam towards the edge, as I became closer I saw them. I saw dozens of people lined up, the Qing Army. I gasped at the amount of people. It was double the amount I had seen from the wall. Did the wretched guards alert them of my presence and cause them to double the security?

Then I heard a yell. My heart froze up. Had they seen me? Was this the end of my journey? Would I be given the same fate as my parents? However as I watched the soldiers in front of me. I saw a figure in the front row crumple to the ground. Lifeless. The guards around it sprung into action, half of them running into the direction the arrow had come from that killed one of their fellow men. Yes! This was great! None of the guards had noticed me at all! A tiny person sprung out from the line of trees towards the wall and half of the remaining half got into position and instantly shot at the silhouette. I felt a pang of pity for the runner, no one would be able to survive that.

I was right, about a dozen arrows pierced into the man's flesh and I saw the man fall onto his knees then flat onto his face. 2 people dead, in 2 minutes and they would never be remembered. Out of the blue 2 more men ran from the safety of the forest, into a certain death trap. All the guards focused their aim on them but as they shot the 2 men were ready and ducked it. The soldiers tried again but these men seemed like masters at dodging and somehow managed to dodge all of the shots. The guards realized that shooting would get them nowhere and half of them ran off to pursue them. I was extremely fortunate that the guards were distracted and half of them gone due to the disturbance.

By this time I had reached the end of the moat, my entire body was tired and in pain. There was nothing more I wanted to do then just collapse, but I knew what my fate would be if I did. Floating by the edge, I pulled my backpack in front of me. I was surprised that I hadn't found it an issue while swimming. I must have been so tired and focused on the pain and just staying afloat I didn't care about anything else. The soldiers stood about a meter in front of where I currently was, their backs facing me. I grabbed my blowgun and a dozen or so darts. I stuffed them into the blow gun, one dart for each soldier. I had to be quiet, quick and most importantly accurate. If I made one wrong move it would all be over. My plan was to keep shooting into the necks of guards one after another before the others have time to react.

I looked at the sky and saw a daytime moon. It was beautiful, glowing and majestic, white and pure. It seemed like it was fading into the sky. I took a deep breath, aimed, and shot. The dart hit the neck of the first soldier, but I had no time to celebrate the accuracy of my shot. Before he could react I moved on to hit the next soldier, then the



next, and the next. Surprisingly the soldiers at the end of the line didn't react at all. Soon they were all on the floor and I pulled myself out of the moat. I lay down on the floor, my limbs felt dead but I knew it wasn't safe to stay here for long. I got up and jogged to the line of trees and once i reached it I finally felt safe. *Finally*.

Finally I was out of Shanghai. Away from that nightmare. Away from the city where my family was falsely accused of murder. Away from the city where my mother was taken, my father was killed and I was considered a fugitive. I smiled.

I looked around to the vast amount of land there was. Fields of green, mountains, trees, grass, wildflowers there was so much vegetation everywhere. I tasted the crisp, clear wind as it hit my cheek. I felt the freshness in the air. I breathed in a deep breath of freedom. I was *free*.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Work, Victoria – 14

I stood on the scaffold on a old steel bridge, looking down into the rapid water fifty feet below. Hands behind my back; wrists bound. A noose encircled my neck.

There were two soldiers from the army, supervised by a sergeant who looked grotesque, malicious – not at all friendly. The sergeant was in uniform, armed and ready to kill. Just in case the prisoners and I didn't die fast enough, a group of soldiers at each end of the bridge had their machine guns loaded, ready to fire.

I heard muffled cries coming from the numerous trucks on the bridge, all packed with squashed prisoners. The trucks were so crowded that each person scarcely had enough room to turn around. Crimson stains on the murky water, corpses with cut ropes around their necks floating on the surface. Shanghai lay on the opposite bank of the river, a place where I came from. Where buildings towered over fields, where farmers plowed the dark earth, creating great clouds of dust and dirt, giving up the grounds musty dampness, exposing its luxuriant richness and wiry worms to the gloomy sky. Little did the worms know, they would be eating well tonight.

My parents left about ten years ago, and no one knew where. I was still a baby, so I was thrown around like a ragged doll by the authorities to my greedy and rapacious relatives, who forced me to do chores all day. I lived in the barn with the horses and the pigs, "Fai, that's where you belong" said my aunt when she first saw me.

Walking home from the market one day. I saw in the distance, two men, arms entangled around each other. Their expressions were fierce and venomous, each looking at each other with hatred and detestation.

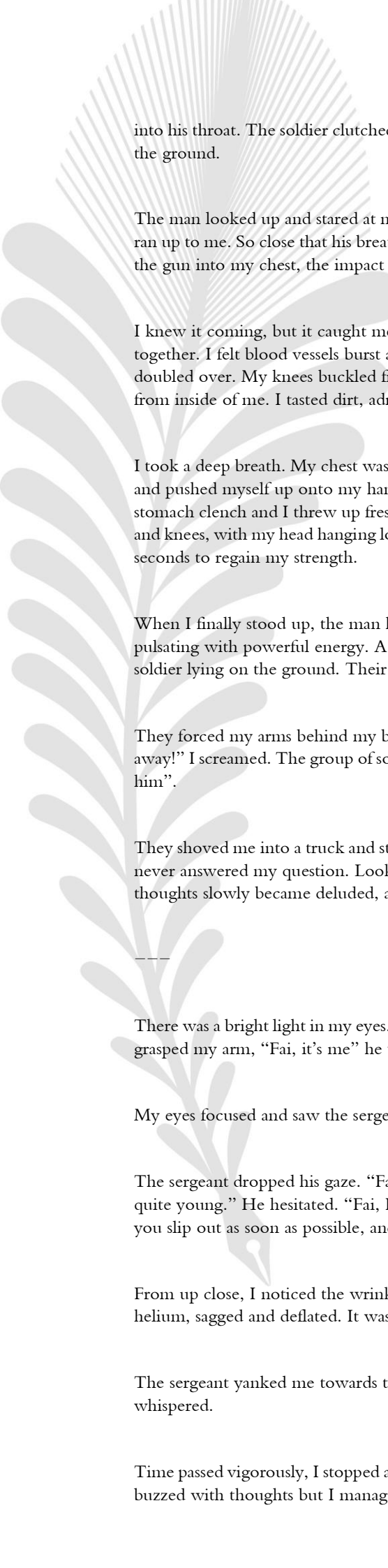
I edged up closer, but still keeping my distance. The man's features were good – a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his black hair was sticking up, falling behind his ear to the collar of his shirt. He had a dark beard, his eyes were large and black, and had a bone-chilling expression which could scare a person from a mile off.

The soldier looked really beat up already, his left eye was already black and blue, with bruises everywhere. His uniform was ripped and his arms were scraped. Berry-red blood oozing through his clothes, his hair was ruffled up, leaves and small branches tangled and twisted in his hair.

The soldier swung around and gave the man a fast and powerful kick in the ribs, the man howled in torment but still continued to stand. The man pounded at the soldier's chest, sending him flying backwards. The man pulled the soldier up to his feet, almost tearing his collar. The soldier kicked him in the leg, forcing the man to drop him.

The soldier ran off towards the middle of the field, where a gun was lying on the ground. The soldier picked it up and pulled the trigger towards the man's face. *Click. Click.* "It's empty!" shouted the soldier. He dropped the gun on the ground and chased after the man. The man turned around and picked up the gun. "Bad mistake." said the man.

The soldier lunged for the gun in the man's hand, but the man rolled his hands down and away with a deflection move, and smashed his fist in the bottom of the soldier's chin, popping his jaw like a mouse trap. He smashed again



into his throat. The soldier clutched at his throat, choking. His face turned purple, and his lifeless body slumped to the ground.

The man looked up and stared at me through the bushes with a spiteful look on his face. He grabbed his gun and ran up to me. So close that his breath engulfed me in a truly putrid odour. “You didn’t see anything.” He thrust the gun into my chest, the impact was so hard I fell backwards.

I knew it coming, but it caught me off guard. I felt the tip make contact with my stomach, smashing my organs together. I felt blood vessels burst and my ribs collapse under the force. My breath instantly left me straining as I doubled over. My knees buckled from the blow, as I deflated like a balloon, I heard a cracking sound coming up from inside of me. I tasted dirt, adrenaline and a hint of blood.

I took a deep breath. My chest was throbbing uncontrollably. I exhaled, inhaled again, moved my arms under me and pushed myself up onto my hands and knees. My hands were shaking. My head was swimming. I felt my stomach clench and I threw up fresh blood, which hurt even more. I stayed in that position a while, on my hands and knees, with my head hanging low. My eyes focused, I crawled up the dead soldier gradually, pausing every few seconds to regain my strength.

When I finally stood up, the man had disappeared. Instead, a thriving mass of people were surrounding me, pulsating with powerful energy. A group of soldiers pushed their way through the crowd, they looked at the soldier lying on the ground. Their eyes narrowed as they saw the gun dripping with blood beside me.

They forced my arms behind my back, and threw me on the ground. “You got the wrong person! He went that away!” I screamed. The group of soldiers shook their heads, one of them came up close to me and said, “you killed him”.

They shoved me into a truck and started to drive, “where are you taking me?” I screamed. They laughed and they never answered my question. Looking at all of the fields and trees zip past made my eyelids feel heavier. My thoughts slowly became deluded, and started to change, my body sunk deeper and deeper into sleep.

There was a bright light in my eyes. I opened them to reveal the monstrous face of someone towering over me. He grasped my arm, “Fai, it’s me” he whispered.

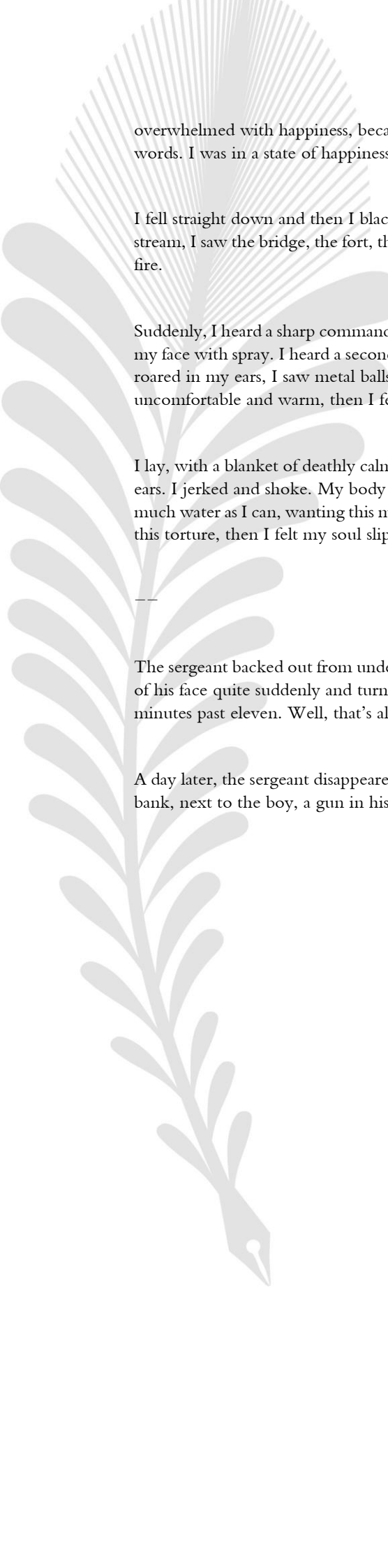
My eyes focused and saw the sergeant . “W—wh—what?” I stuttered.

The sergeant dropped his gaze. “Fai, don’t you remember me? I guess you wouldn’t, we left when you were still quite young.” He hesitated. “Fai, I am your father. You don’t have much time, I am going to loosen the noose, you slip out as soon as possible, and swim as far and as fast as you can, I will come get you afterwards.”

From up close, I noticed the wrinkles and folds of skin next to his eyes. He looked like a balloon deprived it’s helium, sagged and deflated. It was quite surprising me to find him like this.

The sergeant yanked me towards the edge of the bridge, and tied the noose around my neck. “Good luck”, he whispered.

Time passed vigorously, I stopped and plunged into deep thoughts at the realisation of what was coming. My mind buzzed with thoughts but I managed to focus on one: “I will come get you afterwards.” My heart was



overwhelmed with happiness, because this was the only time that anyone has ever noticed me and said such kind words. I was in a state of happiness, free from my worries and anxiety. In that moment, time stopped.

I fell straight down and then I blacked out. When I came back into my senses, I was already facing down the stream, I saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers on the bridge, the sergeant. The captain drew his gun, but he did not fire.

Suddenly, I heard a sharp command and saw something strike the water within a few inches to my head, splattering my face with spray. I heard a second command, “Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!”. I dived as deep as I could. The water roared in my ears, I saw metal balls flying past me, almost hitting me. Some touched my on my face, it was uncomfortable and warm, then I felt the burn.

I lay, with a blanket of deathly calmness over me. Sheltering me from the cold, keeping me safe. Shots rang in my ears. I jerked and shoke. My body afloat in the black water. I clenched my fists, my eyes wide open. I gulped as much water as I can, wanting this moment to finally be over. It filled my lungs, searching for other pathways to end this torture, then I felt my soul slip away from the ends of my fingertips.

— —

The sergeant backed out from under the bridge, and blew out a deep breath. The straight face had disappeared out of his face quite suddenly and turned quite pale. He glanced at his pocket watch and said to the crowd. “Eight minutes past eleven. Well, that’s all for today.”

A day later, the sergeant disappeared and the whole army was looking for him. They found his body resting at the bank, next to the boy, a gun in his hand and a bullet in his head.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Yap, Ryan – 14

I stare at the blinding Sun for a second. Then the flashbacks started setting in. I lost everything I had twice, by the age of seven, in a sunny, warm day in a alleyway by the closed Opium Shop. The breeze from the harbour gives me some relief from the humid day, as I walk along the Avenue of Stars. I pause for a while, to take a break for my aging body. As I look around, a group of children playing catch with a baseball. I watch as they throw the ball around to each other, with a sense of happiness on their face. A happiness I haven't understood for 8 long decades. I begin to walk, slowly at first, but quicker at the seconds past. I have to face it now, the past and the present. Its has been far too long. Or I will never be able to look at myself again, knowing I murdered my best friend.

Growing up in Shanghai, I witnessed many events. I saw the rise of gang warfare, the invasion of Japan and the Communist victory. It all had an impact on me, but the biggest one was the gangs. The gangs, better known as triads, are what made me today, the sad, deflated, introverted figure of today. They cause great sadness for me. I had a ordinary childhood, growing up to loving parents as the only son. It all disappeared after the triad wars began.

My father was a proud Chinese businessman. He was a very smart man, yet he was also physically strong. His small, but sturdy frame make him seems like he is a sportsman. His tanned skin tone, from years of hard work, makes him stand out in a crowd. I will never forget his handsome face. He was very popular in the neighbourhood as he always helped out. He was the one who introduce me to baseball, a brilliant ball game, which he was good at of course. He seems to be able to throw the ball to anywhere he wants, at different speed and direction. He was also a superb hitter of the ball, often losing the balls on the way. I grew up looking up to him and I still to this day.

My beautiful mother was a real gem in our little community. At least that was what men called her. Her nickname was the "Queen of the Pearl of the Orient", as she was considered to be a real beauty. Her slim frame went well with her usual bright red cheongsam. Her emotions often got the better of her, often getting angry at our servants for trivial reasons. She was, at times, a cold mother, but she can be really kind if she wanted to be. I still remember how she helped the homeless outside our street find shelter during the January 28th incident. She was very patriotic, donating money to the Chinese government

I had a close friend. I consider him a real brother. We grew up together near the walls of the Old City of Shanghai, in a decent neighbourhood. Our mothers grew up knowing each other, so we are close family friends. He is 6 months younger than me, but it doesn't feel that way. He has save me from so many situation that I have lost count. He was constantly the more mature one in our friendship, while I like to think I was the funnier person. We had a lot of fun together, spending hours playing baseball and gossiping. We always stuck with each other, no matter what situation. I remember one day, when I got in trouble for hitting one of the bullies at school. Jiao Hao stood for me in front of the principal, who wasn't a very nice lady.

My life was altered in a small alleyway, by the Blue Lotus shop, on a seemingly normal April day. I still remember it like yesterday. It was a nice warm day, with the Sun shining brightly down Shanghai, giving the city an upbeat mood. It was perfect weather to play baseball. I recollect how I was the pitcher for my local team, the team Jiao Hao and me played in. We were pretty good that day, winning 12 runs to 2. We were so happy that day, celebrating that day with great joy. We planned to meet up after dinner, to have fun and play around. As my parents picked me up, little did I know it was one of the last time I will see or hear from them. I remember my father words as we were passing by the Blue Lotus, the last things he will ever say to me, in his deep voice. The last thing before hell broke loose in my life, destroying my emotional side as if it was nothing but a thing in its way. "Well done, son. I am so proud of it! You could be a pro..."

Ratatatatatatat

BANG BANG

Ratatatatatatat

I recognized the sound immediately that day. The terrible sound which filled Shanghai daily. I recollect hearing the screams of pain and terror. I recall how desperate I was to find my parents, as the crowd has ran and stamped everywhere, before finding them seemingly sleeping next to a dead storekeeper. My naive mind kept telling me that they were just pretending to be dead, waiting for the terror to be over. But the terror was over, so why were they still pretending. My young child brain couldn't process it, how fragile life was and how my parents were dead. I was in a denial, for what seemed like hours. Then I realized they were never coming back. That they were really dead. The face of their peaceful body triggered it, my tears of grief, at the realization of how screwed up my life was. I will never forget that scene, the policemen trying to pull me, a grieving, still somehow alive child, away from his bloodied parents.

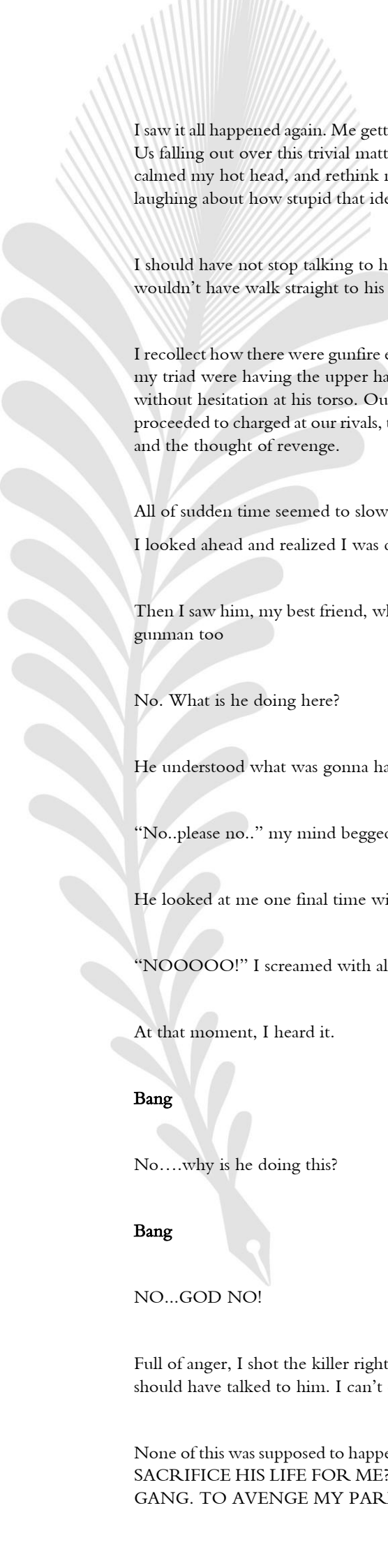
The anger at me rose that day. The anger at the gang who fired the bullets at innocent people as a scare tactic for their rivals. The anger in God for doing this at me. The anger at the establishment for not doing anything with the criminals who destroyed many people life. It never disappeared when I was a child, instead rising and raging with every passing hour, the wish to kill those responsible the desire for a painful long death for them, the need for revenge. My adoptive family, Jiao Hao family, did their best to calm the raging motive inside down. They promised me they would do their best for revenge and finding justice for those murdered, which totaled to a dozen that day, with many more scared for life. But their seemingly inaction over my parents death frustrated my raw, youthful mind. I didn't understand how hard was it to fight justice against the corrupted government in China. I only learnt how much they did just before I fled to Hong Kong. The amount of money they spent on my parents' funeral. How they did their best to fight the monster of the judicial system and lost. I regret how I treated them, especially as I got older. Their patience amazed me. How did they still keep an ungrateful brat, who never stopped whining is beyond me. I would have thrown the teenage me out without a hesitation.

Another thing I will regret until I am in my grave was how I started arguing with Jiao Hao. He was always trying to calmed me, comfort me about my parents' death, yet I always treated him badly. It got worse and worse as we grew up, but he never gave up on me. It was only when I told him on my intention on joining the Green Gang, to avenge my parents. He straight up lost his temper at me. "Have you gone insane? Your parents died in the hands of this people Xiao Lung, why are you doing this? To avenge them? Your parents won't be proud of you!" I started becoming really angry, and possibly disappointed, at the lack of support over my decision. I started saying hurtful things without meaning it as we stopped talking. Oh, how I will be regret this decision later.

As I run into the train, people are whispering about me. "An elderly person running?" "What is going on?" "Why is he running?" Their whispers make me even more determined. Clinging to the handle, I feel my heart racing. I don't know why I chose to face it now, after decades of regret. The guilt of his death has plague me, but never this badly. I should have faced it when I am younger and put all of this behind me. Yet, here I stand, alone, without any family to cling on to, without any friends to go to anymore. It's all because I couldn't face his death. I couldn't accept his death, at least not in the same way as my parents. I caused it, and I know it. Therapists have all said it because of grief, which lasts longer and affects people differently. But this is different. This just cannot be grief. It has lasted way too long for it to be just that. It has to be something else. Lost in my thoughts, I find myself rushing up an escalator, pushing people as I desperately try to reach it. My destination. I keep feel something inside me awakening, a feeling i haven't felt for a long time. As I rush out of the train station, I see more and more people staring at me. "Ignore them. Just ignore them. They have no idea what is going on." my mind was telling me. I surge for the nearest exit, the exit that will bring me closer to me facing my past. Walking past a playground, I see some kids playing with toy guns. Guns similar to the one I used that day. The day he died.

No. Please no. A vague memory is becoming clearer, a memory I have long repressed. The memory of his death.

I am where I was. Many long years ago. I remembered it all.



I saw it all happened again. Me getting ready to battle a stupid war. Him trying to convinced me how stupid it was. Us falling out over this trivial matter. I should have listen to him. I was being so naive and stupid. I should have calmed my hot head, and rethink my decision. It won't have led to his death. He might have been still alive, laughing about how stupid that idea was.

I should have not stop talking to him. He has always worried about me, even when I was completely safe. He wouldn't have walk straight to his death. To defend me.

I recollect how there were gunfire everywhere. Triad members were dropping like flies everywhere. It seemed like my triad were having the upper hand. I spotted a rival triad member about to kill one of my own. I shot him without hesitation at his torso. Our leader roared with delight "GREAT JOB, LITTLE DRAGON!" He then proceeded to charged at our rivals, taking out 4 of their guys. My body was filled with adrenaline, from the fighting and the thought of revenge.

All of sudden time seemed to slow.

I looked ahead and realized I was dead. A burly man was pointing his gun at me.

Then I saw him, my best friend, who has stood by me after all these years. He looked and saw me. He noticed the gunman too

No. What is he doing here?

He understood what was gonna happened to me. All of a sudden, I grasped what he was about to do.

"No..please no.." my mind begged.

He looked at me one final time with a sad smile and ran to shield me

"NOOOOO!" I screamed with all my heart. What was he doing here? Why is he doing this?

At that moment, I heard it.

Bang

No....why is he doing this?

Bang

NO...GOD NO!

Full of anger, I shot the killer right at the head. This was not supposed to happen. Why did I let this happened? I should have talked to him. I can't even protect my sworn brother. How could this happened?

None of this was supposed to happen. Why was he here. Why did he throw himself in front of me. WHY DID HE SACRIFICE HIS LIFE FOR ME? WHY WAS HE THAT STUPID? HE KNEW I WANTED TO JOIN THE GANG. TO AVENGE MY PARENTS. NOW I AM GONNA LOSE THE LAST PERSON I CARED

ABOUT. WHY DO I HAVE TO LOOK AT THIS AGAIN. WHY? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?

“Xiao Lung” he whispered. All my anger, at God, at the rival triad, at him, suddenly disappeared, replaced by a sense of fear. I can not lose another person who is valuable in my life. I just cannot.

“Please Jiao Hao....Please....Don’t die. I...I...can’t lose you. I need you. Pl...please don’t die.” I remembered what I said as my voice broke, while I was looking at his pale face, where bright red blood has started to flow from his mouth. He somehow managed a smile as he looked at me and said, with all his might,

“X....Xiao Lung, I....I will always be there for you...u, s.....supporting you. Don’t live in the pas....sst. It will only drag you down. Goodbye, X...Xiao Lung.” He smiles one last time, before closing his eyes.

Why did he do it? I screamed and screamed. The inner me wants to be vaporized at the moment. Why must I relived this moment. I should be the one to die. He was so stupid. I wished I could go back in time. To save him. To let that bullet kill me instead.

He left me at a time when I needed him the most, at a time when I was vulnerable. He died to save me. Why?

I approach my apartment door. It has been 89 years since my parents died, robbing me of parental love. It has been 67 years since I came to Hong Kong, fleeing the Communist rule. And for 80 long years, I have been avoiding him. Denying his death. In fact, denying that he ever existed. I did not want it to be real. I wanted to hide from it, so I won’t feel the pain. For years, I successfully hid it. In front of my friends, my partners, the public. But inside me, I knew something was not right. I could hide from it, but I will never be able to run from it. I have to accept it now.

I ransacked my storage room, looking for the bloodied letter. The letter he wrote for me, which I have never open for 78 years. I have to know now, what he wrote, if I want to face the future. As I went through years and years worth of memories, reminding me of the past. The time I went to United States. The time I had a stable relationship with the girl I thought was the one. The time I graduated, well overage, after years of hard work and studying. Then I see it. The letter with red splattered everywhere. My hands started to tremble. My eyes starts welling up. Words can not describe what I am feeling right now. As I opened the letter, with my wobbly hands, I could not stop thinking about his last words, aas he laid dying. “Xiao Lung, I will always be there for you, supporting you. Don’t live in the past. It will only drag you down. Goodbye, Xiao Lung” Droplet of water was running down my face. The letter was written in Chinese, in the tone of Shanghainese. I begin to read with a shaky mind:

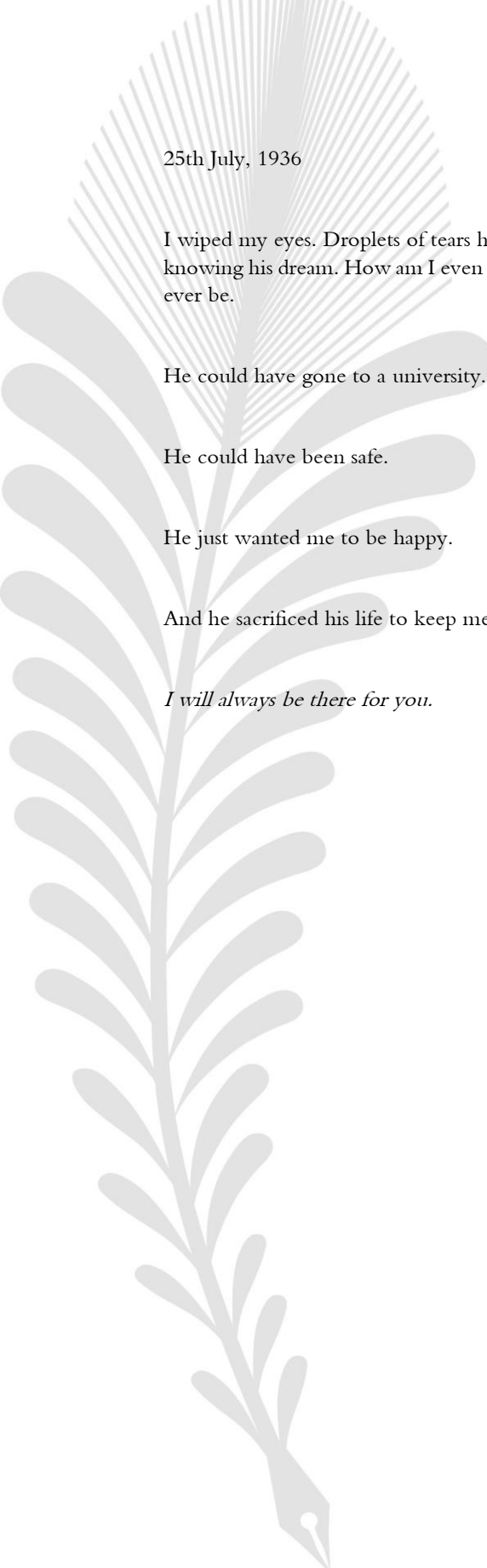
My dear Xiao Lung,

How long has it been since we properly had a conversation? This fight of ours seems trivial, with all the triad wars going on. Look, I am sorry for my different views. I just wanted you to be safe. If you want to join Green Gang to avenge your father death, it’s up to you. I will support you all the way, just like everything we did in the past. Just stay safe and happy.

Anyway, the reason why I wanted to write this letter is to tell you about my decision. I have decide to move away from Shanghai. I feel it’s too unsafe for me. I also want to further my studies for the future. I want to go to Beijing University. Beijing is much more safe compared to Shanghai. Also I don’t have to deal with the unruly *gwailo*, who has taken away the spirit of the city from us. I hope you will support me in my decision. Could we meet up sometime before I move? I really want talk to you one more time before I leave. I fear it will be hard to talk after that, since I don’t know when I will come back. I also want to make things right with you. While I am gone, I will really miss you. Remember, *I will always be there for you, supporting you.*

Your best friend,

Jiao Hao



25th July, 1936

I wiped my eyes. Droplets of tears has stained the red coloured letter .After all this years. All this years without knowing his dream. How am I even a friend? He deserves better than this. He was a much better person than I will ever be.

He could have gone to a university.

He could have been safe.

He just wanted me to be happy.

And he sacrificed his life to keep me alive.

I will always be there for you.

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Yeung, Jonathan – 14

The house itself was very new and modern, one that many couldn't dream of owning— it was one that I had bought for her 90th birthday a few years ago. There were large rectangular windows that wrapped around almost every wall, the floors were made of marble and dark walnut wood. There was a courtyard filled with grass and gravel, though only housed the stray animals of the woods.

“Children, look at all the stuff we have here!” Martha said. I brought my family over to help clean out the house of my mother, and maybe learn a few new things about her in doing so. The attic was dark and stuffy, only to be lit up by the few rays of sunlight shining through the small windows. It was stuffy and reeked of old people smell, contrary to the rest of the house. The paint on the walls were peeling and chipped, exposing the wood that laid behind it, supporting the house. The attic felt empty, despite the fact that it was populated by towers and towers of grey, faded cardboard boxes.

One by one, we went through all the cardboard boxes, scything through tower by tower. I quickly developed a technique; cut open, sift through, move box away. Cut open, sift through, move box away. After hours upon hours of finding and collecting disappointing cutlery, the sound of my four year old Daughter in exclamation lit up my world of boredom.

“Look Babady, look! I found something that isn't knives and forks!” I found that my Daughter had opened a box, hidden away from all the others. Placed in the one dark corner of the attic, it was delicately wrapped up in tape and plastic unlike all the others.

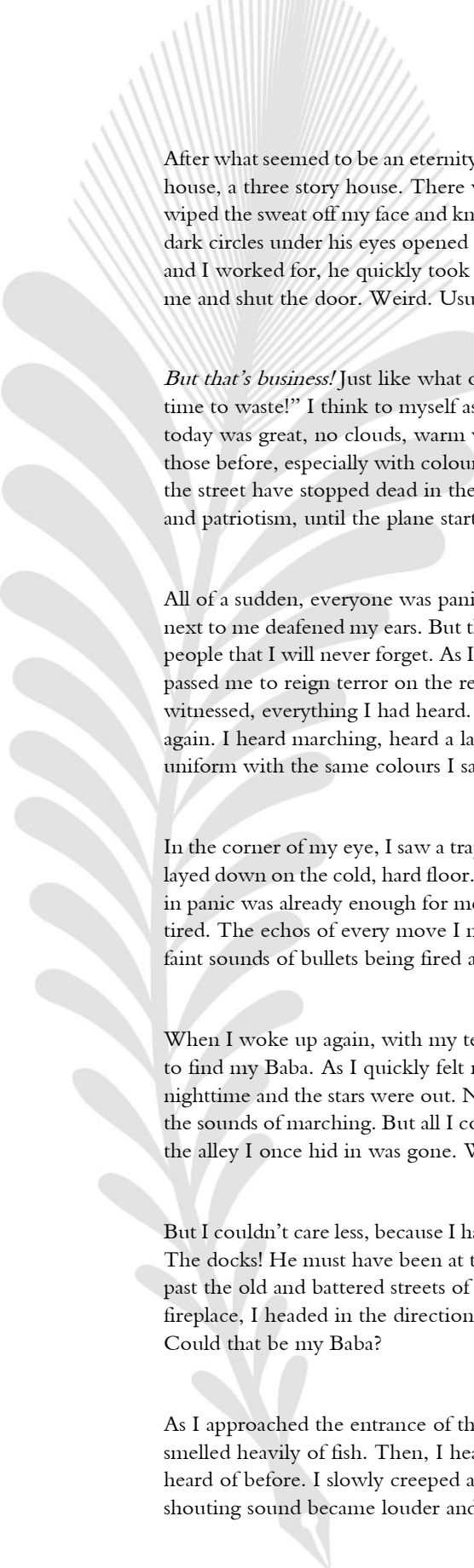
Looking into the box, the inside was organised neatly. Photo books stacked on top of other photo books, cardboard sandwiched in between every level. But something else caught my eye. Cupped in the hands of my beaming Daughter, was a string tied into a circle loop, with a kite-shaped pearl green emerald in the middle. It was a necklace. Worn out and scuffed in every nook and cranny (crevice), the necklace had seen better days. Though, it still reminded me of something. Something in the past...

The year was 1932. It was a new year in Shanghai and I was just turning four years old. “送回个人叫”. It was my Baba, a tan middle aged blue collar worker, who worked long hours day and night. He had wrinkles etched in his face, of which, was always covered in sweats drops cascading down his face and dripping from his neck to the ground. It was early morning, the sky was a pale blue, and the sounds of people returning to their market stalls, setting up, could be heard. He wanted me to deliver a package to the most successful man in town— a gweilo who I had delivered to on many different occasions.

I took the sheet with the address written on, in very messy handwriting that could only be Baba's and headed off. The walk to the address on the receipt wasn't far, the delivery business my Baba works for is located in the docks anyways. The streets of Shanghai were as busy as ever for some reason. As I traversed the busy and loud streets, all I could hear was the sound of market vendors and rickshaw drivers attracting people with too good to be true prices and the occasional dinging of trams as they passed by.

Left, right, right, left; I wandered the streets like a well oiled mouse in a maze. As I dashed through the streets one by the other, I remembered what my Baba had told me when he first brought me to work alongside him— to avoid the police at all times. I never knew why. In fact, I didn't know a lot back then.

“Baba, what's in the package?” I would ask every now and then. All he would have left me with was a half-hearted grunt of acknowledgement and would go back to work. Since he'd never tell me, I opened the package once and found what appeared to be fancy pepper seeds that I've seen all the rich people smoke in the movies. I would often hear Baba and Mama arguing about my life when we were at our hut. “He shouldn't be doing this.” “Oh it's for the good of the business and the family.” The box itself used to be glued on with rice. We were that poor.



After what seemed to be an eternity, I came across a house. Metal railing, a grass courtyard five times the size of our house, a three story house. There was no denying that it looked like it belonged to the richest man in town. I wiped the sweat off my face and knocked the door. Right away, a man with long blonde hair, a scraggly beard and dark circles under his eyes opened the door. With a nervous look and voice somehow coarser than the man Baba and I worked for, he quickly took the package went behind the door, grabbed a wad of paper bills, gave them to me and shut the door. Weird. Usually they'd inspect the contents of the box first.

But that's business! Just like what our boss says whenever he doesn't give Baba his money on time. "There's no time to waste!" I think to myself as I rush back to the docks where I'd get another order to deliver. The weather today was great, no clouds, warm weather. As I looked up at the sky, I saw a warplane. I had never seen one of those before, especially with colours like that. I wasn't the only one that has noticed this, as many other people on the street have stopped dead in their tracks to look up as well. Everyone was cheering and clapping in self-pride and patriotism, until the plane started shooting at all of us.

All of a sudden, everyone was panicking. The constant streaming sound of bullets striking the air and the ground next to me deafened my ears. But there was something worse. The screams of fear and screams of pain of innocent people that I will never forget. As I did my best in dodging and running away from the bullets, the plane overhead passed me to reign terror on the rest of Shanghai. I was still running, running away from everything I had witnessed, everything I had heard. I ran as fast as I could, turning a corner, through an alley and turning a corner again. I heard marching, heard a language I've never heard of before. I saw soldiers, marching in sync, wearing uniform with the same colours I saw on that plane. I ran back the opposite direction.

In the corner of my eye, I saw a trapdoor. I go in. Panting harder than I ever, I closed the trapdoor behind me and layed down on the cold, hard floor. I couldn't see anything, not that I did want to see anything. The sight of people in panic was already enough for me. It was cold and humid inside, inside wherever I was, and I was deprived and tired. The echos of every move I made could be heard, as I was dragging myself along the floor. I could hear the faint sounds of bullets being fired as I fall asleep.

When I woke up again, with my tears dried on my face, everything was silent. But I realised something; I needed to find my Baba. As I quickly felt my way across the walls to find the trapdoor, I opened it and got out. It was nighttime and the stars were out. No longer were there the sounds of people panicking, the sounds of gunfire and the sounds of marching. But all I could hear were the chirps of crickets. As I looked down from the sky, I saw that the alley I once hid in was gone. What was now left were a pile of bricks.

But I couldn't care less, because I had to find my Baba. I thought about where I saw him last. As I think to myself... The docks! He must have been at the docks. I ran, I ran faster than I did when the warplane attacked. As I dashed past the old and battered streets of Shanghai, where the markets once used to be but are now just bullet holed fireplace, I headed in the direction of the ocean. As I headed closer and closer, I heard something and saw light. Could that be my Baba?

As I approached the entrance of the docks, I noticed that the place was now surrounded by barbed wire, and smelled heavily of fish. Then, I heard a man shouting loudly in Mandarin, with a heavy accent that I have never heard of before. I slowly crept around the barbed wire fence as delicately and as quietly as a mouse, as the shouting sound became louder and louder. Then I see my Baba.

Although I initially thought that I would have been in joy seeing my Baba again, I actually wished I had never seen him since the plane attacked. His head was bent over and a man who seemed to be Japanese held a machete in his hand, over Baba's head. Baba was red all over, especially his face. He had more sweat on his face than I had ever seen, dripping down his neck. Then, the man lowered his machete, and took Baba's head off.

Something came off his neck. A string tied into a circle loop, with a kite-shaped pearl green emerald in the middle. It was a necklace. One of the Japanese soldiers picked it up, made a joke, scoffed at it, and threw it out. It landed just close enough for me to have picked it up, in between the holes of the wire fence. I picked it up, and with fresh blood dripping down the necklace, I wore it.

“Dad? Daddy?” The year is now 1986. 54 years later. I’m back at the attic, with my wife and two children. My Daughter, still asking me what that necklace was. What did I say? “I... I don’t know.” And with that, everyone carried on going through the other towers of boxes, finding more plates with the occasional photo book. Why did I say that? Because sometimes, it’s better to hide the truth than to tell it, just like how I put that necklace in my pocket to keep.



A Day in the Life – A Shanghai Adventure

King George V School, Caiulo, Riccardo – 14

What a place Shanghai has become.... Completely transformed from friendly neighborhoods to one giant center. I used to play around in fields that are now markets, used to study in schools that are now massive residential towers. I miss them. I really do, but that won't change anything. Only my job can. Being a friendly tourist advisor and bringing them around to see "Shanghai, The Paris of the East!" doesn't seem like such a bad job, especially compared to the things that happen around these parts.

The neighborhood I pass to get to work every day has a reputation for getting people stolen, drugged and put into a ship where they'll become sailors for the rest of their lives. It's so common people here actually have gotten accustomed to it, I even heard people calling it "Getting Shanghai'ed". What a bunch of bollocks. These people have no idea what Shanghai really is, and even with all of the wonderful revolution and technology the westerners brought, this place has only gotten worse. Before I used to call this place a home, now it's just a temporary stop sign before the next big adventure, before the next big "Where?". It doesn't matter anyway, one day I'm going to leave and never come back, and as that day approaches I only get more and more tired of doing what I do. Talking about a place you hate once or twice to someone doesn't seem malicious, but doing it every bloody day that passes by eats away at you more than you'd think.

As I get to work I start to think about my mother. Oh, what I wouldn't do for that lady, what she didn't do for me. I wonder what tragic secrets she kept, I mean, that's the only reason I have to explain what happened, why she got sick. Believing in God was never my thing, but I guess when something like this happens you're more or less forced into it. How can someone explain something like this without the help of some almighty deity who chose to make her sick, for reasons I still do not exactly know. I wonder if she'll ever get better, if she'll make it through. Honestly every letter I open with her stamp might start with "We regret to inform you...". Ugh. Nevermind. I better not dwell on it too much, that distracts me from my work, and work is the only thing keeping me and her alive now anyways.

I see my boss down at the tourist center.

"Here you are Shing Wai! The clients are down the alley, they're ready to go." – My boss said, happily as ever. He always loved this place, I don't understand how he does it. Maybe I should learn from him.

"Alright" – I responded.

I walked down the alley and there they were, a happy couple out for an adventure. The man was tall and had broad shoulders and was wearing a suit, a peculiar choice of clothes for such a hot day, while the lady was shorter and was wearing a small dress. Simple and elegant. I take a lot of breaks from the so called "present" to think about the situation, the now, not that I'm missing anything important. But now it was a real hard push back into my mind. I think the couple reminded me of a life I could have had, of a life I would've wanted to have. But the love of one man can't stop a whole industry. Shanghai is up for sale, and I can't fight the customer. I suddenly snap back to reality and greet them.

I proceed to take them around the city and walk them through the centers and shops and talk about how amazing the city is and how much of an opportunity it is for foreign investments. That's what they all want to hear. I don't think the same things. I know the truth. Nobody ever appreciates the Shanghai that used to be, everybody is out for the new, the fresh, the brands. This place is a mess, and it'll always be one.

"So are there more Chinese or Foreigners here?" one of the clients asked.

"They're mostly spread in equal parts, so I couldn't tell you for sure," I responded.

I guess I'm over reacting; maybe the job is taking a toll on me. I've been working too much and too hard lately, but work is the only thing that keeps me alive, that gives me hope. Maybe I think that the more I work, the more I'm helping mom. I just want her to be there when I finally get home to her, when I finally escape this place.

It's noon now and we stop by a small restaurant to eat. The couple buy a huge serving of chicken wings for both of them, and they offer me a few. Maybe if I eat enough now I can skip dinner and save a few bucks.

"You're not eating?" asked the lady.

"I have to save money, for my family."

"Oh poor you! You can have some more chicken wings if you want."

“Thanks.”

They're nice people, good people, but in the end nobody is ever actually going to do anything for the poor. I'm not necessarily poor myself, but I have known poverty very well, and I can say with confidence that people would almost always rather sit down and relax than actually do something to help. It's just too easy to ignore, and I see it every day. Shanghai has now not only attracted rich foreigners to start and grow companies, but it has brought in many wounded soldiers and refugees running from their homes because of war or conflict, and even though they are suffering terrible fates, people will always turn their backs on them. No matter what. And I'm not being cynical, I know about the good people and the kind people, but let's be honest, everyone will always look up at them, nod in appreciation, and walk away, silently thanking them for doing a job they didn't want to do. But that's just the world we live in. Just the way it is.

After a left turn we head to a museum full of animals held in suspension and many strange medical instruments. There are glass boxes containing strange animals I didn't even know existed, and they were standing completely still. Woah, wat a spectacle. I've always found medicine extremely interesting, the way humans adapt and create different tools to deal with the challenges of nature. I truly believe there is something philosophical about medicine. I might've become a doctor, help people on a daily basis, do something different each day, and receive enough money to send to my mother, the one person I truly need to save. But that's not for me I guess. The only way to cope with this is to think that I'm destined to do what I do, to talk about Shanghai. Maybe being a doctor would have done more harm than good, who knows. But it's still difficult not to imagine, not to dream about what it would've been like. Huh. I wish I'd studied more as a kid, I wish I had better priorities. The majority of people I meet think I was just a dumb kid, but it couldn't be farther away from the truth. When I was a kid my father wanted me to work from a young age, doing small chores around stores and restaurants to earn money. I guess these small jobs evolved into me becoming a tourist guide, somehow. As a kid all I wanted to do was make my father proud, and I guess this is my way to do it. I've always been working, never stopped and never will. I work to live, not live to work.

As the guide to the city closes to an end, I bring the couple back to the center and kindly ask for a tip. A tip is the least anyone could do in my opinion. They give me a reasonable tip and walk off. That's the end of the first part of the day, now I'm off to my second job, factory work. The most repetitive and monotonous job I've ever even heard of. All I do is bring boxes filled with components for I don't know what from one part of the factory to the other. Same track, same path, same boxes. All day, every day. Now tell me I don't give everything for my family.

I get to the factory late as usual, and I apologize to my boss, as usual.

“You're Late!”

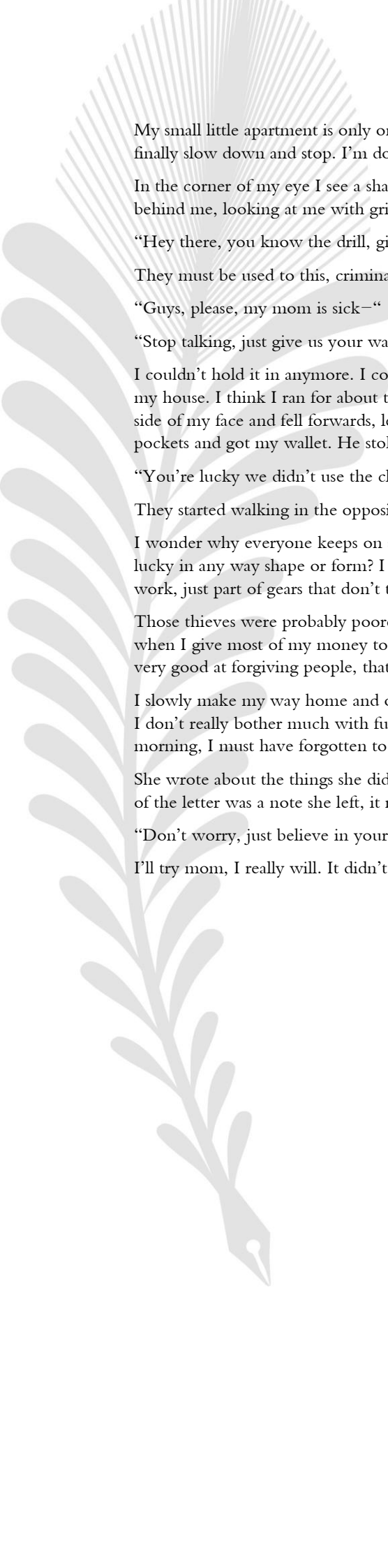
“Yes I know, but it takes me a while to get here”

“That's no excuse, you're lucky you even have this job, now get to work!”

He's not a bad person necessarily, he just likes work done. And who can blame him, he simply wants our sector to do well enough to be promoted and leave to a better place. He's waiting for the day he finally says goodbye, just like me. That's why I can understand him, and why I try to get along with him. When I get through the gates I greet with a nod the old and wrecked factory I have to work at. The dark brittle wood barely holding up a roof that looked like it was about to collapse at any moment, the workers assembling, disassembling and carrying pieces around to create our product, which I honestly still don't know exactly what it is. Rows and rows of worktables for the staff to work on, filled with cuts and chips and enough history it could be told in a lifetime. I walked in and went to my table and asked what I needed to do, and I did, like always.

After I finished working I signed the leave and ticket 21st of January on the factory calendar, of which we had only one. I was in charge of it, and that's the most I've ever been in control of in my life. I've never really had much control over what I have, nevertheless I don't have that much to care for. All I have is my work and my mom.

As I approach the street to home I start thinking about intelligence. What it means, what it means for me. I started thinking about that because I've never necessarily thought of myself as a smart person, not in the traditional sense at least, and definitely not an educated one, but that wasn't because of me. I had to work, and I still do, but the strange thing is that I don't really regret not being able to go to school, to learn like all the other kids and become a doctor. Maybe that's because these small jobs, this boring work I do all day long gives my life purpose, it gives it meaning. Granted, I don't like what I do. Actually I hate it, but I love thinking that doing this is something, that doing this saves someone's life somewhere else, and that what I do is important in my own little world. And that makes me happy, actually no, that makes me satisfied. And I think that is a real demonstration of intelligence. Sure, I don't know how to take the derivative of a function, but I know how to appreciate something I hate doing, and loving my life, and that is more valuable than all of the Nobel prizes in the world to me.



My small little apartment is only one more block away, and then I can finally lie on my bed. That's all I want, to finally slow down and stop. I'm done for the day.

In the corner of my eye I see a shadow, a fleeing dark ghost. I turn around and see two tall men with clubs behind me, looking at me with grins on their faces.

"Hey there, you know the drill, give us your wallet and we'll let you go."

They must be used to this, criminals. All I know is that I'm definitely not.

"Guys, please, my mom is sick—"

"Stop talking, just give us your wallet."

I couldn't hold it in anymore. I couldn't fight them, but I could run. I turn around and start sprinting towards my house. I think I ran for about two seconds before they caught up to me. I felt a cold, solid blow to the right side of my face and fell forwards, leaving a blob of blood on the pavement. The other guy went through my pockets and got my wallet. He stole the small amount of money I made off the tip and threw it back at me.

"You're lucky we didn't use the clubs."

They started walking in the opposite direction and disappeared.

I wonder why everyone keeps on saying that I'm lucky. What part of my life would make anyone say that I'm lucky in any way shape or form? I simply don't understand. I'm not lucky, I'm just part of system that doesn't work, just part of gears that don't turn.

Those thieves were probably poorer than me, but that doesn't give them the right to steal from me. Especially when I give most of my money to my sick mother, but then again how would they know that. Good thing I'm very good at forgiving people, that's the one thing I can really do well.

I slowly make my way home and open the doors to my apartment. It's small, the walls are completely white and I don't really bother much with furniture except a bed and a table. On the table sat three letters from this morning, I must have forgotten to open them. I open the one with my mom's name, I always open hers first.

She wrote about the things she did during the week and what she was planning to do the week after. At the end of the letter was a note she left, it read:

"Don't worry, just believe in yourself today, and if that doesn't work, try tomorrow"

I'll try mom, I really will. It didn't work out today but who knows, tomorrow I might be a doctor.

The Garden of War

Leung Shek Chee College, Chiu, Emily – 16

Shanghai 2017

Cold, it was always cold at funerals. As if the stench of death wasn't enough chill. Looking out of the windows, the gloomy weather made it worse. Then I saw him, a silent silhouette amongst the flowering sea of white. He lay there, in the glass coffin. There was no slight flutter of lashes, no rise or fall of his chest, to give a sign that he was alive.

The funeral proceeded, each beloved one rose to give a speech. Each speech agonizing, each speech ended with seeming endless tears. Then there was a short clip, a small reminder of his young life. It was a video his mother had taken in Old Shanghai when his tree spouted the first flower early spring. It was painful to see him laugh so carefree. It was painful to see the hazy outline of the boy he once was, before the flames of war tore him to pieces. My fist clenched as his voice bought back memories that were locked away for years, and as those memories resurfaced, my eyes went blurry with threatened tears.

Shanghai 1919

Every year, my father took me to the flower market just below the bricks of the city walls. There were all kinds of flowers, from petite lilies to blooming roses. Every merchant competed for the most attractive bouquet in the market.

Loosening my grip on my father's hand, I wandered around the market. I saw a merchant sitting on a tall stool, silently knitting flowers into a circle.

'Excuse me sir, what is that you are holding?' I asked curiously, noticing that the stall was bathed in the fresh aroma of the flowers. The merchant -- no, the boy looked up smiled, and said, 'it's a flower crown, made from all kinds of different flowers.'

Noticing my particular interest in the crown he was weaving, he laughed and said, 'Would you like one to take home with you? I'm almost finished with this one.' Reaching out to stroke the soft petals that adorned the crown, each petal unique and perfect. I sighed, 'I would love one, but I don't have any money with me...' My voice trailing off into the quiet night.

There was a twinkle in his brown eyes as he said, 'Oh you can have it for free, in exchange for one thing -- ' Looking up into his nonchalant gaze, his eyes reminded me of the old barn door, flecks of deep brown married with lighter hues, so much strength remaining despite the years of weathering, so much life.

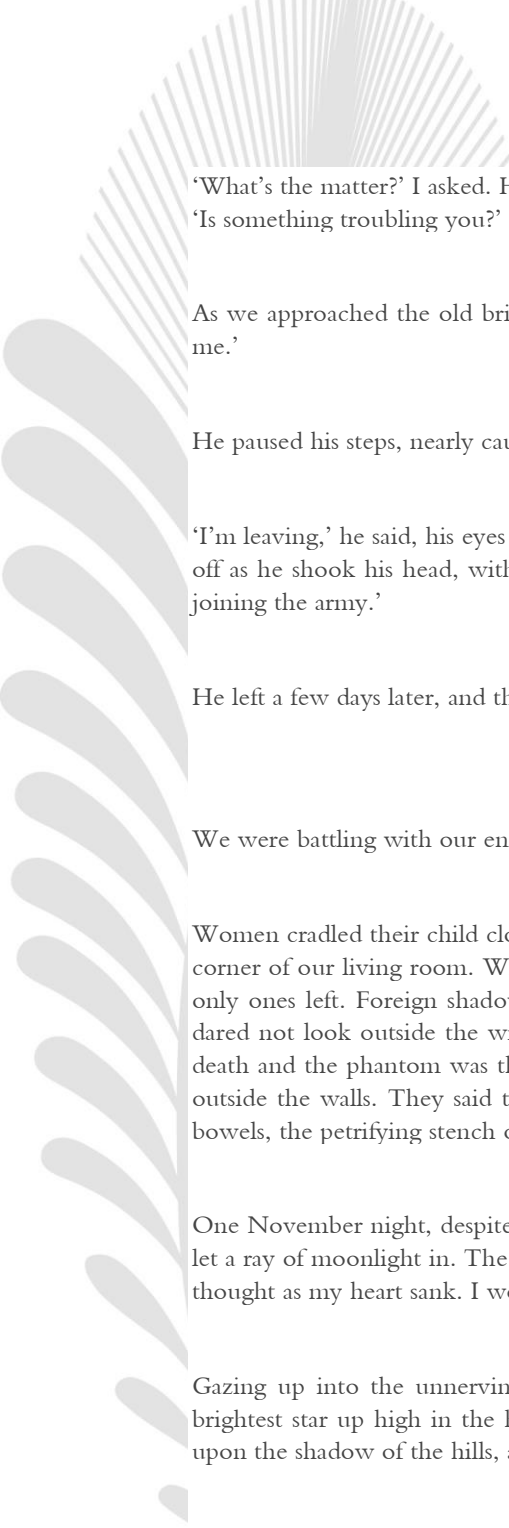
'For what?' I enquired. He smiled, smiles so genuine that even a new born knew it by heart, and murmured, 'Your name.'

Shanghai 1937

'The flames of war are upon us,' whispered my father as he rolled up today's newspaper. I looked up from my desk just to see my mother frown.

'What do you mean?' started my mother but then was abruptly interrupted by a few knocks at the door. 'I'll get it,' I said as I slid off the chair.

Peering through the peeping hole, I was welcomed by a set of familiar brown hues. 'Chang!' I beamed as I opened the door. 'Have you got any flowers for -- ' I stopped midair, noticing the unsettling look that settled on his face.



‘What’s the matter?’ I asked. He didn’t answer, but started to walk the other way, gesturing that I should follow. ‘Is something troubling you?’ I asked, bewildered. But still, I was met with silence.

As we approached the old bridge, I asked again, ‘Chang, is something wrong? I can’t help if you don’t talk to me.’

He paused his steps, nearly causing me to crash into him. Turning around, he spoke only two words.

‘I’m leaving,’ he said, his eyes frantic. ‘What?’ I whispered, ‘But why? I thought you liked Shanghai –’ I was cut off as he shook his head, with head hung low almost as if he was ashamed of something. He murmured, ‘I’m joining the army.’

He left a few days later, and those brown eyes never looked the same.

Shanghai November 1937

We were battling with our enemy under a moonless sky.

Women cradled their child close, hushing their frightened cries that pierced through the night. I shivered in the corner of our living room. With all the men at war defending our nation, my mother, my sister and I were the only ones left. Foreign shadows loomed through the thin curtains, like wolves prowling through the night. I dared not look outside the window. I dared not breathe so loud. For outside the city walls was the theatre of death and the phantom was there. For three months and eleven days, I heard only whispers of what happened outside the walls. They said the earth was sodden with ichor and they said the battlefield was annotated with bowels, the petrifying stench of death seems not far.

One November night, despite the chaos around us, it was quiet. I peeled away a small corner of the curtains to let a ray of moonlight in. The light glazed through our room, landing on the spoiled vase of bauhinias. Chang, I thought as my heart sank. I wonder if he was still out there. I wonder if he was safe.

Gazing up into the unnerving black sky, even the clouds felt morose. I closed my eyes, wishing upon the brightest star up high in the heavens. Please bring him back, I whispered to the moon. As the clouds cleared upon the shadow of the hills, another blizzard of bullets and spears were yet to dawn.

A year after the surrender of the enemy

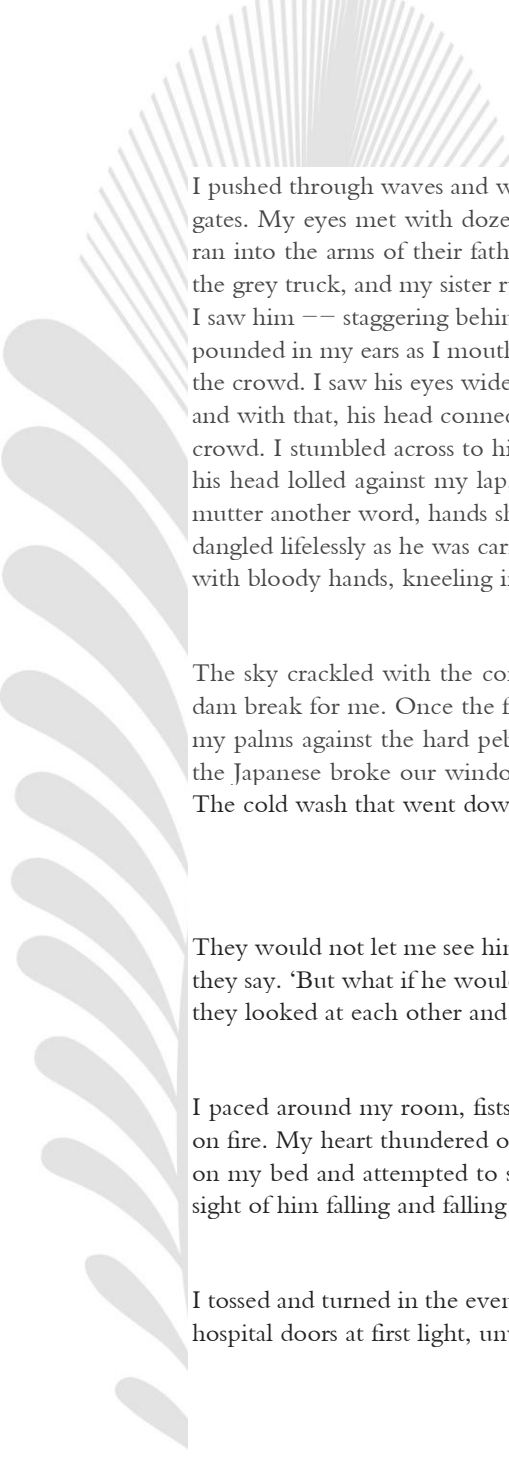
In a clatter of plates and cutlery, my mother placed in front of me my breakfast. ‘

‘Do eat up, Cho.’ said Mama, ‘We are going to the market this morning. Your sister needs a new dress.’

The perpetual skies of summer were buckled with clouds, the trees rigged with their own blooming seeds as I walked along the market beside my mother. Suddenly, there was a shout and a cry from afar. ‘They’re back! They’re back,’ shouted a page boy as he ran past me.

‘Who are back?’ I shouted back, tiptoeing in hopes of seeing through the crowd.

‘The army!’ yelled the page boy, waving today’s papers, ‘Didn’t you read the news? Here, take one.’ With that, he disappeared into the crowd.



I pushed through waves and waves of people struggling to have a glance at who were arriving through the heavy gates. My eyes met with dozens of weary eyes — men limping from injuries acquired from the war. Children ran into the arms of their father who returned. A teary eyed mother embraced her son. I saw my father get off the grey truck, and my sister running towards him. When the crowd slowly started to fade out into the openness, I saw him — staggering behind the long line, with his leather bag slung on his drooping shoulders. My heartbeat pounded in my ears as I mouthed his name over and over again. But my words were drowned out by the cries of the crowd. I saw his eyes widen as he recognized me, and for a split second I thought he would say my name — and with that, his head connected with the jagged ground. ‘Chang!’ I screamed, pushing my way through the crowd. I stumbled across to him, my hands scrapping the ground. I held him like a mother cradling her child as his head lolled against my lap, coughing up blood. ‘Help, please. Somebody, anyone, please...’ Before I could mutter another word, hands shot out to grab him from me, people heaved him up on a stretcher. I saw his limbs dangled lifelessly as he was carried away. The crowd cleared to let him pass through, leaving me — a girl in rags with bloody hands, kneeling in the middle of the streets with tears tracking down her face.

The sky crackled with the coming monsoon, as the rain poured down on the old city of Shanghai. So did the dam break for me. Once the first tear broke free, the rest followed in an endless stream. I bent forward, pressing my palms against the hard pebbles until the cracks welled up with my own blood, I had not known fear when the Japanese broke our windows with their rifles, but I know it now — when I saw life drain out of his eyes. The cold wash that went down your back, the lead weight in your stomach. Fear, cold raw ebbing fear.

A few days later

They would not let me see him. ‘Inner hemorrhage’ I heard one of them say. ‘He is not well enough to see you,’ they say. ‘But what if he would never be well enough?’ I would retort, ‘Would you let me see him then?’ At that, they looked at each other and then told me to run along.

I paced around my room, fists clenching and unclenching. The cold air swirled around me but my insides were on fire. My heart thundered on as dark thoughts roamed my head. Letting out an agonizing cry, I flopped down on my bed and attempted to sleep. Failing miserably, every time I closed my eyelids, all I saw was the dreadful sight of him falling and falling to the ground, and me — failing to catch him.

I tossed and turned in the events of a never ending nightmare, until I made up my mind — to barge through the hospital doors at first light, unyielding to anyone who dared to stop me.

That morning

That morning’s serene start to the day was a strong indication that the day would not end the same. I walked along a narrow path until I came to a rusty gate. The gate made an unpleasant creak as I forced them open. The overgrown grass glistened in the sun which was blazing in the cloudless sky.

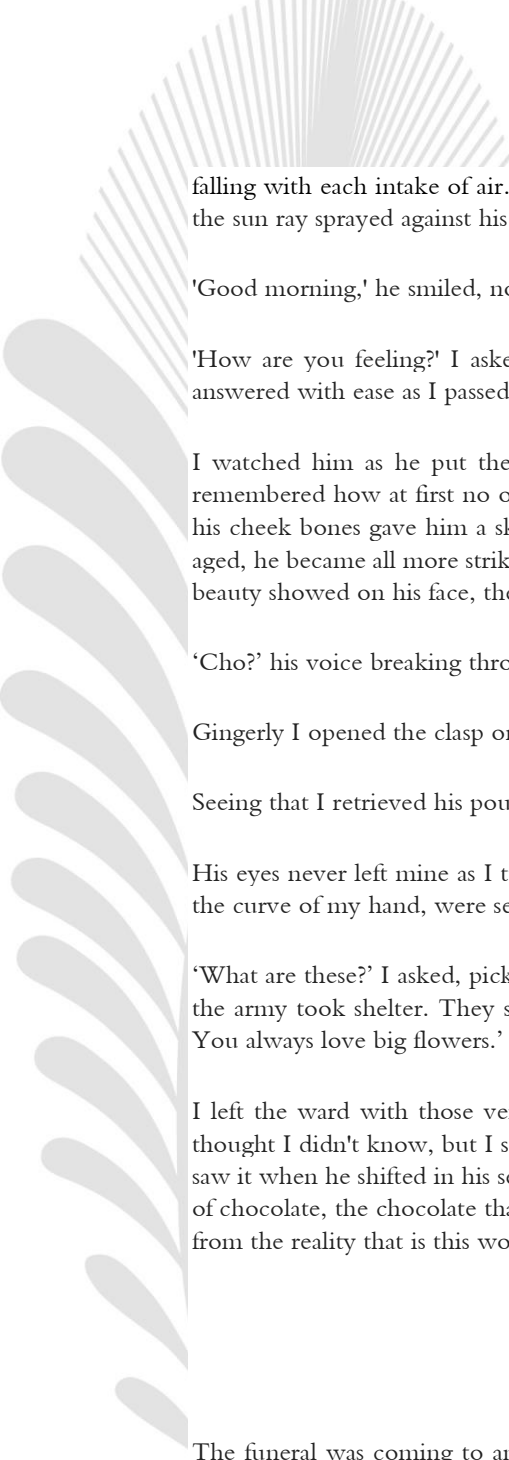
I reached the hospital, a huge building consisting of several wings with a clock in the middle. The whole approach to the hospital was full of people waiting to be examined or waiting to see their relatives.

‘You again?’ greeted the doctor as he saw me pace through the hallway with a look of determination plastered on my face. ‘He’s still not well enough —’ he began. ‘I don’t care,’ I cut him off abruptly, ‘I didn’t ask for him to be well. I just asked to see him.’

The doctor opened his mouth as if he was about to say something, but closed it as he probably thought better of it.

Through the unending hallways of the hospital, the eerie silence made the faded walls look even menacing. Taking another turn, I found myself in a large room. The radio was on when I walked in, the announcers continuing the same, meaningless conversation. The pale white walls matched the boring bedspreads.

He lay there on the bedside by the window. The tag No.48 circled his wrists. His eyelids closed against the soft light, his breathing steady and relaxed. Not a twitch, not a spasm, barely any movement of his chest rising and



falling with each intake of air. Such was the depth of his oblivion. His eyelids fluttered as he stirred in his sleep, the sun ray sprayed against his freckles. I watched him as he blinked, adjusting to the welcoming morning.

'Good morning,' he smiled, noticing me staring.

'How are you feeling?' I asked, perching myself on an old rocking chair. 'Good, but a little bit thirsty.' He answered with ease as I passed him a drink of water.

I watched him as he put the glass to his lips, the water swished inside the clear glass as his hands shook. I remembered how at first no one except his mother thought Chang handsome as a boy. He was just skinny and his cheek bones gave him a skeletal look. But by his teenage years, he had grown into those features and as he aged, he became all more striking. I always thought that it was because with every passing year, more of his inner beauty showed on his face, the intimidating gaze softened and there was gentleness in his smile.

'Cho?' his voice breaking through my trance, 'Can you reach inside my bag please? There's a pouch there.'

Gingerly I opened the clasp on his leather bag, my fingers glazed over foreign objects until I felt the soft velvet.

Seeing that I retrieved his pouch, he said, 'Open it.'

His eyes never left mine as I turned the pouch on my palm. And there, dropping out from the velvet, sitting in the curve of my hand, were seeds.

'What are these?' I asked, picking up one to examine. 'I saw the most beautiful flowers on the river bank where the army took shelter. They smelt like caramel and looked like giant turnips.' He mused. 'I thought of you – You always love big flowers.'

I left the ward with those very seeds nestled in my fist. He seemed well enough, or he tried to, at least. He thought I didn't know, but I saw it in his eyes. I saw it when his hands shook, struggling to hold the thin glass. I saw it when he shifted in his seat, the decades of battles had done its damage. I saw his eyes, the unchanging hues of chocolate, the chocolate that melted at the slightest touch from love. But that chocolate could also grow cold from the reality that is this world, a world of arrows and bullets.

Shanghai 2017

The funeral was coming to an end, everyone stood in salute as they passed the coffin whispering last words of peace. As I neared the altar, Mrs Chang beckoned me forward. 'Cho, when I was clearing his room, I found a box. It was his father's and then it became his.' She sniffed, wiping away a stray tear. 'I found a letter inside, addressed to you. Here, I didn't open it.' Taking the tea-stained envelope from Mrs Chang's shaky hands, I gave her a hug and told her I would come by for dinner.

The letter was marked with scrawny handwriting, the splotchy ink making it hard to read. He must have written this in his last days, I realised, acknowledging the quiet breaking of my heart. My hands trembled as I opened the envelope. He didn't write much, only a few lines scattered across the yellowish parchment.

You can survive it, he wrote, And that's all I want. You can find your own place in this world with your strength alone....Cho, star of my heart, be brave. I saw terrible things on the march, and did unspeakable things. Do not mourn my death, dearest. It is what I deserved. Farewell, my angel. Go back to your garden. Plant your seeds, watch them grow. If more of us valued cheers and songs above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.'

A teardrop rolled down my cheek as I brushed my fingers across the places where the pen had made indentions.

He was so young, I murmured as tears stung my eyes. So young.

I reached into my pocket, caressing the tiny seeds. I stayed seated under the sunlight for the full hour, going



over his letter a thousand times until I knew it by heart. Then, as I promised, I went back to my overgrown garden, and started digging.

Somewhere, in an alternative universe, a boy's tree has just spouted its first flower.

The Tales of Magnolia

Leung Shek Chee College, Liu, Carolyn – 16

2000, Shanghai.

Under a gigantic magnolia tree, two gravestones were embedded into the soil, standing next to each other. Surrounding them were numerous blooming magnolias, representing the Shanghai city and the pure love between the two.

1946, Shanghai.

A girl was on her way to her new home. She was engaged to a man and was ready to start a new life with him. "Camellia, are you on your way now?" The man's voice came out from the rotary telephone. "Yes, I'm nearly there." Camellia hanged up the telephone handset and saw that a magnolia had fallen onto her hand. Surprised, she realised that on her left was a gigantic magnolia tree. Looking at the sparkling engagement ring on her left hand, a myriad of emotions flooded over. "It'd been ten years since ..." She knew, that it was time to let go of those memories. Slowly, she stepped out of the telephone booth and sat under the magnolia tree, ready to recall these bitter-sweet memories one last time and then bury them in the deepest part of her heart.

1936, Shanghai.

"Please? It's fun! I promise! Joining the Book Club's my lifelong dream! Come on, join it with me, will you?" Camellia wasn't a girl who loved reading, but since her friend Yelena begged her so hard, Camellia had no choice but to join the Book Club together with her. However, she regretted this decision as soon as she found out that the activities were nothing more than reading.

"Who promised that this is fun?" she groaned and glared at Yelena, who was reading beside her.

"Try grab a book and you'll know how enjoyable reading is!" Yelena smiled.

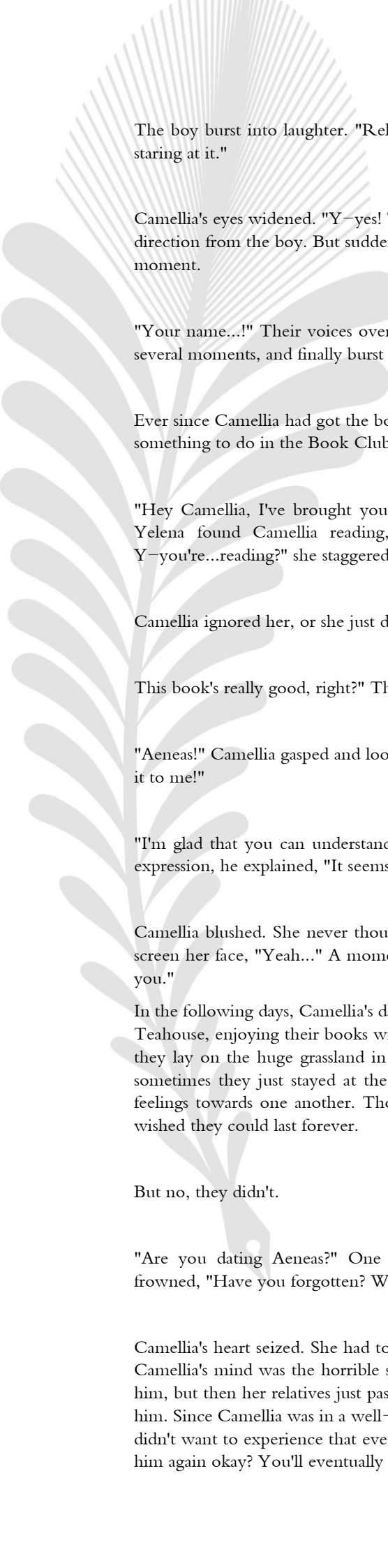
"You know that I hate reading!" Camellia howled angrily.

"Sorry!" Yelena giggled and ran off. Having nothing to do, Camellia could only sit and wait for the reading period to end. Meanwhile, she saw a boy at the corner, reading quietly just by himself. She wondered, 'He looks really hooked onto that book. Is it really that good?' She was really curious and couldn't stop giving the boy sidelong glances.

The boy wasn't handsome at all, but since he looked so focused and serious when he was reading, Camellia couldn't help being deeply attracted by him. Every day, Camellia just stared at the boy fixedly and did nothing. Finally, their eyes met.

Carrying the book in his hands, the boy walked towards Camellia. "Are you ... one of my fans?" he asked, with a puzzled expression.

Camellia's face went bright red. "N-no, I.I..I'm ju-just...t-there's a mosquito on...on y-your face s-so..." she stuttered.



The boy burst into laughter. "Relax, I was only kidding," he smiled, "So, you want this book? You're always staring at it."

Camellia's eyes widened. "Y—yes! Thank you...!" Claspng the book in her hands, Camellia went in the opposite direction from the boy. But suddenly something flashed into both their minds and they both turned at the same moment.

"Your name...!" Their voices overlapped. Frozen, their eyebrows raised. They gazed into each other's eyes for several moments, and finally burst out laughing.

Ever since Camellia had got the book, she got hooked onto it and fell in deep love with reading. She finally had something to do in the Book Club.

"Hey Camellia, I've brought you something today to keep you awake during the reading period—" When Yelena found Camellia reading, her mouth fell wide open. "Oh my god! I can't believe my eyes! Y—you're...reading?" she staggered back in shock.

Camellia ignored her, or she just didn't notice her, as she was totally lost in her book.

This book's really good, right?" The boy's voice broke her trance.

"Aeneas!" Camellia gasped and looked at the book in her hands, "This book's great! Thanks so much for lending it to me!"

"I'm glad that you can understand how enjoyable reading is," smiled Aeneas. Looking at Camellia's confused expression, he explained, "It seems that you hated reading before I lent you the book."

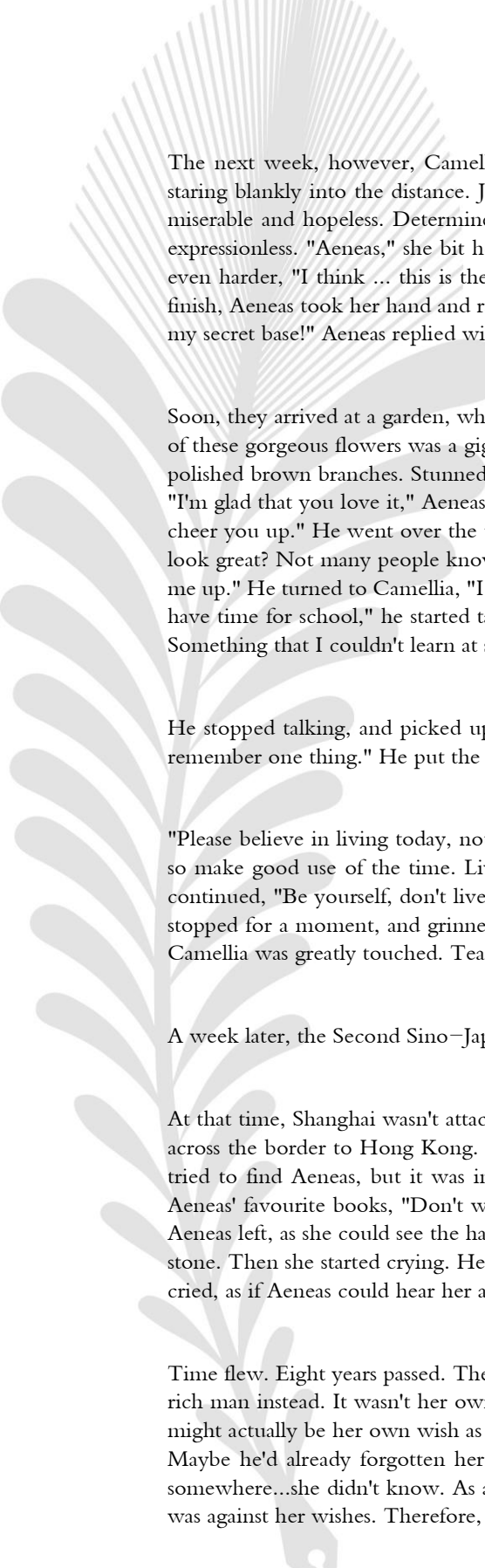
Camellia blushed. She never thought that Aeneas would've noticed her. She bowed her head, letting her hair screen her face, "Yeah..." A moment later, she looked up and smiled, "But now I've become a bookworm like you."

In the following days, Camellia's daily routine was reading with Aeneas. Sometimes they stayed at the Huxinting Teahouse, enjoying their books with the aromatic Chinese tea and the exquisite scenery of the lake; Sometimes they lay on the huge grassland in Jessfield Park, read while smelling the lovely scent of the freshly-cut grass; sometimes they just stayed at the Book Club. Slowly, they fell in love, but neither of them expressed their feelings towards one another. Those were the simplest days, but also the happiest days in Camellia's life. She wished they could last forever.

But no, they didn't.

"Are you dating Aeneas?" One day, Yelena asked Camellia. Watching Camellia's face reddened, Yelena frowned, "Have you forgotten? What'll happen if your father knows about this!"

Camellia's heart seized. She had totally forgotten her father. Yelena's words brought back terrible memories. In Camellia's mind was the horrible scene last time when she went too close to a poor boy. She didn't even love him, but then her relatives just passed around rumors that she was in love with the boy and was going out with him. Since Camellia was in a well-off family, the rumors caused big trouble among her family's social circle. She didn't want to experience that ever again. Seeing her friend's body stiffen with fear, Yelena sighed, "Don't meet him again okay? You'll eventually move on and your feelings will fade away with time."



The next week, however, Camellia still went to Jessfield Park on time. She saw Aeneas sitting on the grass, staring blankly into the distance. Just the sight of him made Camellia happy, but at the same time it made her miserable and hopeless. Determined, she decided to put an end to this. She strode up to Aeneas, trying to be expressionless. "Aeneas," she bit her lower lip. "Oh, hi!" Aeneas' cheerful expression made Camellia bit her lip even harder, "I think ... this is the last time ..." Words fell out from her trembling lips. Before Camellia could finish, Aeneas took her hand and ran towards the woods. Surprised, Camellia asked, "Where're we going?" "To my secret base!" Aeneas replied with a naughty smile.

Soon, they arrived at a garden, where numerous enchanting and blushing flowers were blooming. In the middle of these gorgeous flowers was a gigantic tree filled with white blossoms, sitting proudly on the perch among the polished brown branches. Stunned by the majestic beauty of the tree, Camellia was unable to say a single word. "I'm glad that you love it," Aeneas smiled, "you don't seem very happy these days, so I thought this scenery will cheer you up." He went over the tree and sat under it. Camellia followed. "This is the magnolia tree. Doesn't it look great? Not many people know about this place. I always come here when I'm upset. It never fails to cheer me up." He turned to Camellia, "I was born in a poor family. I have to work in order to make a living, so I don't have time for school," he started talking about himself. "That's why I love reading so much. It taught me a lot. Something that I couldn't learn at school."

He stopped talking, and picked up a magnolia landed beside him. "I don't know why you're upset, but please remember one thing." He put the magnolia on Camellia's hair.

"Please believe in living today, not in yesterday, nor in tomorrow. You won't know what'll happen tomorrow, so make good use of the time. Live in the present and make it beautiful." He gazed into Camellia's eyes, and continued, "Be yourself, don't live for anyone. Live for yourself, do what you want, as you only live once." He stopped for a moment, and grinned, "I learn all these from books. You'll always be happy if you live like this." Camellia was greatly touched. Tears filled her eyes. Yet, she hid her true feelings behind her tears.

A week later, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out. That was 7th July, 1937.

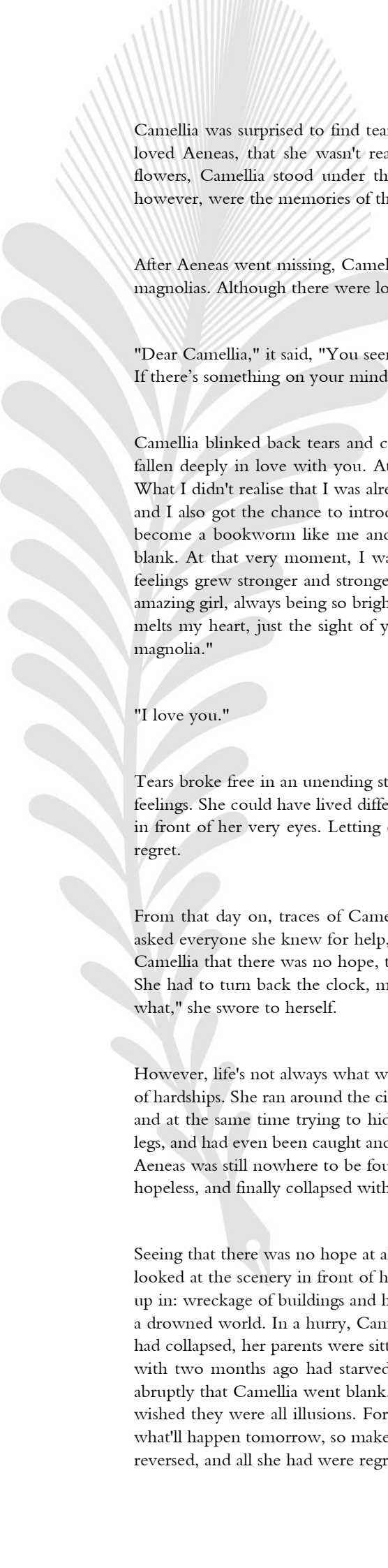
At that time, Shanghai wasn't attacked yet. However, everyone panicked. Hundreds and thousands of them fled across the border to Hong Kong. Some of them remained in Shanghai, where Camellia was one of them. She tried to find Aeneas, but it was impossible in such utter chaos. All she'd found was a note, hidden in one of Aeneas' favourite books, "Don't worry, we'll meet again someday. I promise." It was written in a hurry before Aeneas left, as she could see the handwriting was quite messy. When Camellia first saw the note, she froze like a stone. Then she started crying. Her tears landed on the words and they became blurry. She cried, and cried, and cried, as if Aeneas could hear her and come back for her.

Time flew. Eight years passed. The war had ended, but Camellia still hadn't found Aeneas. She was engaged to a rich man instead. It wasn't her own wish, but she had to save her family, which was brought low by the war. It might actually be her own wish as well, since she didn't know whether Aeneas remembered the promise or not. Maybe he'd already forgotten her. Maybe he wasn't waiting for her anymore. Maybe he had his own family somewhere...she didn't know. As a girl, Camellia was taught to grin and bear it, and she mustn't resist even if it was against her wishes. Therefore, she ended up having the big, sparkling ring on her finger.

Camellia's thoughts came back to the present. 'So it ends here,' she thought. Slowly, she stood up, scraped away the leaves on her skirt, and was ready to step into her new journey.

The tales of old Shanghai should end here—

But it didn't.



Camellia was surprised to find tears all over her face. She didn't want to admit it, but she realised that she still loved Aeneas, that she wasn't ready to move on yet. Surrounded by the innumerable lovely and gorgeous flowers, Camellia stood under the gigantic magnolia tree and got lost in memories once again. This time, however, were the memories of the eight-year war.

After Aeneas went missing, Camellia found another letter left by him in the Book Club, along with a bunch of magnolias. Although there were lots of creases on the paper, it was still readable.

"Dear Camellia," it said, "You seem tired and upset these days. I hope the Magnolia garden cheers you up a bit. If there's something on your mind, don't hesitate to talk about it with me. I'm always here for you."

Camellia blinked back tears and continued reading, "You may be surprised, but since the day we've met, I've fallen deeply in love with you. At that time, however, everything in my mind was to get you to love books. What I didn't realise that I was already under your spell. Thanks to fate, we got the chance to know each other, and I also got the chance to introduce you to a good book." Camellia's face burnt. "When you said that you'd become a bookworm like me and gave me the warmest smile in the world, my heart raced. My mind went blank. At that very moment, I was drawn to you. I was addicted to you." It continued, "As days passed, my feelings grew stronger and stronger. Ever since I've met you, my life has never been the same. You're such an amazing girl, always being so bright and cheerful. Your warm smile lights up my whole world, your sweet voice melts my heart, just the sight of you makes my day. I've totally fallen for you, for the girl who is as pure as a magnolia."

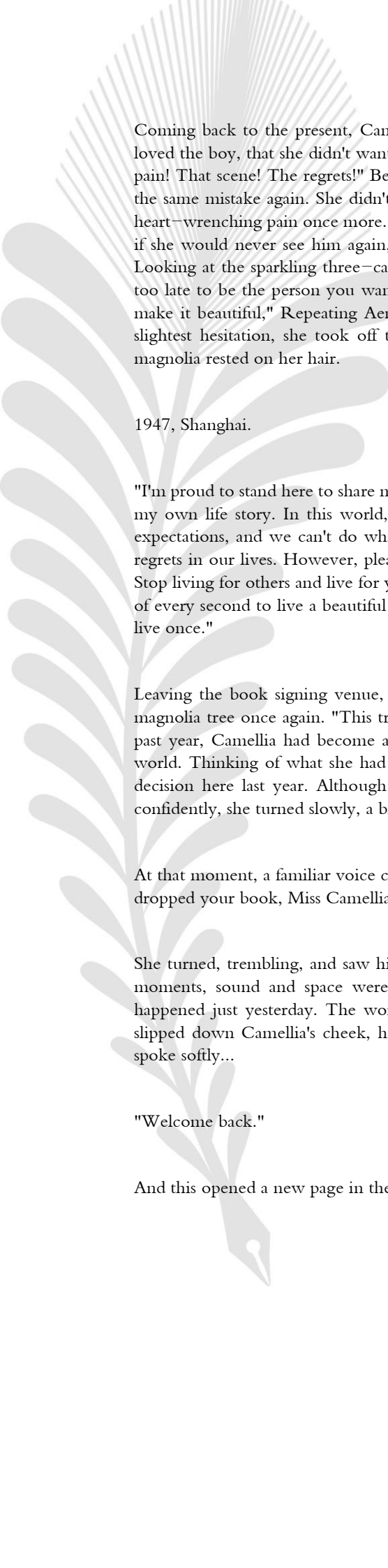
"I love you."

Tears broke free in an unending stream on Camellia's face. She bitterly regretted her choice, for hiding her true feelings. She could have lived differently, she could have been there with him, but she just let the chance slip by in front of her very eyes. Letting out a heart-wrenching wail, Camellia broke down and fell asleep in tears of regret.

From that day on, traces of Camellia could be found all around the city, trying to find her beloved. She had asked everyone she knew for help, but Aeneas was still nowhere to be found. Days passed, everyone was telling Camellia that there was no hope, telling her to give up, but she didn't want to let chances slip away once more. She had to turn back the clock, make up for what she'd lost, and leave no regrets. "I must find him, no matter what," she swore to herself.

However, life's not always what we want it to be. In order to find her beloved, Camellia went through all kinds of hardships. She ran around the city every day, trying to find every single piece of news of Aeneas' whereabouts, and at the same time trying to hide from the invaders. During the worst times, she was mistakenly shot in the legs, and had even been caught and interrogated due to suspicious activities. After all Camellia had gone through, Aeneas was still nowhere to be found. There wasn't even a single piece of his news. Camellia had never been so hopeless, and finally collapsed with huge grief and wounds all over her body.

Seeing that there was no hope at all, Camellia finally gave up locating Aeneas. For the first time she stopped and looked at the scenery in front of her. She was shocked to find out the huge changes of the city where she grew up in: wreckage of buildings and houses, numerous cracks on the ground, corpses lying everywhere...It was like a drowned world. In a hurry, Camellia went back home as fast as she could, and gasped in horror. Her mansion had collapsed, her parents were sitting on the road with tattered clothes, the kind neighbour she had just chatted with two months ago had starved to death, Yelena had been killed by a flying missile...All of these came so abruptly that Camellia went blank. "Was this all a nightmare...?" She wished all of this was just a nightmare, she wished they were all illusions. For the first time, Camellia understood what Aeneas meant by 'you won't know what'll happen tomorrow, so make good use of the time'. However, it was already too late. Time could never be reversed, and all she had were regrets.



Coming back to the present, Camellia wiped away the tears on her face. She finally understood that she still loved the boy, that she didn't want to get married to the rich man at all. "How could I forget? That letter! That pain! That scene! The regrets!" Being mad at herself, Camellia, at the same time, was glad that she didn't make the same mistake again. She didn't want to experience regrets ever again. She wasn't sure if she could bear the heart-wrenching pain once more. Even if Aeneas had already forgotten her, even if he had his own family, even if she would never see him again, she didn't want to marry the rich man and live up to others' expectations. Looking at the sparkling three-carat diamond ring, Camellia had never been so clear on her mind. "It's never too late to be the person you want to be. Treasure your time and do what you want. Live in the present and make it beautiful," Repeating Aeneas' words in a small voice, Camellia finally made her choice. Without the slightest hesitation, she took off the dazzling ring and walked into the alley in a different direction, with a magnolia rested on her hair.

1947, Shanghai.

"I'm proud to stand here to share my book with all of you today. My new book, 'Tales of Magnolia', was actually my own life story. In this world, life's not always what we want it to be. We're always living up to others' expectations, and we can't do what we really want to do because of the harsh reality. There might be lots of regrets in our lives. However, please remember one thing. It's never too late to be the person you want to be. Stop living for others and live for yourself. You won't know what'll happen tomorrow, so please make good use of every second to live a beautiful life. Live in the present, and do what you want to do. Remember, you only live once."

Leaving the book signing venue, Camellia made her way back home. On her way home, she passed by the magnolia tree once again. "This tree really brought back lots of memories." she muttered to herself. Over the past year, Camellia had become a famous writer and was sharing her experiences with people all around the world. Thinking of what she had been through, Camellia smiled. She was really glad that she made the right decision here last year. Although she still hadn't found her beloved, she was satisfied with her life. Smiling confidently, she turned slowly, a bit reluctant to leave.

At that moment, a familiar voice chimed behind her. A voice that she had longed to hear for ten years. "You've dropped your book, Miss Camellia."

She turned, trembling, and saw him holding a book, her 'Tales of Magnolia'. Their eyes met. For the briefest moments, sound and space were non-existent, all the past memories appeared before them as if they all happened just yesterday. The world fell away, drained of all color but him, standing in the sunlight. A tear slipped down Camellia's cheek, her mouth falling open to the softest of gasps. She smiled through tears, and spoke softly...

"Welcome back."

And this opened a new page in the tales of old Shanghai.

Single Soul Dwelling in Two Bodies

Leung Shek Chee College, Pak, Becky – 16

A wisp of subdued sunlight passed through the window and was condensed on a yellowing memory within a lacework. A young lady in a flowery cheongsam and wearing crimson lipstick stood next to an underprivileged girl in ragged clothes. The smiles on both faces crossed over my presbyopia glasses and a smile was on my face again as I recalled happiness in the past. My sight started to become blurry with a watery layer blocking my field of view. I caressed HER face with calloused fingers. I missed HER so much...

Knock! Knock! 'Pandora! Pandora! Wake up! It's time for us to go to work!' I pounded the door and yelled in front of my best friend's wooden house.

'Ouch! Wait me for a minute! I don't want to be late! Please wait for me, Holly! Please!', she begged sincerely.

'Okay, okay! Calm down! I'm here waiting for you! BUT we only have FIVE minutes left to rush to the factory!!' Pandora opened the door immediately and grabbed my hand and we began to run towards the textile factory on this new sunny day in Old Shanghai.

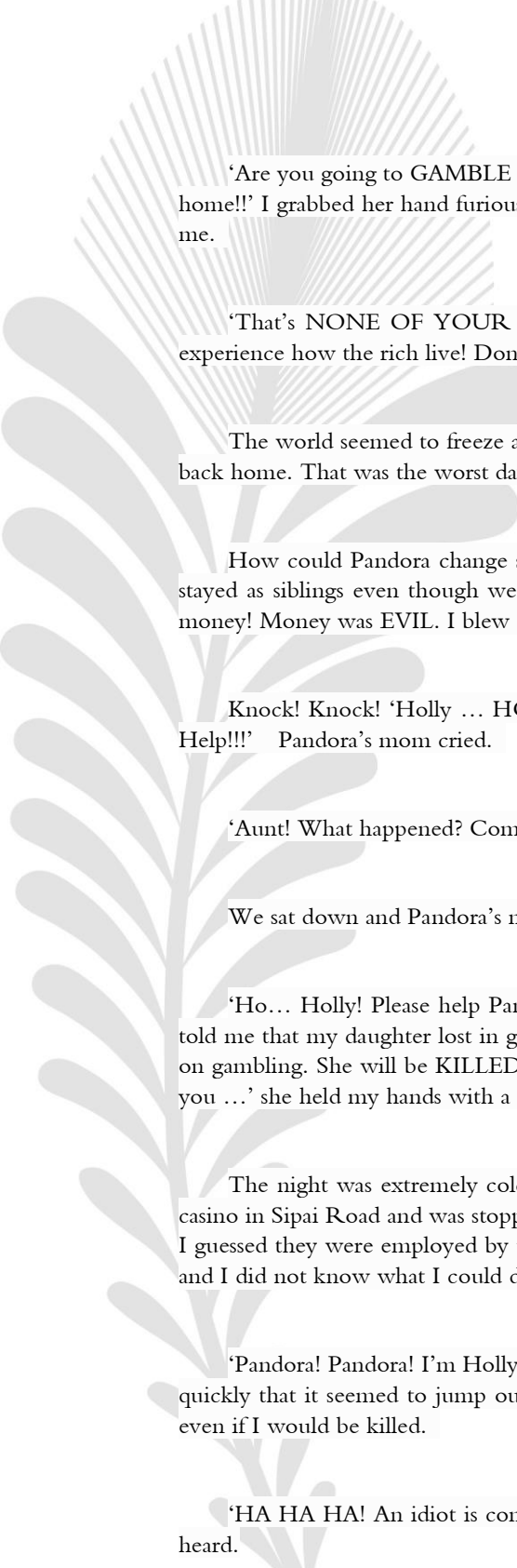
We halted after passing the entrance of the factory and arrived punctually. We giggled at each other and wiped our sweat away with our handkerchiefs. 'We should wake up earlier in the future or else we will experience this exciting process of coming to the factory every day!' I told Pandora and she nodded in delight. We moved towards our seats and started our sewing work.

The sky turned orange at sunset and the shadow of a pair of girls on their way back home stretched long. Pandora and I had been neighbors in Nanshi District since we were born. We came from poor families so we only wore tattered clothes. However, Pandora was a glamorous girl with regular facial features, even though she was in really old clothes. This beauty was what Pandora had been proud of in these years. A great contrast would occur when I stood abreast of her, but I didn't care much about that.

Days shifted and time flew. Pandora and I had worked in the factory for a month so we got our salaries on the last day of the month. Unexpectedly, Pandora got much more than I had even though we had worked for the same length of time! Both of us were shocked at first but I realized something — the manager of the factory was partial to pretty girls — and this result wasn't so unexpected. I kept silent instead of saying anything as Pandora was as smart as me and I guessed she must also understand what the extra wage meant. Things seemed quiet right now, but it was just the lull before the storm.

There is an old saying about how money would kill humanity. When someone has got much more wealth than he had never imagined before, his greed would grow and that was the dark side of humanity. Unsurprisingly, Pandora begun to enjoy her life thanks to the favoritism from the factory's manager. She morphed into a modern and classic lady wearing cheongsam and high-heeled shoes. Prettified with foreign cosmetics, she was more gorgeous than before. She even told me that she would do everything to earn as much wage as she could in order to break away from the poverty and step into the upper-class. Pandora was unfamiliar to me now as she was strange and utilitarian...

'Holly! I have something to do tonight ... so ... you don't need to wait for me to go back home together.' Pandora smiled reservedly to me when we finished our work one day.



‘Are you going to GAMBLE again?! You should stop it or otherwise you would be addicted to it!! Go back home!!’ I grabbed her hand furiously and pulled her to follow me home. She threw off my hand and shouted at me.

‘That’s NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS! We are different! Poor people like you won’t understand and experience how the rich live! Don’t bother me from being a privileged lady! Get away from me, ugly lady!’

The world seemed to freeze at that moment and my heart was broken. I burst into tears and turned to rush back home. That was the worst day in my whole life. I HATE MONEY.

How could Pandora change suddenly? Was money really that important to her? That was ridiculous! We stayed as siblings even though we needed to suffer from hunger in the past ... But we now broke up due to money! Money was EVIL. I blew out the candle and went to bed in a depressed mood.

Knock! Knock! ‘Holly ... HOLLY! Please ... please open ... open the door for me! I’m Pandora’s mom! Help!!!’ Pandora’s mom cried.

‘Aunt! What happened? Come in, please!’ I helped her into my house.

We sat down and Pandora’s mom started sobbing.

‘Ho... Holly! Please help Pandora! She ... she hasn’t come back home yet ... some ... some neighbors told me that my daughter lost in gam...gambling but she still borrowed money from the usury to keep ... keep on gambling. She will be KILLED by the usury! SHE LOST!!! Holly! You must save her!!! I beg you ... I beg you ...’ she held my hands with a hopeful gaze. I nodded instinctively. That was friendship.

The night was extremely cold and the wind stabbed at my face like thousands of needles. I rushed to the casino in Sipai Road and was stopped by a few strong and muscular security guards at the entrance of the casino. I guessed they were employed by the moneylender. Something bad would be happening. My mind went blank and I did not know what I could do to save Pandora...

‘Pandora! Pandora! I’m Holly! I’m here to save you!’ I shouted these words automatically. My heart beat so quickly that it seemed to jump out of my mouth. I wiped my sweat with my hand and waited for a response: even if I would be killed.

‘HA HA HA! An idiot is coming to save you, pretty lady!’ a deep and low and crafty sound of a man was heard.

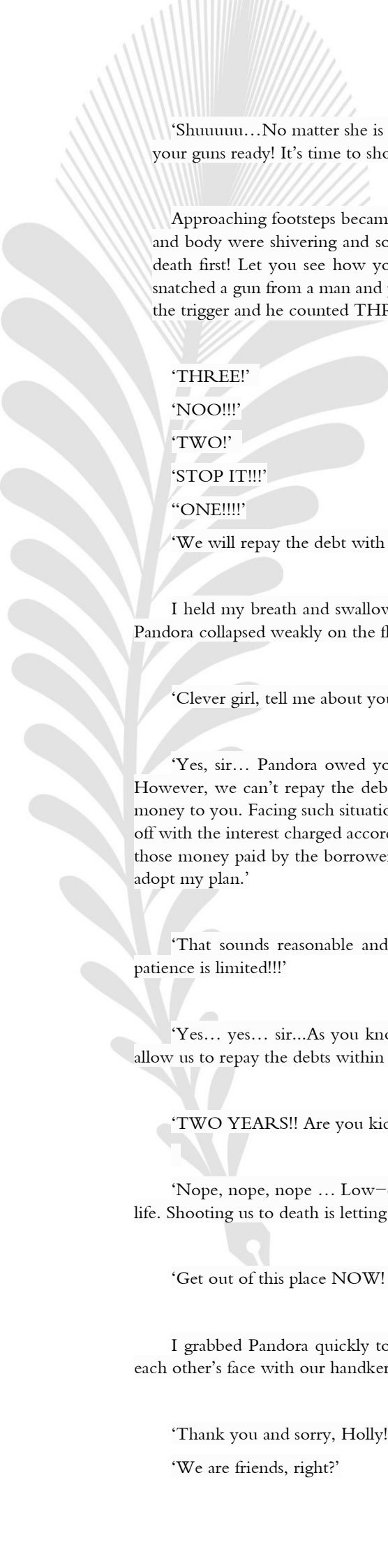
I pretended to be calm but I was shivering internally. Those huge men took one step backward to form a blind alley for me. I stared at this road of no return and was shocked. My shoulders were then held by two powerful men and I was being pushed towards my hell.

I was then pushed over in front of a disgusting and lewd ‘gentleman’. He tugged Pandora’s hair tightly with a filthy smile.

‘Little lady... are you this lady’s friend?’ he pointed at Pandora.

‘Yes!!!’ I answered firmly.

‘Noooo! She’s not my friend. You let her go!!’ Pandora screamed.



‘Shuuuuuu...No matter she is your friend or not, both of you can’t walk out of this door tonight! Men! Get your guns ready! It’s time to shoot!’ the moneylender yelled.

Approaching footsteps became louder and louder and eventually halted beside Pandora and me. My mouth and body were shivering and so were Pandora’s. ‘Who would like to die first? Ha ha... Let you witness her death first! Let you see how you have SAVED her!!!!’ this despicable men talked to me insidiously and he snatched a gun from a man and pointed the muzzle of the gun at Pandora’s head. His forefinger was placed on the trigger and he counted THREE seconds.

‘THREE!’

‘NOO!!!’

‘TWO!’

‘STOP IT!!!’

‘ONE!!!!’

‘We will repay the debt with interest!’

I held my breath and swallowed my saliva to release my nerve. The moneylender pointed the gun at me. Pandora collapsed weakly on the floor and it was my turn to face Azrael.

‘Clever girl, tell me about your plan in detail or else you two must die!!!’

‘Yes, sir... Pandora owed you piles of money and she should repay the debt with interest immediately. However, we can’t repay the debt now and we should be killed. True, there is a loss of life but also a loss of money to you. Facing such situation, why don’t you minimize your loss and maximize your wealth by letting us off with the interest charged according to the inflation rate? You have lost in the past as the purchasing power of those money paid by the borrowers to you reduced in the future. Nevertheless, you won’t lose anything if you adopt my plan.’

‘That sounds reasonable and beneficial to me...but I’m not going to extend the repayment time! My patience is limited!!!’

‘Yes... yes... sir...As you know that, poor people like us don’t have much money now and I beg you to allow us to repay the debts within ... within two ...TWO years. PLEASE!!!’

‘TWO YEARS!! Are you kidding?! ’

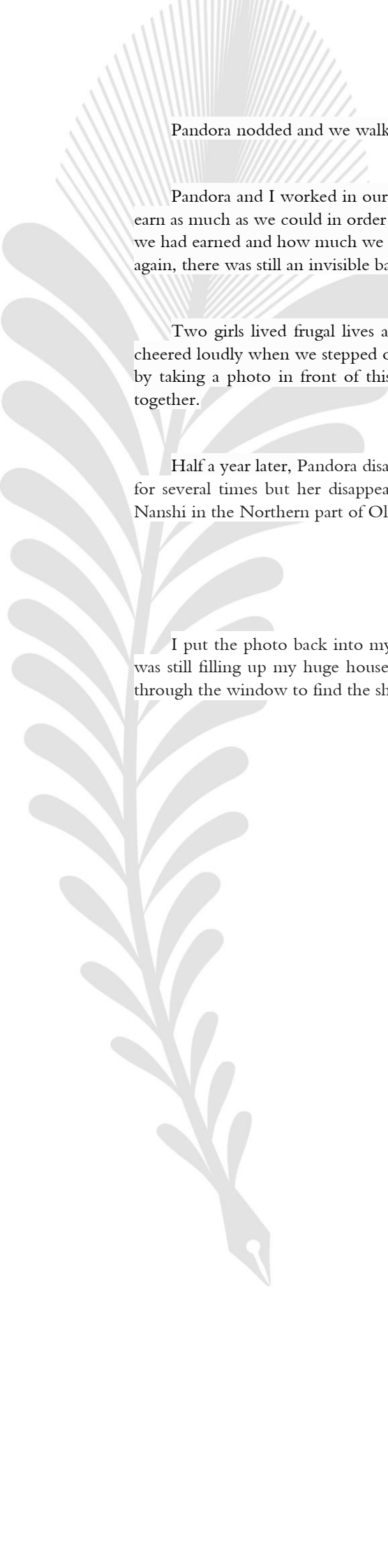
‘Nope, nope, nope ... Low-class people like us need more time to struggle and experience the hardship of life. Shooting us to death is letting us off lightly and wasting yours bullets. Right?’

‘Get out of this place NOW! Do what you’ve promised!!’

I grabbed Pandora quickly to escape from the casino. We smiled at one another and wiped the sweat off each other’s face with our handkerchiefs. That was a familiar moment we have experienced before.

‘Thank you and sorry, Holly!’ Pandora looked at me with thankfulness and regret.

‘We are friends, right?’



Pandora nodded and we walked back home under the bright moonlight.

Pandora and I worked in our own fields separately after escaping from hell. We worked days and nights to earn as much as we could in order to minimize our loan. We gathered together every night to count how much we had earned and how much we should earn in the following days. Even when we got on well with each other again, there was still an invisible barrier between us and none of us had the incentive to break through it.

Two girls lived frugal lives and we repaid all the debts to the usury after a year and half. Pandora and I cheered loudly when we stepped out of the casino in Sipai Road. We both then decided to record this moment by taking a photo in front of this casino. This is the first time and also the last time for us to take a photo together.

Half a year later, Pandora disappeared when the Sino-Japanese War began. Her family and I looked for her for several times but her disappearance remained a mystery. I survived by escaping to the refugee district of Nanshi in the Northern part of Old Shanghai. I never saw Pandora again. Where did you go, my dearest friend?

I put the photo back into my drawer. Let it be placed inside the darkness and peacefulness. The sunshine was still filling up my huge house with its warmth. I felt warm and embraced myself with my arms. I looked through the window to find the shadow of Old Shanghai and the face of Pandora at the sunset.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Neon Lights at Midnight

Malvern College Qingdao, Chen, Ariel – 15

When I was eight years younger than now, I was wandering in the streets all day. I often took the tram which made by British businessman to Jing'an temple then wander along the nearby trails. In those years of the weekend I was like a scurrying sparrow the sunny countryside fields. I was walking in the field all day scattered on the trail, dragging the muddy path to get dusty, as if the wheels rolling over.

At harvest time, the boss always brought me to look at the fields and his harbor. When hardworking farmer saw him, they would respectfully say:

"Sir"

Every summer, the river is a prosperous scene. There are many cargo ship and bamboo boats on the river like a myriad of lights twinkled in the distance. On the other side of the bank of the river, the high rise—building is the customs house, Shanghai. It is undoubtedly a significant port for the voyage of the ocean's or its trade dealings. A few years ago when I was managing the harbor of my boss, I always saw some cargo ship from the West, carrying a full ship of arms or opium, coming toward to the harbor like some dark clouds coming. After the ban on foreign trade, I did not see the foreign ship which often called here. The original busy port has become a little quiet.

A few years ago, purely by chance, I left my old boss and joined the army. To be precise, I was rarely a watchdog of a great warlord. In the days when I was a soldier in his army, I was just to protect his house. Every day the visit like in an endless stream, layer upon layer without an end. These people were nothing more than some foreign traders and local squire nouveau riche. The opening of Shanghai to the World did not merely bring a number of foreign merchants, it also brought a lot of external erecting and factory. At that time, Shanghai was not like a city ruled by Qing Dynasty government, it was more like a colony which was divided by some of foreign countries.

Because of my job, I was living in the concession which were full of novelty shops. My house is small and it was crowded in two fashionable foreign firm. My house is fully ugly. Fortunately, it is small and nobody notice it. Consequently, I had shared the same view with my neighbors. The rich and luxury scene of their life like a snake caught my mind and let me felt my life is really depressed that it is hard to breathe.

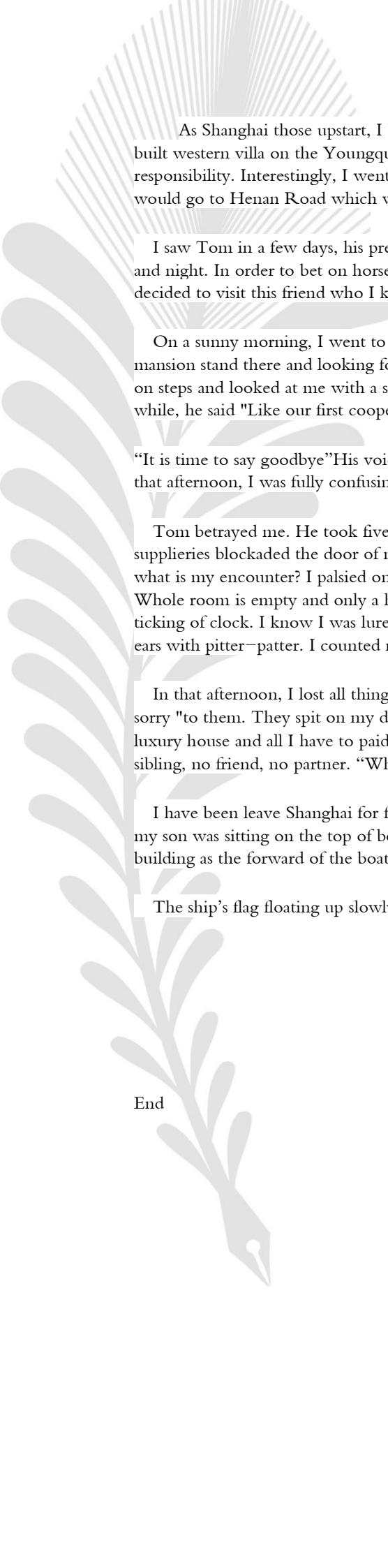
Because of a special opportunity, I got an unexpected huge fortune. I turned from a little—known citizen to a revered figure. I was often accompanied by business to the harbor to see goods. Tom was my largest customer and we were always sitting on the floor of harbor and saw the ships coming and going.

I am still remember that day, the boat which we were sitting on departed from Wusong mouth, the riverside is all the flat farmland and the fields are crisscrossed by irrigation canals and ditches. Then the boat went over this area, Chinese sailing and hyperpowered gunboats were driving on the river. Subsequently, the ship sailed to the Bund and docked at a port on the French concession.

Tom ordered the workers who were around him with his resonant passionate voice. His appearance of concentration looked a little pathetic because the extent of his ego is better than before. The pavement and the road was full of people and rickshaws passed leisurely beside them. It is full of noise, the noise, the noise. The clatter of rickshaws, the squeak of unicycles, the cries of street hawkers, the blare of steamships and the noise of crowd. The only thing was quiet is the wind. The wind was utterly mild and little wet. In spite of this, the wind sometimes is not so calm.

"You see!" Tom said that with his gruff tenor. "Yes," I said, "Today the wind is more larger than usual." "Indeed , "he said waveringly. "Finish this one, we can have a good rest."

Nanjing Road, my place of entertainment. Nanjing road was full of neon lights at midnight and the street has a variety of stalls and department stores. In the front of the Nanjing Road is my favourite place, New World amusement park. You take a few cents that you can play all day in it and it is also a good place to meet some power because casino and prostitutes are also an important part of here.



As Shanghai those upstart, I bought a new car, bought fashionable costume dress up myself. Like them, built western villa on the Youngquan Road and donated money to the new public facility to show my social responsibility. Interestingly, I went to the church in Xujiahui every week for listening bible. In the evening, I would go to Henan Road which was outside concession to gamble on horse race.

I saw Tom in a few days, his present life was far better than I expected. He vested all casino in Shanghai day and night. In order to bet on horses, he actually shipped many special racing from UK for his entertainment. I decided to visit this friend who I know nothing about him.

On a sunny morning, I went to visit him. His house was more elaborate than I expected. An extravagant mansion stand there and looking for the river bank. The giant door opened to the warm wind. Tom was sitting on steps and looked at me with a smile. Half a year not see Tom, he had become increasingly strong. After a while, he said "Like our first cooperation, the wind is still so". He let out a sigh,

"It is time to say goodbye" His voice sounds very mild, as he have done something that is essential for him. In that afternoon, I was fully confusing about he took French leave until the 5th last month.

Tom betrayed me. He took five or six gigantic vessel which is carrying the goods to the United States. The suppliers blockaded the door of my firm and shouted about the injustice. Their unfair situation was unjust, what is my encounter? I palsied on my wooden floor, looked at the angry people outside through the window. Whole room is empty and only a huge bell in front of me. I was drifting away into a trance and just heard the ticking of clock. I know I was lured to destruction but nothing I can do for it. The ticking rang hollow in my ears with pitter-patter. I counted my fingers to calculate all of my family property and mutter "Sorry."

In that afternoon, I lost all thing that I was had. After a chaotic morning, I opened the door and said "I am sorry "to them. They spit on my door and rebuked me. What they said like an arrow tingled me. I sold my luxury house and all I have to paid the debt. In that evening ,I realized that I was just a homeless tramps. No sibling, no friend, no partner. "Where are those people who was entertained by me?"

I have been leave Shanghai for four years until my son told me he want to see where I had been lived. I and my son was sitting on the top of boat. Sunshine spit up on his immature face .The appearance of those few high building as the forward of the boat more clear.

The ship's flag floating up slowly. My son said: Seethe wind is rising.

End

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Union

Malvern College Qingdao, Cheng, Maxwell – 15

I was born just a few days before the Spring Festival, during the coldest days of the year. But my birth, like a flame in the freezing winter, gave to the whole family, especially to my father, who got me as his first son at the age of about forty which seemed quite late during that period. Therefore, my father coddled me madly, he almost satisfied all my desires, I have never worried about the problem of food and clothing as long as I can remember. I own my private room, have innumerable toys and various clothes which now in retrospect it was impossible for other children to achieve at that time, but it seemed like deservedly to have those in my mind as once I asked my father for something, he would do his best to make it come true, I consider everyone else got the same life as me during my young and ignorant age. Sometimes my mother even could not stand the spoiling, they also quarreled for this more than once in my memory.

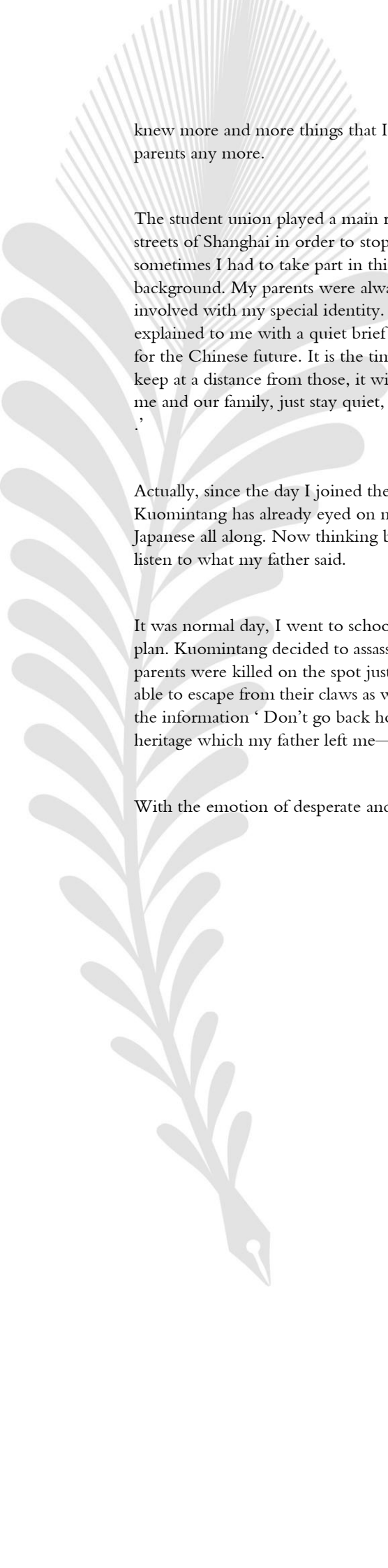
When I grew up, I gradually found I was very special compared to my contemporaries. At the age of school, my father found two knowledgeable teachers for me to let me receive education, it was too hard for me to understand, as I was only a child, why I could not go to school as normal children, I sometimes felt so bored that no one accompanied me in learning. My childhood was passed during this well-fed but slightly insipid life.

I became more and more curious about my family as I was at the age of teenagers, that began to have own understanding of everything. I found lots of strangers going in and out our houses who seemed like soldiers because of the guns on their waists, but they looked very scared of my father. I don't know why, but I could feel it in the air.

I still remember that summer night which was too hot to fall asleep. It was midnight, I wanted to get some water from the kitchen. On the way, I found that the study's light was still on, out of curiosity, I fell in the doorway to listen. My father was having a meeting while playing mahjong with his followers. That is his special way of having meetings. I heard a deep voice 'this plan of city defense is absolutely confidential, we have got this in our hands for one day, no one can take us.' Then I heard my father say 'the existence of this map should only be known by the people sitting here today, even your family don't have the rights to know, if this secret is leaked out to the public, don not blame me for the ruthless. You know I am the person who disgust the traitors most.' I accidentally smashed the vase near the door into pieces, the crackling sound resounded in the house, my father yelled inside 'who was outside? Catch him, don't let him go!' A man like a giant in my mind with frightened beard rushed out of the room immediately with a gun holding in his hand and pointing to me, I was totally shocked then ran to my father without thinking. My father stared at that man angrily which hinted at him to put his gun away while clasped me in his arm and said to me 'it's all right, it's getting late, you need to be in your bed for sleeping.' I went back to my bedroom, but I could not fall asleep at all. I was wondering about all the things happened tonight. What the map meant, why my father doesn't want others to know and why they were all very anxious about being caught? This puzzled me deeply.

The next day, my mother wanted to talk to me, I knew it was for the things happened last night. I sat on the sofa, playing with my fingers, strained to the roof that I was even afraid to look at my mother's eyes directly. My mother talked to me genially while touching my head 'You are not a young boy any more, maybe it was the time to tell you something about the family. As you know since the Qing Dynasty extinct, the country was torn apart by the warlords, each warlord was controlling his own region. Your father was a marvelous person who survive in the wars and splits among the warlords successfully, and became in charge of Shanghai, whether the Kuomintang or the Japanese, they both dreaded about the power of your father in Shanghai. That's why you could have the life that everybody dreamt. Please cherish this hard-earned life. You will never understand the effort your father has put to reach this height and own today's status. Forget about the things happened last night, it's still too hard to explain to your age. Just pretend it didn't happen at all, both for you and our family.'

To be honest, I was still confused even my mother had explained to me at that age. I was kind of selfish that I thought it 's unnecessary to care about other's feeling, as long as I was happy. Later on, as I went to university, I



knew more and more things that I even could not imagine before. I was not that little boy who was blocked by parents any more.

The student union played a main role along with Japan declare war on China. It held parades across the main streets of Shanghai in order to stop the civil war and against the foreign aggression. As a member of the union, sometimes I had to take part in this kind of public assembly, however it was not very appropriate for my family background. My parents were always opposed to my behavior that time, they considered that I should not get involved with my special identity. I couldn't remember how many times I argued with them, my father always explained to me with a quiet brief voice 'It is useless to do those unnecessary resistance, there was no hope at all for the Chinese future. It is the time to make some changes now. As a son of me, you know that you should keep at a distance from those, it will create a bad impression if somebody else recognize that. Sometimes both for me and our family, just stay quiet, you won't worry about the rest of your life, we have already planned for you.'

Actually, since the day I joined the student union, the danger was closing to me and my family step by step. The Kuomintang has already eyed on my father for a long time, they doubted the trade between my father and the Japanese all along. Now thinking back, I was too young to distinguish right and wrong, maybe it was right to listen to what my father said.

It was normal day, I went to school as usual in the morning. However, the thing I wasn't aware happened as the plan. Kuomintang decided to assassinate our family in order to establish authority among people in Shanghai. My parents were killed on the spot just in our house, and the nanny who looked after me for over 15 years was not able to escape from their claws as well. The guard who accompanied my father for 20 years risk his live to tell me the information 'Don't go back home!' What's more, he also brought me the only as well as the most important heritage which my father left me—a stamp collection.

With the emotion of desperate and furious, I set foot on the road of vengeance.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – The Fang

Malvern College Qingdao, Huang, Claire – 14

1

It was a dark night, just like every other nights in Shanghai, both light and darkness, wealth and poverty, justice and guilt, happiness and hopelessness were gathering in Shanghai.

That was the night of 15th May 1932, people were going to sleep or work just like it was another ordinary day. Everything was normal. Or maybe, just seemed like normal.

In a small alley, a young man with dark bright eyes was standing stiffly and quietly, his wolf tooth necklace was shining under the moon. He was so awful that even the air was frozen. There were some corpses with huge frozen fright on their faces, which made the standing young man even more like a brutal bloody demon from the hell.

"Have a good dream", said the man grimly, and he showed no emotion after that, but turned around and left those hopeless corpse.

2

We entered into the water, which was very unaccountable for me. However, Shang was also following the team, and I had those equipment, so there was nothing to be afraid of. Not to mention that I was an assassin, so I wasn't even afraid of death anymore.

This was a exploration team. The reason I joined this team was because their employer Shang was my next target.

Who was I? I was an assassin. I was no longer a boy, but not yet a man.

Nobody knew my real name, neither did I. My parents? They died a long time ago. Those people who were also assassins and paid money to assassins for killing people always call me "Jo Black".

I knew I was wearing a wolf tooth as a necklace, but I didn't know where I got it. I had had it since I was very young.

It was quiet comfortable to swim in the sea, although those equipment was heavy, but it was still enjoyable. As we submerged deeper and deeper, we could see some beautiful fishes swim freely in the water, it is reminding me one word: freedom.

After a while, I saw a big rock with a hole in front of us, and we entered in immediately. After we all entered, I could see nothing but darkness.

It was really rare for me to just relax and flow freely in the water surrounded by darkness. Can you imagine that? You just relax your whole body in the darkness. You can't see or hear anything. You can touch nothing but water around you. It was like nothing in the whole world can bother you, and you're flowing freely in a mysterious space which is isolated from the whole world.

I worked in the darkness, so I understood how much they were afraid of darkness, because darkness means unknown and hidden guilt or traps. However, people can't always see the real darkness around us, or tell it apart from the good and the bright

Suddenly, a bright light appeared and illuminated the space around us. The light came from Shang's searchlight, which started to shine the bottom the the hole.

I looked down with the light, and I actually could see something that was looming, but I couldn't see it clearly. However, I spotted something that made me apprehensive.

There are some creatures with strong attack and in a big size...

I can't go down. I told myself. However, those people were crazy. I tried my best to stop them by using body language when they were going down. However, nobody listened to me. All of them just started to dive down immediately. Come on, those people were so brave. What on earth was this group?

Should I go back? No! I'm going to kill Shang, who was diving down to the bottom!

As we were going down, all of us could see those big wired things moving slowly on the bottom. Their shapes were very weird, but we still couldn't see clearly what they were.

Everybody started to feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Nobody could describe what made them weird. It was like you couldn't really tell why it was weird but you could definitely feel it.

If one word had to be chosen to describe it, it would be: thrilling.

Shang was much braver than I thought. He immediately took out his weapon, and continued to dive down. I had no choice, because I didn't leave any other choices for myself.

I was getting closer and closer to the bottom, also to those creatures, and I could see clearer and clearer... I hold my sword tighter and tighter... Oh my! I suddenly relaxed my body after I saw those "creature".

Those were just some sea plants.

However, I still couldn't really relax... Why? I couldn't understand, but I still felt something's not right. Wait... why were there so many sea plants? There was no sunshine which meant plants couldn't survive...

I suddenly felt a chill.

Suddenly, a huge thing promptly burst into us and I was dumped by a great force. That happened so quickly that when I saw it, my body was already far away from them.

It was a huge monstrous fish, which had the size of a car, big sharp teeth and horrible out-looking.

It had really strong attack. I felt very painful, and my mind was not even clear after that, but the fish suddenly came to me and wanted to attack me. I couldn't control my body very well at that time, and my mind was also not clear, so that I couldn't dodge it.

When I was ready to sustain the attack, the fish suddenly stopped a little bit. That was just a little and it was even not a stop but just a deceleration. However, this "little" for me was a big favourable turn. Because of that, I dodged the attack from the huge fish and successfully hurt it with my sword.

The fish started to bleed, but even though the wound it got still didn't concern it a lot, because its scale were too hard, so the wound it got was not really deep.

Anyway, I was rescued. Afterwards, I looked for the "thing" which decelerated it and I found that was Huang Chenyang, the only person here I like.

The fish was very prompt. It quickly stopped and turned to us, and we immediately started to move away. But we were much slower in the water. So I had no idea when the fish dashed to Chenyang fiercely in an awful speed which we'll never have.

No! I shouted in my mind. Chenyang's impossible to live in front of the enemy which had very high strong attack and high speed! I swam to him as fast as I could, although I knew I couldn't reach him on time.

However, Chenyang was very brave, he dodged promptly and immediately put his sword insert into one of its eyes. He saved himself, and hurt the fish powerfully, but he was still stroked by the fish, and the bag he carried was swallowed by it.

I could see Chenyang was dizzy after the collision, but the fish was still going to attack him, at that moment, I quickly caught its barbel and pull it with all of my strength, and put my sword insert to the another eye of it, then I quickly released it so I didn't get hurt. After that, Shang and his bodyguard killed it quickly with their air gun.

All of these happened very quickly, so that lots of people even haven't do anything, and the war was already finished. Also we found that one man was dead.

After it died, Chenyang moved to it and started to go into its mouth. What? Is he crazy? I went to him, and I saw he was looking for his bag, so I started to help him. I took out my sword from its eye, and used the sword to search for his bag. Fortunately, I found it, it was already broken but the things were well.

When I was taking it out, I saw a strange thing which made me very astonished: a wolf tooth which looks very similar with mine. Maybe wolf teeth are all looks the same, but this one even has a same string and ruby on it which made it a necklace.

I hid all of my thought and gave it back to Chenyang, at that time, my tooth was hidden under my clothes.

There was another burrow in the bottom, which seems like a way to go into somewhere, and actually we did go into there and swim along to through it.

That was a long journey, we passed all kinds of place, and that was very tired to swim in a strange dark place, but after I saw that old building under the water, I couldn't feel anything.

That was an mausoleum. After we went through all those burrow, we found a way to go up, and in the end, I found I came out from the water, and the thing in front of me was a tomb.

I climbed up to the land, and others even started to take off their air tanks already.

“Okay, let’s have a rest, and we will go into it to find the antique.”said Shang.

So I sat down quietly.

3

I was an communist.

My name was Huang Chenyang.

I was going to kill Shang, because he was a important Kuomintang member, also because he killed my parents.

I followed him to the journey of looking for “The Fangs of Wolf King”, and I was sure that he couldn’t find it, because my parents had brought them out a long time ago and now they’re belong to me and my younger brother.

However, I didn’t know where was my brother, and I could never ever think that the young dangerous strange guy is my brother if I didn’t see the fang he wore.

Anyway, I decided to finish my role first.

I followed Shang to go into the place which he’ll never find the fangs there, and I went closer and closer to him, my sleeve arrow were ready to break his neck, and I was shaking nervously...

I suddenly attacked him, but he was much faster than I thought he would be, he unexpectedly turned around and quickly stopped me. Then, a huge pain came to my mind that I even couldn’t breath...I felt down to the ground, I started to feel cold and weak, a great fear came around me...

4

When I heard the yelling with pain, I quickly ran to there with full of fear in my heart.

No no no, I know who is it, no!

I should had followed them, I shouldn’t went to find what is the thing that Shang was trying to find out! I even didn’t care about it at all, I just...just suddenly wanted to do so, it’s just a...intuition!

“How can you do that!” when I saw the person who was lying on the ground in his own blood, I couldn’t control my anger and fear...my brother, my last family member...died.

Yes, he’s my brother, I found the diary in a small hidden room from my parents, and I understood everything !

This was the only thing I cared about in the whole world! This was the biggest nightmare in all those years! Family...all of them were killed by the guy in front of me!

A huge precipitate feeling suddenly came and around me, like a nip in the air: scare, homeless, hopeless, disordered, confused. I could feel a strong scorching hot fire was burning and consuming my sense...

“Kill him, kill him...”

I immediately ran to Shang and attacked him with my sword, he dodged it, and took out his gun. It is impossible to win him if he has gun, so I quickly lied down and kicked my leg to his hand. The first shot chafed my arm, and I kicked away the gun from his hand.

I then suddenly stand up and at my sword on his neck: “You are gonna pay everything back!”

“Wait, wait...why do you want to kill me? I’ve done nothing to you.”said Shang

At usual, I won’t say anything useless to him, but I was really angry at that time, so I said: “You’ve killed my parents, and now my brother. You took away my family people like you should all die!”

He started to laugh unexpectedly: “So, you should also die, right? Mr. Assassin?”

“What? No, it’s...it’s different. Wait, how do you know that?”

“Do you think I don’t know anything? You think I’ll just let a young assassin come and kill me? Don’t be silly.”

I turned my head, and I saw one of Shang’s bodyguards was aiming at my head with a gun.

“Well, then. Do you think the gun or the sword will be faster?”said Shang

“What a pity, anyway you’ll not find the thing you want to find. Someone else has already taken it away.”

“Ha, yeah, and the ‘somebody’ are your parents.”

“You knew it?”

“I saw it, in Chenyang’s bag, and I think the another one must belongs to you now.”

“But...why do you want to find it?”

“Young man, the world is not as simple as you thought, but it’s not also complicated. Humans are fighting for goods, countries are fighting for people. You know why did I kill your parents? They’re communists, they’re my enemy because they are in the different group and have different belief with me.

“You can’t say I was right, but you can’t also say I’m wrong. It’s just like you’re killing people and breaking families.”

“No, it’s different...I’m not...” Yes I am. I suddenly felt helpless, it’s like all of my anger was just meaningless, because I was the same kind of person with Shang! There’s no need for it, I’ve done what I should done, my family will not come back even I kill him, It’s meaningless to spend my time and power to revenge...

“You know what does these fangs for? If we give them to another country as a presents, we’ll not have wars with that country for some time, and we need time,we don’t need to be so obstinate.

“However, what do your parents believe is, don’t show weakness to your enemy, if they want to fight, they will fight, but the fangs are our treasure of the country.

“We have different opinions, and they don’t have right or wrong, the most important thing is what’s your belief.

“The country is in danger now, so don’t always think about yourself, think about this country, because this is a big family. For now there are two powers in this country and fight with each other, there are lots of people betrayed our country, there are other countries are staring at us and want to get something from here...

“So what are you gonna do? Think about it.”

Both of us stopped talking, it was so silence.

“Okay, I think...” I suddenly killed Shang with my sword and quickly pull his corpse in front of me, so after the bodyguard fired, the corpse protected me. Then I quickly picked up his gun and shoot the bodyguard.

Both of them died.

There was a dagger in Shang’s hand, he also wanted to kill me, he couldn’t give the bodyguard order to kill me because if I see it, I will also kill Shang.

I knew what was Shang thinking about: Nothing is true, I couldn’t know if he still wanted to kill me or not, if he would become my enemy or not, then why don’t just kill him?

I suddenly started to cry, with all my pain and anger in those years. I knew he’s right, but I still killed him, because I hate him, I hate him in all those years. I was so young but live without a family. I had be bullied and beat, others laughed at me and teased me...

“Mom, dad, Chenyang! Have you seen it? I killed him! I killed him!”

My name is Shi Jieson, and I was an assassin.

I lived with Jo Black, a famous assassin, I was very proud of being his roommate.

One day, he suddenly told those guys who always paid money for us to kill people that he was done with it. He wouldn’t work on it anymore. I was greatly shocked, and found it hard to understand.

However, I found out that he was killing those people who betrayed our country or have done something bad to our country, and he took their money to live. I also realized that he started to love drawing. I could always see him draw on a building. He sat there peacefully and drew carefully.

All of those were so strange.

When I eventually saw one of his drawings, I was very confused.

There were four people on it: Mr. Huang, Mrs. Huang, Chenyang and Chenyu. They were all smiling. The youngest little boy who seemed quiet similar with Jo had a necklace with a wolf fang on it, and the elder boy had a same necklace with the younger one.

Wait, that necklace looked familiar...I was touched deeply.

Yes, I knew that fang.

The wolf fang with a heart of freedom...



The New Tales of Old Shanghai – A Passage to the Wild

Malvern College Qingdao, Li, David – 14

Preface

In 1964, a boy was born in Shanghai in China. "Look at him, he is so cute!" It was so fun to see a very strong man holding a tiny baby. During the time when there was war everywhere, having a newborn baby was the only thing that made this poor family happy. "What do you want to name him?" The old lady who delivered the baby asked. "I want to call him Luck. I wish his future can be lucky," said the mother, a beautiful woman even in a feeble condition. "OK, as long as you are happy", her husband smiled.

It was still snowing outside, but inside it was quite warm, even for the heart. They lived in a small countryside which was very peaceful and far away from war. But they had no idea that danger was coming close...

Chapter 1

"A-a-a-a!" "Are you OK, luck?" A boy asks a boy who is taller than him anxiously. "I'm okay, just had a nightmare." Recalling the dream, he feels very scared -- fire, dead people were everywhere. He's the only one alive. He is in an orphanage now. He has lots of friends in it. He feels safe in it.

One day, he walks along the river. They will have this activity every weekend which is camping. Suddenly, he hears a voice --- "help! help!" He looks at direction of the sound. A girl is in the river! The river flows powerfully, she wants to use her hand to catch something but it is futile. He jumps into the water quickly. He struggles to swim to the girl. He catches the girl, but a stone hit his head, then he loses consciousness...

"Where am I?" When he wakes up, he finds himself in a forest and the river is quiet again. His head was broken by the stone, and now the blood is frozen. He looks around, he finds the girl is not far away from him. He walks to her. "Hey, wake up!" He tries to wake her up, but it doesn't work. He turns the girl around. He watches intensely --- the girl is so beautiful that he had ever seen. He touches the girl's head, his face turns to dignity because the girl has very high fever! His parents were dead when he born, so he knows lots of generals. He holds the girl with both arms. It's night right now and it's very cold, he knows that he must let the girl warm. But they can't leave the river because the river shows the direction --- you can find people if you go along the river --- and resources. He decides to make a fire first, but he is afraid that the girl's fever can get more serious so he puts his jacket on her and puts some dry grass around her. Then he leaves to find some dry branches, so he can make fire.

"Come on!" Half hour went, he just has two swelling hands, and he couldn't make a little fire out. His entire body poured with sweat. He wants to give up, but when he looks at the girl, he builds confidence again. He must make a fire! He rubs again and again, when he feels numb, the red light which symbolizes of the hope comes out! His dim eyes seem that he has lights too. He pays whole attention to make fire. He succeeds! He puts the fire to the tinder carefully. Then he blows to the tinder, fire comes out after smoke. He puts some small dry branches on the small fire. When the fire gets bigger, he puts big brand in it. "Ha ha" He is very exciting because they have heat and light now. The clothes on the girl are wet. He knits his brows because he knows she must keep her body dry. Water will make her feel cold, but he doesn't have any dry clothes... He ponders a later. After that, he makes a big resolve that he moves the girl near to the fire, then he finds lots of dry grasses and stacks them on the ground. His coat is dry now he takes off the wet clothes from the girl and uses his dry coat around the girl and puts her in the dry grass. After that, his face is so red like an apple. The girl's body is very soft handle. He uses his cold hands to touch his face to keep his clear-headed. He rips his clothes and goes to the river to soak it. When he comes back, he puts it on the girl's head. Then he starts to check the things they have. He has a big bag, but the thing inside was all wet. There are some ropes, a bottle, some wet papers, a knife, and a tent. Because putting up the tent will take some time, so he didn't put up. He thinks his very lucky because he has enough things to be alive because of the camping. He puts up the tent later and puts the girl inside tent. The girl looks better, but she is still hot. He throws some dry branches in the fire, now it's still night. He is afraid that there have some wild animals around, so he just sits in front of the fire and ponders until tomorrow....

Chapter 2

The first sunshine light up the land,the girl open her eyes...The boy listens her squeals and runs to the tent quickly."What happen?" "Who are you?"The girl asks him angrily."You fall down to the river and I save you."The girl remembers every thing now ,she thought she will be dead that time ,she felt very cold,but someone gave her warm and made her alive."Why I am naked?"She asks him ashamed."because the clothes on you were wet and you had high fever so I took off your clothes."She is not very angry now,"where my clothes?" "Oh."He takes the clothes to her."Can you go out?" "Why?"She doesn't dare to look to him "I want to put on my clothes." "Oh." "I already seen it anyway."He says it in a low voice but the girl hears it."OK,quickly."He looks her beautiful face turn to red again ,so he turns back and run out quickly.About 3 minutes the girl goes out .The boy feels a little awkward."Why you were in the river?"Luck asks the girl ."That was a accident."The girl's eyes turn to red ."OK OK ,get it.What's your name?"Claudia Elizabeth" "Oh, beautiful name." "Thank you,and what's your name ?" "Luck Frey."About 5 minutes ,they are familiar with each other."What next step?"The girl asks."We have to walk along the river and find human.But first,we need find some food and make something can protect us." "OK."Claudia says."I will find something to make two spears ,can you go and find something we can eat? I'll call your name per 10 second to make sure you are safe and you say yes,OK?" "Okay."Then they leave the tent...

After 10 minute ,they come back to the tent.Claudia found some grade and some potherb ,Luck cut two long branch and bring back two sharp stone,two prototype stone"We need some protein,why you didn't catch some insect to eat." "I'm just a girl,okay?" "Oh ,I forget it,Ha –ha –ha.And you are so beautiful when your face is red.Ah!"The girl hit him angrily and says:"If you don't make the spear quickly,you won't get the meal!"He uses the timbo to truss up the stone and branch together and uses timbo and two prototype stone to makes a Meteor hammer.When he doing that ,the girl looks at him conscientious.She feels that luck look very handsome at that time.She is fascinated imperceptibly."OK,done."Hers mind was broken by the sound."Can I eat now?" "Sure."They eat something to allay their hunger.But Luck know they must get the lipid and protein to keep warm and get energy.It's afternoon now.They have to hunting some thing ."Come with me."He picks the weapons up and gives Claudia a spear."Then they set out .

They are walking in the forest quietly and looking around."Do you find something?" "No...wait!What's that?"The girl looks to the direction that boy point out.A very fat rabbit is right here and eating the grass."Let's catch it!"Then the grail wants to jump out of the bush .Luck pull the girl at the first time."Why?" "Don't scare to it!" "If it run ,it not easy to sight! " "You said what?How will you catch it?" "We will use Meteor hammer to catch!" "Can you use it ?" "Of cause,if I can't so why I made it?" "I thought you just make it because of it can hit and scared the big animal..." "Look at me."Luck closes the rabbit quietly and carefully.About 1 minute the rabbit stand up suddenly and sees him."Right now!"Luck aim the rabbit and through the Meteor hummer.The rabbit fall over because of it's hind legs is hit by the stone."Yes!"They are very happy and run to the rabbit quickly and catch it."You are the genius!"Claudia is so excited that kiss the luck face .Luck face turn to red suddenly.She runs back to the tent quietly and the rabbit is in her hand."Look who will go back to the tent first!"Luck picks up the Meteor hummer and pursues the girl,they will have a good dinner tonight that makes he so happy.

Chapter 3

When he comes back to the tent,Claudia is already their."You are too slow!"The rabbit is still not dead."You clean the rabbit ."Claudia give the rabbit to him."OK,come with me."Luck takes the rabbit and go to the fire to takes a stick with fire. tells ."Where will we going for?"The girl asks."Dinner." "Why can't we eat in the tent?" "If you want to attract the predators to our tent,we can eat in the tent." "Oh,okay,let's go.Wait for me!"He has already walked about 20 meters..."Come on!We have to strengthening our camp before it gets dark!"

They arrive an opening among along the river and far away from their tent ."OK,let's begin.Can you get some dry stick to me and I will clean the rabbit ."OK."Luck go to the river and use knife to end the life of the rabbit.After a while,the rabbit is just have meat,Luck uses stick to prop it's fur up and let it dry.He want to keep it because maybe they will use it in the future to keep warm.Then he use knife to cut rabbit in half .He plans that they just eat half rabbit tonight and half for tomorrow breakfast .Claudia come back and brings some stick.Luck use one long stick to pierce through the rabbit.After a while,they make up the fire by the fire stick that they took .They put the half rabbit over the fire...

"It smell very good!" "Claudia is very excited that she will eat the first meat in the forest." "OK,we can eat now."Luck give half of rabbit to her, "We have to eat it quickly,come on!"The smell can attract carnivore to them ,but they are so lucky that there have no carnivore around them,and the direction of the wind is to the river..."Oh, very delicious!I think that is the best dinner I have ever had!Although it doesn't have salt or any

seasoning!" "Me too." They looked at each other in the eyes and smiled happily. Their hearts are closer to each other at that time.

"Come on, we have to go." They wash their hands and make sure they have no smell on their clothes. Then Luck uses leaves to pack the other half of rabbit. "OK." Claudia feels some strange mood, she looks Luck is more and more handsome. Do I like him? She thought to herself. "What are you thinking? We have to strengthen the camp before it gets dark!" "OK!" She uses her cold hand to touch her slight hot beautiful face and catch him up.

Luck chooses four huge trunks, and dragged them one by one because they are so big. And he lets Claudia to pick some thorns back to protect the camp. When they finish all things, the night is coming.

They can't all go to sleep. When one is sleeping, the other has to monitor around to make sure the animal not come in to the tent. Luck will monitor the first half of the night and Claudia will monitor the second half of the night. "Have a good dream." Luck says, "Thank you." Claudia is very tired that can't open her eyes. When she fell asleep, he looks to her beautiful face, long eyelashes, small nose, cherry lips... He couldn't help close to her, and then kisses her face. What did I do? He panics looking at her but no response. He breathes a sign of relief and goes out of the tent. But he doesn't know, when he goes out, the girl opens her eyes and the sly smile goes onto her face. And then she fell asleep with a sweet smile.

Chapter 4

Cold wind let him become sober. He sits near to the fire and puts some dry sticks in it. When he sees the river, he finds that he should make a fishing rod to fishing. It not need too much energy to do, so they can keep energy and use less calories. Learning how to save calories is very important in survival. There is a bamboo forest near to the camp, so he goes out of the camp and cuts down two bamboo with knife. It is very quiet, he is very nervous and looks around, he is afraid a wolf or a tiger jump out suddenly. When he goes back into the camp, he feels a sense of relief.

He has to make fish hook first. He uses the knife and cuts a piece of bamboo to make a middle coarse, fine and very sharp on both sides little stick. And carves a ring in the middle to tie to a rope. When fish eat that bait, it will stuck in it mouth. Then he uses the knife and wear a hole on the one end of the bamboo and tie the rope to the top. Finish! They just need catch some earthworm in the dirt tomorrow before fishing. Claudia comes out of the tent, "It's my turn now, go to sleep." Luck nodded his head and passes her the spear.

"Be careful." "OK." The girl's temperature is still here when he lies down in the tent. He feels very warm and falls in sleep quickly.

The second day, Luck gets up early and goes out of the tent. "Let's go and have breakfast!" Claudia says. "OK, let's go." Luck plans that they will eat breakfast and fishing in same time. Beside the river, they put down the bait then they eat the other half rabbit by fire. He is afraid it will rain because the sky is so dark. So he splits the tent and puts it in the bag.

About 30 minutes later, they get their first fish, it is a very big crucian carp, they are very excited about that. When is the time they should have lunch, they already caught 3 fish. They eat one fish at lunch and carry two fish in bamboo leaves. Then they go back to the camp. But when they go back to the camp, they are shocked. There is a tiger in the camp! They forgot to close the "door"! Tiger also sees them, he leans down his body. Luck knows that is the movement before the jump. He closes the door quickly. "Run!" Then they run as soon as they can. Unconsciously, they run to the river. How to be safe? The voice of tiger is closer and closer. He looks to the river... "Come on!" He pushed her to run towards the river.

He cuts down the river of reeds with knife and puts it in the package made of tent. He is going down the river with it. It is a race against time... When they finish their job, Claudia uses the rope and ties the end on their own. "If we can alive, would you like to be my girlfriend? Wu~" The girl suddenly kisses him on the mouth. Her eyes are only infinite tenderness. "Of course." When the tiger runs out of the forest, they hold the bag and jump together.

Cold, just feel very cold. They feel body consciousness are gone, but their hands on the bag are tightly together.

On second day, when some boys playing on the river bank and find them. They are saved.

About 2 weeks, they disappear...

There is a small house in forest. One boy and one girl are eating their meal. Their names are Luck and Claudia ...

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – The Landlord

Malvern College Qingdao, Li, Rachel – 15

The square tower of a church loomed through the dust. In the imponderable mysterious and vaporious illusions of twilight, Shanghai is not falling asleep. Instead, the prosperous city is studded with neon lights, like glowworms floating in the sky.

Walking on the passionate Shanghai bund, there are people taking pictures, sketching the romantic sight, there are couples holding hands, sharing their love with each other. The fountain wells its limpid water, which contrasts by a ship knifing through the surging waves on the HuangPu River.

He looked like a disaster, had a face that even couldn't be recognized by his own mother. Unfortunately, he didn't have a mother, or a father. He had to serve the landlord for living. He was bare feet, wearing shabbily that couldn't be described as clothes, more accurately, cloth waste. He was walking along the Massenet Rue, lined with plane trees.

The bike that was passing by him in the warm sunlight pulled out a long shadow, accompanying his lonely figure.

However, behind his messy hair, beneath a thick layer of dust, it was a firm and persistent face with the brightest eyes which revealed his enthusiasm of life. He's never thought of himself as vulnerable.

They were the richest men in the area. They wore fancy clothes, and spent all day lying on the bed. Their servants were the wretches, who were bullied by those people who liked to be called—landlords. If they were smart enough to get everything done following the landlords' demands, they got a bite. Otherwise, they got the taste of the whip.

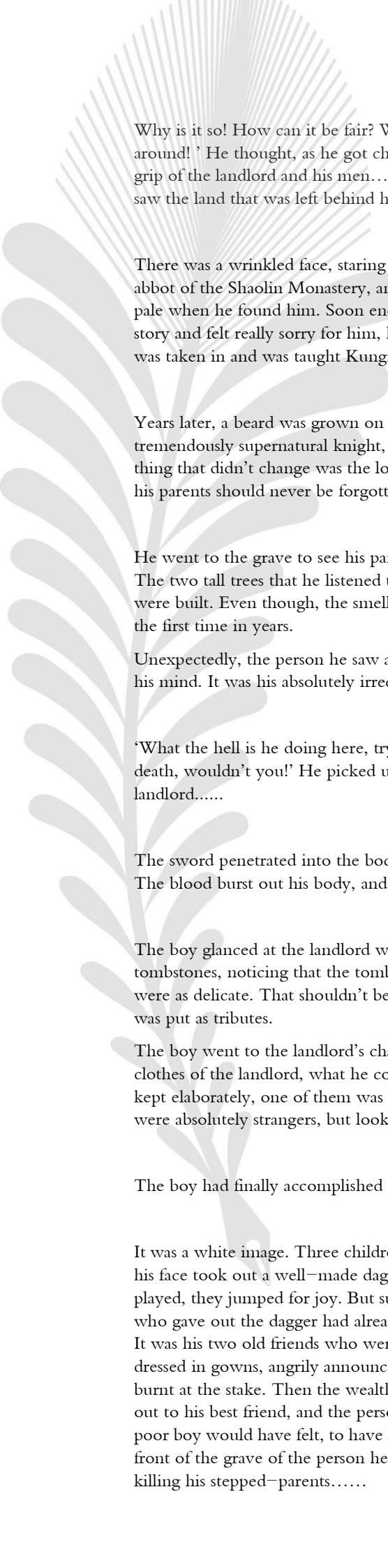
'I get to make decisions of my fate, I get to choose what kind of person I want to be. It is not my destiny to serve people and beg for bread for my entire life.' The image of the boy's parents being burned at the stake was printed deepen in his memory, because they accidently broke one of the most precious possessions of the landlord. He must take revenge. Everyday he endured the furiousness, the flame that had been lighted up and the sadness that was hidden in his heart, abiding his time.

It was a dark and peaceful night, like a dim lamp, the moon shone from above. The stars twinkled their eyes curiously. There wasn't a single sound, even the crickets quieted down. Only the glowworms were still awake, carefully weaving a picture in the night sky with their gentle strokes. Every member in the landlord's house was asleep, except the boy. He held a dagger in his hand, sneaking into the landlord's chamber, trying to murder him. The landlord was lying on his ass, snoring like a pig.

Overcoming his fears, without thinking, the boy stabbed the soft landlord's body, and suddenly, he felt a warm stream flowing on his hands, as a shrilled cry from the landlord penetrated the silence...

Instinctively, the landlord punched the thing that attacked him, the boy was terrified. Unfortunately, the blow given by the poor boy with little strength was not a mortal one. The dagger deviated from the landlord's vital organ, in the dark it stabbed him in the arm. He managed to survive.

'Guard, seize him!!!' The landlord summoned for help. The boy was about to be beset, he knew that it might be the time for his reunion with his parents, he could only wait for luck. In the chaos, he ran about wildly trying to escape. How could he be capable of taking revenge if he's dead? 'My parents were taken away from me so early.



Why is it so! How can it be fair? Why are evil men still living? Why can't I live a normal life with my parents around! ' He thought, as he got choked by his tears. It seemed like he had already escaped from the tenacious grip of the landlord and his men...But still he couldn't stop running. He heard the howl of wind passing by him, saw the land that was left behind him, and all of a sudden, he got faint and passed out.....

There was a wrinkled face, staring at the boy fatherly as he opened his eyes. It turned out the old man was an abbot of the Shaolin Monastery, and he saved the boy when he was going for a walk. As he said, the boy looked pale when he found him. Soon enough they got acquainted with each other, the abbot heard the poor boy's story and felt really sorry for him, he promised the boy that he would defend him against the injustice. The boy was taken in and was taught Kungfu.

Years later, a beard was grown on the monk's face, he was no longer a boy. Instead, he had become this tremendously supernatural knight, who no longer had fear. He grew taller, gained more weight, but the only thing that didn't change was the look in his eyes. Even after all these years, the hostility to the person who killed his parents should never be forgotten.

He went to the grave to see his parents. It has been years since he last visited, the surroundings were changed. The two tall trees that he listened to his mom telling stories under were chopped down, and strange buildings were built. Even though, the smell of this place never changed, and as he was walking, his eyes were wetted, for the first time in years.

Unexpectedly, the person he saw at his father's grave was someone so familiar, the image was never blurred in his mind. It was his absolutely irreconcilable enemy.....The landlord.

'What the hell is he doing here, trying to kill my parents again?' The boy sneered. 'You'd rather be courting death, wouldn't you!' He picked up his sword, and again, confidently without thinking, he thrust at the landlord.....

The sword penetrated into the body...The landlord turned around and surprisingly, tears were filled in his eyes. The blood burst out his body, and he fell, as he never did before. He was dead.

The boy glanced at the landlord with the coldest expression, and left him there. He slowly walked towards the tombstones, noticing that the tombstones of his parents' were majestically built, and the name carved on them were as delicate. That shouldn't be right for the abuse of civilians like them. Both of his parents had titles, liquor was put as tributes.

The boy went to the landlord's chamber to find out clues. The chamber looked so grand. Despite the luxury clothes of the landlord, what he could also see were possession of great value. He also found a picture that was kept elaborately, one of them was the landlord when he was young, which he easily recognized. The other two were absolutely strangers, but looked familiar on some levels.....

The boy had finally accomplished his target, so he found a shelter and settled down.

It was a white image. Three children were frolicking in the pure snow. One of the boy with the biggest smile on his face took out a well-made dagger, and gave it to the other boy as a birthday present. They laughed, they played, they jumped for joy. But suddenly, the image became red and bloody, a battle had just finished. The boy who gave out the dagger had already grown up, he kneeled down in front of two graves and choked with sobs. It was his two old friends who were dead. The fragments alternated in between, he stood up and suddenly, dressed in gowns, angrily announced to his men that the two people who broke his precious jewelry were to be burnt at the stake. Then the wealthy powerful man recognized the dagger that stabbed him was the one given out to his best friend, and the person who stabbed him was his best friend's son. Satirically, he realized how the poor boy would have felt, to have his step-parents burnt at his hand. So he kneeled down again, but this time, in front of the grave of the person he killed, and cried bitterly. What kind of life he gave to his best friend's son killing his stepped-parents.....



The dagger was casted from far, far away and woke up the young man who had just taken revenge.....

Shanghai is now asleep, people all quieted down. The dagger is kept safely in the museum to keep this bloody story remembered, and to remind people how lucky it is to live in an equal, safe society without war.....

Shanghai is energetically awake again.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Double Zero

Malvern College Qingdao, Lin, Jackson – 14

“Today is the start of winter HOLIDAY!” Kevin and his classmates screamed in ecstasy. “Silence! I will announce homework and after that you may leave. Your homework is to write a passage about how citizens in old Shanghai greeted their emperor. You should write at least 3 pages. I teacher said firmly. “Oh no... I have no idea about old Shanghai. I don’t even know Shanghai very well. How can I possibly complete the homework? There’s no way I can do it.” Kevin mumbled in frustration.

Kevin had played the video game for a month. He only had a week to do his homework. He started to think how to write 3 pages about a city that he was not familiar with. 6 days left...5 days....4 days.....3.....2.....1..... “Oh my goddess. Why is time passing so fast? I haven’t written down anything yet... Old Shanghai...Old Shanghai.....Old Shanghai.....”He groaned slower and slower.

“Where am I? What time is it? Why am I here?”Kevin was shocked. He could see pictures of Emperor Lee on the big gate of the palace! “Where is my video games? Where is my home? Who are they? Why are they wearing ridiculous clothes? Are they shooting drama?” He was in panic. He looked at his watch and the watch showed that it was 7th century now. It made him completely confused.

He walked toward Emperor Lee’s pictures and found a big number of people coming towards him. Everyone around him was on their knees with the utmost respect. He didn’t know why they were greeting Emperor like that, so he just stood still and stared at him. There were millions of soldiers who guarded the Emperor. “Hey young boy, get down on your knees and greet the emperor like others do.” an old man next to him warned in a low voice. However, Kevin ignored the old man and stood still because he thought putting knees down would hurt his pride.

Nothing happened until the Emperor spotted Kevin in the crowd. Emperor called the closest guard around him and stopped the parade. “Arrest the boy over there who is not showing respect to me!” He shouted angrily. Three soldiers went ahead and arrested Kevin. He was frightened, so he ran away.

Kevin tried to escape from the three soldiers, but he didn’t know the way to escape, so he just ran towards wherever he could go. He went through markets and shelters and finally he ran to a dead end . He hesitated because he didn’t know how to deal with the situation. He wanted to fight with them, but he didn’t have any weapons to fight and the soldiers had spears. While he was considering, the soldiers arrived. “ Finally catch you!” He couldn’t disobey anymore.

Three soldiers brought Kevin to the Emperor. “Why didn’t you greet me properly?” the Emperor asked. “Um...because it hurt my pride.”Kevin answered. “So, you didn’t greet me properly because you don’t feel well?” the Emperor answered. “Yes...” Kevin answered. “..... Are you a spy? Why are you wearing ridiculous clothes?” the Emperor stunned silence for a while and asked him some questions again. “Bring him to judge and let judge identify this rude boy. He seems like a spy.” the Emperor said angrily.

He stayed in prison for a moment before he got punishment. “Should I be punished because I didn’t put my knees down? What kinds of punishment are they going to give me?” He mumbled. While he is mumbling he heard some noise from the next door. The sound was like an old man whispering.

“Hello? Anyone there?” he asked carefully. “What do you want?” unknown person from the next door asked back. “I just want to ask you something.” Kevin said. “What are your questions?” the person from the next door asked. “What is your name?” Kevin asked. “I am James.” Kevin was little surprised because his grandfather was also called James. “May I see your face?” Kevin asked curiously. “Why? I don’t want to show my face.” James answered doubtfully. “Sorry I was not meant to make you feel bad. Why are you here by the way?” Kevin changed topic as fast as possible.

“It is complicated. Then why are you here?” he refused to answer. “It is complicated too.” Kevin answered in same way. “Okay, I am here because I stole food from a store and the owner of the store was friend of the head of the village I hope you know the story afterward. How about you?” James said. “Well, I am not sure why I am here, but the Emperor said I am here because I didn’t greet him with putting my knees down.” Kevin answered. “Do you think it makes sense? I think it is really unfair. What do you think?” Kevin said quickly and his voice broke with emotion. “I think it is unfair too, but we don’t have any authority to change rules.” James answered calmly.

“Could you please show me your face because your voice and name is similar with someone I know?” Kevin asked cautiously. “Sure, come closer.” James walked toward to Kevin by the time he said the words.

“Grandpa! Aren’t you my grandfather? You should be! In fact you are!” Kevin said excitedly. “What are you talking about. I don’t have any grandson.” James said. “It is impossible. You looks exactly like my grandfather.” Kevin said unbelievably.

Kevin wanted to talk more with him, but there were some noises suddenly came from the outside. The guards were coming. They were here for bring James which Kevin believes he is Kevin’s grandfather to judge. Guards were treating James badly. “Treat him as treat your emperor!” Kevin shouted very angrily. Guards ignored and brought James to judge. James seemed very painful because he didn’t look very healthy and guards were pushing him very hardly.

Kevin had to wait by himself. He felt scared because there was nobody stayed with him and guards were treating prisoners badly. Moreover, they brought James who looks like Kevin’s grandfather. He was too scared, so he couldn’t even sleep during the night. He was thinking about one thing which was escaping. He made some plans, but there is no way to escape through more than million soldiers. He was not that fast and small. He was the one of the slowest boy from his class. Also, he was afraid of soldiers might kill him if he is arrested again.

Kevin was thinking about other ways to escape. One of the best idea was playing dead. Soldiers would throw dead people’s corpses from palace everyday, so that he could run away after soldiers throw him away from the palace. After he came with an escaping plan, he got one more question, which was ‘where should he go if it is successful.’ He didn’t have any information of the place which was similar with filming site.

Kevin was thinking over and over to choose either escape or stay. His final decision was escaping from the palace without any information about the palace because even though he didn’t have any information, outside of the palace should be at least better than in prison.

Now, he was starting to act. Everyday soldiers came to prison 3 times to provide some food to them. Kevin was not going to eat any food that is provided from soldiers. He would hide some food before he started the plan and he was saving food to eat in the outside of the palace. He was eating some, so he could be alive.

If he fails in playing dead, probably he would be killed by soldiers So it was very important. In order to have a bigger chance to live, he simulated it few times last night so that he could be better at playing dead. He would play dead tonight by the time soldiers come to supply dinner.

As same as what Kevin’s prediction, soldiers came to give dinner to Kevin. He lay down on the ground and tried not to breathe often. Soldiers found that Kevin was died soon, so they came closer to Kevin and checked if he was dead or collapsed. They put their finger under the nose. When they were putting their finger, Kevin felt difficulty in breathing because he should not breathe.

Soldiers called handling corpses manager after they checked Kevin was dead. The handling corpses requires 3 or 4 men with a stretcher. When they were lifting Kevin up, they were touching Kevin’s body to move him to stretcher. He was almost not be able to act properly because they were treating him as bad as treating James.

Kevin arrived to a warehouse of corpses. There were smelly and dirty because nobody cares the corpses. He sat up and found few real corpses in the warehouse. He felt scared because it is first time for him to see corpses and sleep with corpses. He found the best place to sleep during the night.

Kevin was sleeping during the night. There were some noises from outside, so Kevin woke up and tried to stop moving. It was soldiers who has to put one more corpse to warehouse. Soldiers putted corpse around Kevin. After Soldiers put one more corpse, he locked the door of warehouse.

Kevin felt very uncomfortable because the latest corpse was bleeding, so it had blood on the most parts of the body. Every time Kevin moved, his skin touched to the corpse’s skin with blood. He just tried to ignore and slept during the night.

Kevin woke up in the morning and found the new corpse was James! He looked like tortured by soldiers. Some of his nails were missing, he got big scars and parts of his back was scars of burnt. Kevin cried because it was too scary. By the time Kevin had touched James, he was showing small reactions.

Kevin was surprised again because James was still alive. Soldiers might thought he was dead because he collapsed for a long time. “Are you okay?” Kevin asked. “Wa... Wat.... Water.....” James was stammering because part of his tongue is disabled.

“What happened to you?” Kevin gave his water to James. “They were tortured me because I am from another country. Emperor wanted to know about it and invade my country. Of course I didn’t tell anything to him. I was almost dead, but I acted like I am dead. How about you? Why are you here?” James told him whole story and asked Kevin. Both Kevin and James felt better because they had companion again.

They were planning how to escape from the palace. They found a very big problem. They didn’t know where and how would soldiers throw corpses.

In the following morning, the soldiers came to the warehouse to throw corpses away. 20 people carried around 5 stretchers and lift up all corpses in the warehouse and put corpses to a wooden wagon. They carried corpses by using wagon. In the wagon, James and Kevin thought it is disgusting because they were staying with corpses.

The wagon was made of wood, so it had big gaps between each bars. James and Kevin had to close their eyes because wagon is surrounded by 20 soldiers. They might found out they were still alive. However, they also had to look at outside. Otherwise, they couldn't find the direction to leave the country or the city or wherever they are. Also, they didn't know when and how are they going to throw the corpses away from the wagon.

When Kevin opened his eyes, the closest soldier saw it, and Kevin also realized that the soldier saw him with his opened eyes quickly. He was too startled that he doesn't know how to react, so that he just closed his eyes as quick as possible, but it was too late. "Stop the wagon" the soldier who saw Kevin opened his eyes shouted. The wagon was stopped and the door was opened.

Kevin tried his best to act like a dead person, but soldiers were checking violently. "Ouch!" Kevin made some sound because he felt too hurt. Soldiers arrested Kevin again. Not only Kevin, but also James. Kevin didn't know why James was arrested. "Why are you being arrested?" Kevin whispered to James, while they were going to palace. Kevin whispered to James. "Soldiers were double checking other corpses too." James answered. Kevin felt sorry to James.

They were being sent to judge. After they have arrived, one soldier went close to the judge and whispered to judge everything that happened. Judge sent Kevin and James to emperor because he thought it is big problem, so it was impossible to be judged by judge.

Emperor met James and Kevin. The soldier who told the situation to judge goes to emperor and tells him the situation. "Welcome back two traitors. The biggest punishment is waiting for you guys. Do you have anything to say before you get punishment?" Emperor talked to them after listened to the situation. Both Kevin and James were not saying anything.

"Are you ready for the punishment?" Emperor asked to Kevin and James. There was no answers again. "Alright, I will count silent as yes. Bring the sharpest scaffold." Emperor said. Four soldiers brought a scaffold. It was really huge. James and Kevin were scared. "Do you have any words to say before you die?" Emperor teased them.

"Kill the old man first." Emperor ordered to soldiers. They brought James to scaffold. James's neck was tied under the scaffold. If they cut off the rope that was connected with huge knife, the knife would fall down and kill James. Soldier was ready for cutting off the rope.

"Cut the rope now." Emperor said. The soldier cut the rope with a knife. The soldier had to rob few times. Once, twice, BANG! The huge knife went through James's neck. Soldiers discarded the real corpse of James. Kevin was screaming frantically and sobbing.

"Next one." Emperor said. The soldiers finished preparing scaffold and brought Kevin to the scaffold. Kevin was really scared because they killed James just now in front of Kevin. It was first time for Kevin to see somebody is dying.

Kevin had started sobbing since James went to scaffold. He was not saying anything, but he was staring at Emperor. He heard sounds of robbing the rope. Once....Twice....Kevin closed his eyes and prepared to be dead.

He could not hear any robbing sound and he couldn't feel anything else. He thought it was the feeling of death. He opened his eyes to see what was going on. He could see his room now. It was his house. Also, he wasn't dead.

It was good news, but there was bad news, too. "Knock, knock. Kevin, grandpa passed away couple of minutes ago. Your uncle phoned me just now. We are heading to the funeral. Get ready for it." His mother said. It was a disaster. He was utterly shocked. It never occurred to him that death could happen to any of his family members. Kevin felt paralyzed because he was very close to grandpa.

Kevin's family was also shocked by his grandpa's death because he was very healthy before he passed away. Kevin felt guilty because in his nightmare, James passed away too. He felt it was all his fault and stayed depressed.

Kevin started writing his homework. He didn't even look up any formation from the internet. He was merely recalling memories from his nightmare.

He got an A* for his project after he went back to school.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – The Diary

Malvern College Qingdao, Liu, Sofia – 14

“No, no, grandpa, please don’t leave me alone!” I held the frozen body of my grandpa tightly. I just wanted to stay by his side for one more minute, but the doctor pulled me out of the mortuary without mercy, and the door slammed in my face. I kneeled beside the door, knocking the door really hard and shouting continuously. There was no response.

Then, I woke up. It was the middle of the night and I had the same nightmare over and over again since my grandfather had passed away. I got up and walked around the house. My grandfather used to comfort me when I had a nightmare. He wasn’t around anymore to do that. Silence surrounded me instead. A sense of sadness ran through my body – I had lost him forever.

My grandfather was not my real grandfather. I was an orphan. At the age of six, he adopted me from the orphanage. His son, daughter-in-law and his unborn grandson died in a car accident two years before. So, I was the only family he had, and he was my only family as well. It’s so hard to imagine life without him.

I kept walking around the house trying to clear my head but couldn’t seem to shake the sense of grief. When I walked to the living room, I could see my grandfather sitting on the sofa and reading me stories just a few weeks ago. He had such a kind smile. I swooped down on him, but the vision of him disappeared and I was let crying into a cold, dusty sofa. I was alone again and history was repeating itself – I was orphaned once more.

In his will, he left me money to live off and his book collection. There were thousands of them. I don’t understand why he left his books to me. I walked to his study, picked up a book and turned page after page until I lost focus. I suddenly thought of my grandfather’s last words. He was so weak at the time. He held my hands tightly and said, “Shirley, there is something I have always wanted to tell you... but now it seems like I don’t have enough time to tell you all the story by myself. I have written it down in my diary, which I locked behind my bookshelf. Please find it.”

He released my hands immediately after saying that.

The morning sunlight poured in through the windows onto my face and I remembered his words. It was like he was looking over me in that moment. I ran to do the bookshelf and peered behind it, expecting to find the tat that usually goes missing around the house but instead, I saw an ancient wooden box. I dusted it off and opened it carefully. A yellowing timeworn diary was lying in the bottom of the box. I picked it up and turned it over and started to read...

3rd May, 1973

Mum’s cough disease is getting worse and worse every day. She won’t stop coughing...I even saw her cough up blood the other day.

Dad is very worried about her. He asked the best doctor in Shanghai to come and treat her but the response was bleak. The doctor said that my mum doesn’t have much time left. Then, he left shutting the door behind us to contemplate what we should do next. We couldn’t believe it, especially dad. I don’t think he wants to believe it.

The moon is full and bright and the wind is so cold it reaches my bones. It is bound to be a sleepless night. I sit under the eave in the chilly wind. Tears pour out of my eyes. I pray to the God to do something for her.

4th May, 1973

A mysterious Japanese man came to our house at dawn. He was a lean person with a drooping moustache and slicked-back, black hair. He carried a pile of gold and silver.

His name is Kono Kimio. He asserted that my mum's sickness is just a simple bout of pneumonia, and assured us that the Japanese army doctor has the medicine to cure my mum. But as an exchange, my dad had to agree to be part of their expedition to lead them to rob a dangerous tomb in Shanghai. The Japanese officer gave dad three days to think about the ultimatum – his wife or his country.

I was born into a famous family of tomb robbers. They robbed the tomb under the guise of the historic preservation but because my grandpa is the general in the army, nobody could prosecute us. My dad is a well-known tomb robber in Shanghai but he hasn't done any guilty deeds since my mum became ill. He thinks his guilty deeds caused the terrible disease. So, he is operating an export business, which sells silk to Europe currently.

6th May, 1973

After two days, my dad finally thought it through. He chose his wife. He could not bear to live without her. However, the event will not be a smooth one. A communist underground staff, Hu Ming, came to find us.

Hu explained that the Japanese task is not as simple as he first thought. They just got the information that a long-lost chemical has recently been detected by the Japanese expedition in an ancient tomb, and it is an essential material they need to produce the biochemical weapons, which the Japanese army are working on. If they can make the biochemical weapons successfully, then the whole of Shanghai will be in a great danger. So, that's why Mr. Hu came here – to persuade my dad to stand on our side, not the enemies. Just like what the staff said, 'China is in great danger. The war is on the verge of breaking out but your decision can change the whole thing. I understand the grief of losing your wife, but have you ever thought about the fact that the Japanese will not save you when you are useless?' When he said this, we could all feel his sincerity, not only from the language, but also from his eye contact.

Dad was lost in another deep thought. His wife, or the country – this is too difficult to choose. His patriotism tells him to give up his wife but on the other hand his love for his wife makes it too difficult to decide.

7th May, 1973

Dad insisted on saving his wife and he told Kono Kimio that he will stand with them. The Japanese Army Doctor reacted very quickly and they took my mum to their hospital this afternoon. The Japanese Army has the best medical condition in Asia. I am sure my mum will be cured in their hospital.

My dad went to the expedition meeting after sending my mum to the hospital. He came back very late, and started to packing up. The expedition will start in two days. He has to be ready by tomorrow.

I cannot say whether dad's decision is right or wrong, but I can feel a sense of regret deep in my heart.

8th May, 1973

Mr. Hu came here at midnight. He said if my dad were determined to raid the tomb, he would go with my dad as an assistant. He wanted to sneak on into the Japanese Army to get more information. Dad agreed to take him, as well as me.

We packed up really quickly and went to the Japanese Army. Prior to that, we went to the hospital to visit mum. She was much better, which means Kono Kimio didn't lie to us.

We are staying in a secret house with other explorers. Kono Kimio pointed out the key of our task – collect the gallbladder of the viper. According to the legend, the owner of the tomb was a very famous geomancer. He put a gallbladder of a viper into his tomb and the gallbladder contains very toxic venom, which can make any biochemical weapon stronger.

I was extremely angry and scared when I heard this, but dad and Mr. Hu seemed very calm. I didn't understand why they came here to help our enemy destroy our hometown.

At night, they finally told me the truth. The key to getting into the tomb is finding the right entry. These kind of ancient tombs usually have lots of entries but there is only one leads to the main chamber.

My dad went to this tomb once when he was my age with my grandpa. He remembered that the tomb was under a huge mountain and the right entry was under a little river. "We will lead the expedition into a wrong entry beside the river and when they are trapped, we will go out and go to the right entry. We will take away the gallbladder and destroy it, so that the Japanese army will never find it," he said.

9th May, 1973

We started our venture at dawn. It took two hours to get there but it was obvious when we arrived – the mountain was breathtakingly big and was covered by rows of endless trees. My dad took out his compass, he drew a simple graph of the tomb underneath the mountain and gave it to Kono Kimio... but he didn't draw the little river.

"Mr. Zhang, I wish you didn't trick on me," Kono Kimio said angrily.

"Of course, I didn't," my dad said.

"You cannot betray me because I have your wife. If you do anything wrong in this amazing journey, I can assure you won't see your wife again," grinned Kono Kimio.

We led them to the wrong entry as we planned. It was a really dark tunnel with a smell of decomposed bodies. Even though we flashed the torch, it was still very scary and I felt like something was staring us through the darkness. The Japanese took the lead, so we couldn't escape easily. Dad seemed notice my worry and pointed to the top of the tunnel– there was loads of holes in it.

When we got deeper, we suddenly heard somebody singing at the other end of the tunnel. It was like a Peking Opera. With the help of the sound, dad asked all of us to turn off the lights and stand against the wall and be quiet. Then, we just climbed up the tunnel and hid ourselves in a hole. I remember feeling so scared.

When Kono Kimio finally found out, he shouted abuse angrily. After about half an hour, they gave up trying to find us and moved forward.

When we left the tunnel, we found the river immediately and we dove into the deep. Just below, there was a big entry. We swam into it but I was running out of breath. I can't remember what happened next. When I woke up, we were sitting in a coffin chamber, but it was just a chamber for the tomb.

I asked dad about the Japanese. Dad just told me, "They are probably dead." 'But what killed them?' I asked curiously. "The tunnel they walked was full of hair in the other end, and it is not ordinary hair. When people touch it, it will stab into people's skin and blood vessels. Eventually, it will reach the brain and kill the cells."

10th May, 1973

After a rest, we started to move to inside. It was really strange that the tomb was not as big as I thought. We only found two tiny coffin chambers. One was the one where we rested at, and another one was opposite it. They are exactly the same. They only have three coffins on both side and nothing else.

When we were wondering what to do, Mr.Hu found some bricks on the wall, which moved. He removed one of the brick. Suddenly, a beam of sunshine lit up the chamber. We quickly removed all the bricks and made a big hole to fit through.

That's the main chamber! We had finally found it. It was enormous. There was an old tree in the middle of the chamber. It was very tall and there was some sunlight shining from the top of the tree. A thick layer of spider web covered the wall of the chamber. I knew these were toxic spiders.

We moved carefully to the tree, which was in the middle of the chamber... but we didn't see any coffin. It was ridiculous. When dad and Mr. Hu were looking for the coffin, I indistinctly saw a person behind the tree. He was moving towards us totteringly.

"Oh, Mr. Zhang, Mr. Hu, I am so glad to see you here!" Kono Kimio whispered.

"Are you surprised? You thought you killed me but I am still here."

I remember his face – it was full of blood.

He continued, "The pathway was so scary. It was full of toxic hair. So, I just use the bodies of my teammates to make a road for me."

While he was talking, he took out his gun. Almost at the same time, the coffin emerged. It was in the tree hole.

All of us ran to the coffin. Dad and I arrived there, and Kono Kimio was not far behind. In crisis, Mr. Hu leapt at Kono Kimio and held him off briefly. While they were fighting, dad and I quickly opened the coffin and found the gallbladder in the mouth of the corpse.

When we went to find Mr. Hu, we found out he was captured by Kono Kimio. "If you want him to survive, give the gallbladder to me," Kono Kimio threatened.

"Go, destroy the gallbladder, don't worry about me," Mr.Hu shouted.

Dad pulled me to the tree. I saw Mr. Hu push Kono Kimio to the wall. Millions of toxic spiders suddenly covered them. I heard their horrid screams. I wanted to help them but some spiders even started coming to us. We climbed the tree as quickly as we could. We managed to escape...just.

Dad burned the gallbladder and threw it into the tomb. After two seconds, it exploded. That was the first time I saw dad cry.

11th May, 1973

We went home. The house was decorated with white. I felt something bad. I ran into the lobby. I saw a black-and-white portrait of my mum on the table. Underneath, that was the coffin with my mum inside.

The steward told me, the Japanese killed her just after we went to the expedition and left her body outside of our house.



Tears poured out of my eyes. I kneeled down. Everything just turned dark. My life was so dark. I swore to revenge my mum.

I couldn't believe it. Grandpa had carried this round with him his whole life. I felt proud to have been raised by such a strong, caring man. His life was full of challenges but he still managed to raise me. I vowed to get his story out there... to show people who he was so he would live on forever.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Under the Sky

Malvern College Qingdao, Lu, Novia – 14

It was a dark winter's day. Below the blue sky, thick, yellow fog hung low on the streets of Shanghai. Wide-eyed, I sat staring out from the old, rickety rickshaw – an expensive kind of transport only reserved for the wealthy. My mother was next to me, like always. Her long, blonde hair brushed over her shoulders and her dark blue eyes met the road in front. She rarely showed emotion but no matter what, she always made me feel comfortable. I leaned softly against her, she had a queer old-fashioned thoughtfulness deep in the eyes. I only wish I knew what about but all I could do was imagine. Maybe she was questioning the very same thing as me – why am I here? She shot me a glance, and said, “You are very similar to me...” These words did not resonate with me, and sometimes I'd prefer to call her Mrs. Cedric, rather than mom.

I am Cornelia Cedric, a girl born in China, of French descent. My mother Mrs. Cedric, is a beautiful French lady who came to China in 1900 with her husband, Mr Cedric. He was a soldier in the Eight Power Allied Force. I had never met him but my mom has told me his story several times. Mr. Cedric is not my father, but his story allows me see what he was like.

After one day of cruel aggressiveness, the Cedrics were tired of killing, robbing, and burning everything – bodies, houses, treasures. They wanted to run away and give the treasure they've got back to where it should be. Unfortunately, their discussion was overheard by a stranger. When they noticed that, they went off immediately. Mrs. Cedric succeed, Mr. Cedric, unluckily, went the wrong way and was killed. Mom escaped to Shanghai by train. Twenty years later, she met a handsome but poor man, and at the age of 38, she had me. However, the man, my father, threw us away. My mom sold all our things and opened a shop.

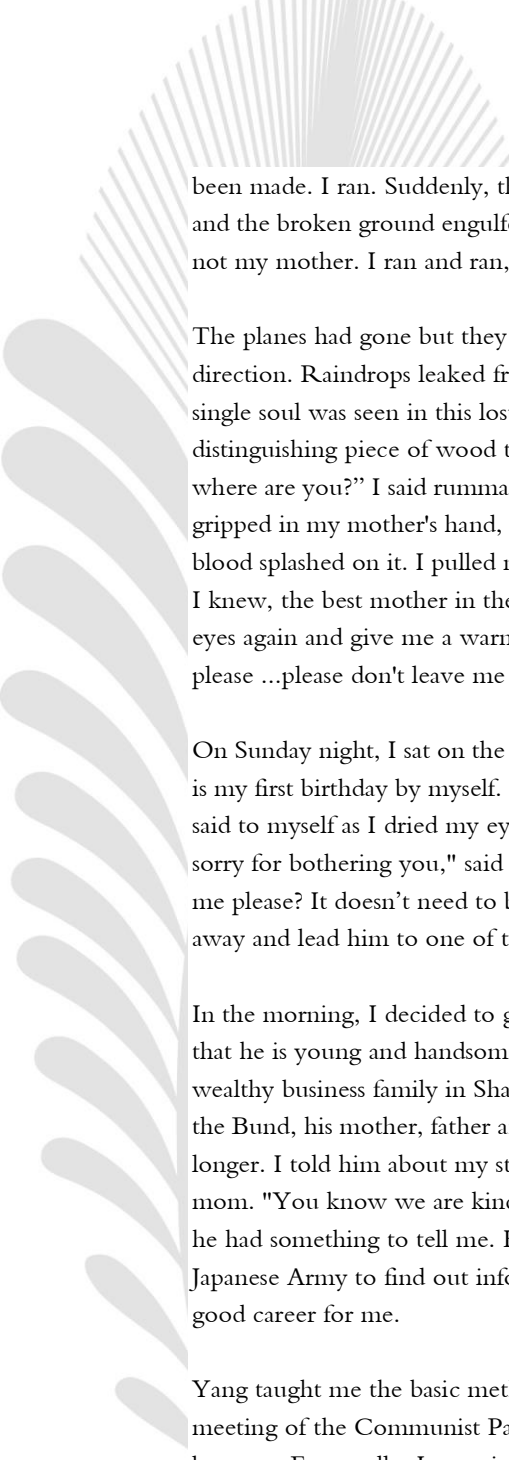
The rickshaw had arrived at the Bund, which I would be living around for a long time. As my first step made a mark on the moist, frozen cold ground, my eyes swiveled around and I felt perplexed. The sky was full with a rainbow of colours, and all the buildings seemed to be totally different from the traditional Chinese ones printed in my memory. These structures were new and fresh and there was a sense of a lively atmosphere that made me feel a bit dazed. “The Bund,” I mumbled with a voice that was soon overshadowed by the noise of others. “Do I really belong here,” I muttered again.

“Come inside, my dear,” mom whispered softly, trying to disguise from the hundreds of people that we were new here. I went into the house, and was led by my mom to the second floor.

I woke up with a fright in the middle of night. Outside the window, things were surrounded in mist, the bright lights and the noise were gone – only the roar of wind could be heard. I couldn't shake my feeling nervousness, so I went to my mother's room. Mrs. Cedric was having a good sleep. Nonetheless, she welcomed me into her arms and like that, I was out like a light.

Hours later, I got up from an empty bed, the quilt was quite warm, yet a frosty pressure almost made me unable to breathe. “Mom?” I said. No-one answered, but a letter on the the nightstand caught my attention. It has Mrs. Cedric's handwriting on it, “Dear my Cornelia, I am going to our old house to get our appliances. Don't worry. Breakfast is on the table, don't forget to heat it before you eat.” I got off the bed, picked up some clothes hastily and went out of the room. I saw the food on the dining table. If it was a ordinary day, I would probably run to it and enjoy the delicacy. But this time my mind was elsewhere, I was thinking about the old house. ‘It is not too far away.....I'm gonna go,’ I thought to myself. In a minute, I rushed out of the house running toward my mother.

I had nearly reached my old home when a strange sound appeared. I looked up to the sky. I had never seen anything like it before but I immediately knew what it was – an bombardment aircraft. Just as I caught my attention on it, a bomb rained down on where my old house was supposed to be. BOOM! The first attack had



been made. I ran. Suddenly, the atmosphere had changed. Houses were destroyed. Dirt and rocks were flying, and the broken ground engulfed screaming people. "Mom!" I shouted, as I saw a woman fall down, but she was not my mother. I ran and ran, searching for her long, blonde hair.

The planes had gone but they had left a city that was disfigured beyond recognition. I had lost my sense of direction. Raindrops leaked from the red, cloudy, sky down onto my head. It felt like...human blood. Not a single soul was seen in this lost world. I almost sank into the depths of hopelessness. Then, I noticed a distinguishing piece of wood that was used by my family among the debris. "That's ...Oh! It's my home! Mom, where are you?" I said rummaging for clues. Finally, I found a photo of Mrs. Cedric (at the time she was young), gripped in my mother's hand, beside a collapsed wall, under a huge rock, with a rebar through it. The photo had blood splashed on it. I pulled my mom's corpse out. Her long, blonde hair now a dark shade of red. At that time, I knew, the best mother in the world was now nothing but a dead body. She would never open her charming eyes again and give me a warm hug when I needed. "Why has this happened to me? It's unfair!" I cried, "Mom, please ...please don't leave me alone," my voice choked as I wept.

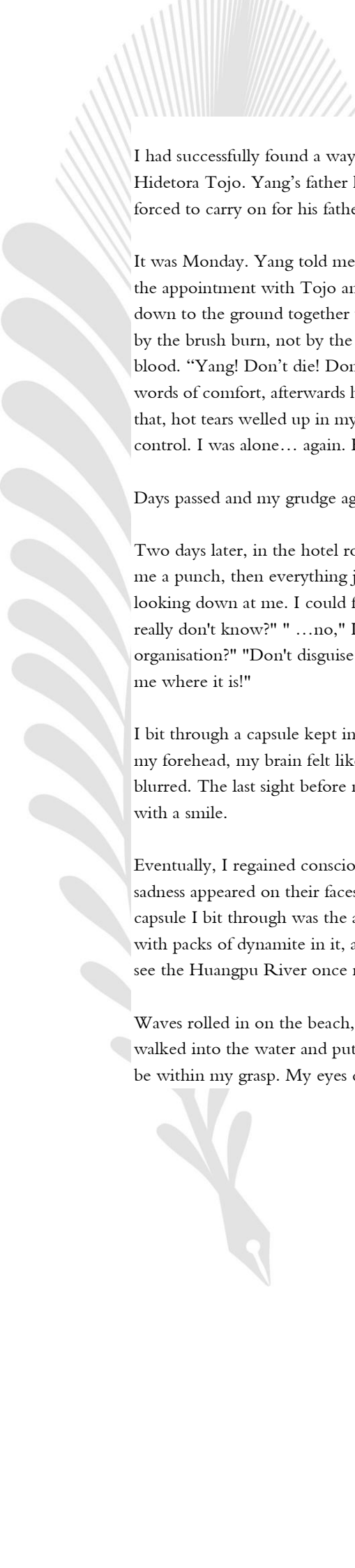
On Sunday night, I sat on the bed, held my mother's photo in both hands, while tears dropped down; tomorrow is my first birthday by myself. Tap tap -- someone knocked the door. "Who would that be? It's late at night," I said to myself as I dried my eyes then grabbed a coat and went to open the door. "Good evening, my lady, I'm sorry for bothering you," said a young man dressed in a suit. "I need a place to sleep for a while. Can you help me please? It doesn't need to be a bed, just anywhere," he asked gently. "Sure, come with me," I answered right away and lead him to one of the empty rooms. As I lay in bed that night, I couldn't help wonder who he was.

In the morning, I decided to get more information about the man, the only things I knew about him was just that he is young and handsome. We had breakfast together. His name was Yimou Yang, the young master of a wealthy business family in Shanghai. Yimou was 20 years old, who lived far away and when he was moving to the Bund, his mother, father and sister were killed by the Japanese. I felt sorry for him and told him he could stay longer. I told him about my story and I could feel that his heart trembled when he heard what had happened to mom. "You know we are kind of similar, don't you?" I said sincerely. After a while of chatting, Yang told me he had something to tell me. He told me he wasn't just a rich son. He also had a job as a mole planet in the Japanese Army to find out information for the Chinese. Feeling alone, I agreed to see whether this would be a good career for me.

Yang taught me the basic methods of pretending and a few things I could do. One day, he brought me to a meeting of the Communist Party. I learned quickly. Yang said I was so intelligent and he believed I was born to be a spy. Eventually, I was given a new name and identity – Miss Carter. My first job was to sneak into the Japanese Army Headquarters without being seen. I went to leave to start my mission but Yang grabbed me. "There's a party being held on the Bund next week, the Japanese will be there then. That will be the perfect time for you to start your mission," he said. I wasn't happy but I knew I had to wait. In the coming days, I went and bought many new clothes, learned a few Japanese words, practiced my mother tongue – French, and spent lots of time talking to Yang. I like him...

Friday came. I sat by the window, looking at the magnificent scenery of Shanghai at dusk. The colourful sunset glow brought me back to the time I spent with my mom and I knew at this moment, I had to avenge my mother.

Clang. Clang. It was six o'clock. I left to head towards the banquet. When I got there, I was admired by everyone. Many officers and men came and spoke with me, including the Japanese hunters. Yang was well-known in the upper stratum, he pretended he didn't know me and gave me a greeting as a man who had an interest on me. At the end, a formally dressed man went to me, "A pleasure to meet you, my lady, may I have your name?" "I'm Co...Carter, Caroline Carter, a pleasure to meet you, sir," I replied, within a short look at his emblem, which revealed his status – a high-ranking official. "Can I ask for the honour to have a drink with you on Monday, please?" I answered after a quick thought. "Sure, sir, if you'd like to." "I'm Hidetora Tojo, meet you there at Monday at the eighteenth quarter, have a good day, Ms. Carter." Then, he left.



I had successfully found a way in and managed to build a nice relationship between Miss Carter (me) and Hidetora Tojo. Yang's father had been forced to work for Tojo before and when Yang's father died, he was forced to carry on for his father.

It was Monday. Yang told me he sensed danger was coming. I was worried. In the afternoon, I quickly finished the appointment with Tojo and went off to the restaurant. In the twinkling of an eye, a familiar tall figure fell down to the ground together with splashed blood and a single bullet. I was shocked, not by the huge sound, not by the brush burn, not by the guy behind me who was saying "calm down", but by the guy lay weltering in blood. "Yang! Don't die! Don't leave me!" I cried. It was a familiar feeling. Tojo came up to give me a few words of comfort, afterwards he just disappeared into the fog, with another guy who held a silent gun. Following that, hot tears welled up in my eyes and I quickly walked away from this dreadful place, right before I would lose control. I was alone... again. His sweet handsome face lay on the ground in front of me. I couldn't do anything.

Days passed and my grudge against Tojo had doubled. I decided to form a plan and kill Tojo once and for all.

Two days later, in the hotel room, I was picking up my clothes and some Japanese soldiers cropped up and gave me a punch, then everything just turned dark. When I came to my senses I was sitting in a cell and Tojo was looking down at me. I could feel that I was being bound tightly. "Why am I here, Mr.Tojo," I asked. "You really don't know?" "...no," I whimpered. "All right, tell me where the organisation is?" Tojo shouted. "What organisation?" "Don't disguise any more, the Communist Party! WHERE ARE THEY!" "Ok, last chance, tell me where it is!"

I bit through a capsule kept inside my mouth. "Now, tell me where it is!" Tojo shouted. Sweat came out from my forehead, my brain felt like it was trouble. "Renmin Tearoom," I answered after all. Everything became blurred. The last sight before my world had switched off again was soldiers going out, and Tojo look back at me with a smile.

Eventually, I regained consciousness. There were few Party members beside me, I could see the happiness and sadness appeared on their faces. Thus I knew, my enemy was dead. But I knew I would be soon as well. The capsule I bit through was the antidote of the drug but it was also poisonous. I have told Tojo the trap address with packs of dynamite in it, and the price for blowing up them is my life. My last wish was that I could go and see the Huangpu River once more. Therefore, the others brought me there and left me alone as I watched on.

Waves rolled in on the beach, water was flowing past in an endless stream. It took me back to my childhood. I walked into the water and put my entire body in the cool water. Looking up, the cloudless azure sky seemed to be within my grasp. My eyes closed gradually, but this time, I saw brightness.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Lorong

Malvern College Qingdao, Shi, Katherine – 14

1

The cars on the street were flowing in an endless stream. The lights were unusually shiny and glamorous. I was too dead to appreciate the view though. Skyler also seemed to be depleted. I had been following her around all day crossing errands off the list.

Skyler was born a princess of the richest royal family in England, but her family declined abruptly in a political war when she turned 20. All her family members were either arrested or exiled overnight. She's the only survivor. And I was passed on to her as a precious piece of the family heirloom.

To shake off the nightmare, Skyler escaped to the Far East with me. She struggled to build a new life in this exotic city called Shanghai in China. She worked hard and earned a decent living.

It seemed like everyone else was either busy talking on their phones, or rushing to get on the buses. You could almost smell the restlessness in the air. In contrast, Skyler was walking at a much slower pace. But somehow I could tell something was bothering her. I started to worry about what might happen in a few minutes.

10 minutes passed, but nothing happened. She was still that flat tire. "Maybe I am over-worried." I comforted myself.

It was becoming harder and harder for Skyler to breathe. Something must be wrong! But all I could do was to stay still on her wrist, waiting for her reaction. How I wish I could protect her from any potential dangers or miseries!

All of a sudden, Skyler fell down really hard beside a gigantic trashcan at the crossing of an alley. What happened next took my breath away. Everything around collapsed. There was no sight of any trashcan, and we were no longer at the crossing. I found myself in an old shabby room, the interior of which was heavily furnished with heavy and old-fashioned pieces, the kind you would see in an ancient Chinese museum. I looked up. Thanks my goodness heaven! I was still with Skyler. Her eyes were glued shut, showing no signs of waking up any time soon.

A few hours later, Skyler finally opened her eyes. Almost at the same time, some massive hunks burst into the room with some black bags in their hands. "Nothing good could come out of this", I murmured in fear.

"OUCH! DON'T TOUCH ME!" Skyler shouted to those guys when they grabbed her roughly and blindfolded her eyes. They dragged her out of this scruffy room, and I got a clear view of the outside world. Everything looked different from the world that we lived in before. Instead of skyscrapers, fancy cars and stylish modern people, all I could see were doggy flat buildings, rickshaws, and people dressed up in an old Shanghai fashion. Everybody looked like they walked right out of an old Shanghai movie.

Skyler was shaking her arms hysterically, so I was swayed up and down in violence. I was trying to find some clues that could tell me where we were. Suddenly I spotted a newsstand, and the headline on the newspaper read 'JAPAN IS COMING!' I tried to recall some history knowledge I had gathered in the past with Skyler. 'Wait, if we are still in China, and we are in the right time that we are experiencing, then we must be in Shanghai in the 1930s or 1940s! Why are we in the past?' This reminded me of the plot in a time travel movie and it confused me utterly.

As I was deeply lost in my thoughts, we were taken to yet another dingy house, only this one was much more spacious than the one before. I overheard some low voices arguing over whether or not to sell Skyler to the 'camp'. Wild panic started to strike me. 'Where are they going to take her? What on earth is this camp? Am I going to be ripped off Skyler's wrist? Are we going to part our ways? She never takes me off! Please let me stay with her through this nightmare!' At that very moment, she put me in front of her face, and I was shocked to find out that Skyler turned into a little girl! Now she looked exactly the same as when she was 7 years old, which was when I first met her.

Just as I heard before, we were sold to a place that is inundated with bloodiness and endless darkness.

It was a place where they taught children how to pull the trigger of a gun and stab with a variety of knives. These children were also prepped on how to recognize the fastest and sharpest deadly weapons. In simple terms, they were training these youngsters to be professional killers. And they would be killing for employers as long as they are paid enough with rational reasons provided.

From that point on, Skyler's life was completely changed. It took her months to restore calm and hopeful. Although Skyler was adamant, she still couldn't quite adapt to her new role in this killer training camp.

"Just move your finger with a little bit more strength and strategy. How hard could it be! What a complete rubbish you are!" Coach Lucifer shouted to Skyler frenetically. This was already the 17th time Lucifer got furious at Skyler today. Eventually Skyler could not stand it anymore, so she cried out loud and hit Lucifer's head mercilessly.

"S..T!" Lucifer ouches painfully. He looks surprised at Skyler.

"Who do you think you are! Do not think any tricks anymore! Or I will pull the trigger over your head!" Lucifer shouted in a huff and walked away.

After Lucifer went away, Skyler cried more heavy. A boy walks towards us. He comes along, sit besides Skyler, and just sit there without one word. I can see he is trying to comfort Skyler, but don't know how to make her stop crying, lost his head.

"Hey, are you okay?" Edward asked timidly when Skyler starts sob instead of wail. "Eh.....Do not care about what Lucifer said, he will not do that to you, I promise!" "I stay here for one and half years, he never killed any kids like you. Nothing is easy, you just start, as long as we do more practice, you will handle it! Trust me." He seems like used all words that he can recognize, and it is just for her.

But Skyler is no appreciate, she cannot stop crying still.

So Edward chooses to stay along with her without any other choices, because Skyler is holding his arm and wipe the tears using his sleeve. I really got a shock, because Skyler is the that never stay together comfortably with boys. But now, it all looks so natural, and it just happened.

2

After that day, Edward helped Skyler swam out of the tear pool, Edward became the first friend she make at this cruelty training camp.

Edward is actually the favorite pupil of Lucifer. Once he becomes friends with Skyler, Lucifer was angry but he cannot say no to her anymore, thus Skyler gets a few years of time to stay here peacefully.

Time as fleeting, ten years passed.

As usual, the boys and girls start their daily training, Edward and Skyler stayed together still, but as many people forecasted, their relationship has been improved a lot, become Jake and Jill. And now Skyler is no longer that poor, weak girl that will just get reproached and punished by COACH Lucifer. She is the most excellent girl among all the training camp. Lucifer can really not point out anything that is incorrect or disobey him. Like before, Edward is still that excellent far away beyond the other people. Also, they start to help the elder "professionals" to attempt some easy missions.

I can see that Skyler turns to be more happy and comfortable to stay here even wants to spend her rest life like this, a real killer. That really surprised me, she was a girl that looking forward living freely, without controlling and inner-directed. But now she just accept the reality. Sometimes she dose think if there is a chance to choose, she wants to just be a usual girl, like the other girls in the same age with her. The thing held in her hands can be flowers, not guns and knives; the clothes she wear can be floral skirts, not the killer suits; the dreams in the night are about the boy that she loved, not the man she killed. Although now there is Edward's companionship, she is still regret that she does not have a life just that pure and peace, everything was too late.

3

It is closer to Skyler's birthday.

Edward prepared a colossal surprise for her. And this absolutely changed Skyler in the rest of her life.

The party for Skyler is in the evening of her birthday. Lucifer wants to use this chance to for a rewarding to all the people in the training camp. Everyone thought he must be crazy, or how could he reward them? But anyway they are all involved deeply with happiness.

At 21:00, the party start, seems like everybody is enjoy, nothing happened.

At 22:30, people are almost run out of energy, someone just fall down on the tables and sleep. Skyler is holding a bottle of beer, lazily standing against the wall. I looked around, want to find if there are more cakes or something. Suddenly, I saw Edward is furtively looked around like is waiting for something.

While I am still thinking what are Edward doing, Skyler just fall down, hit the ground hard. Fortunately, she didn't let me face the ground. I know she is still love me.

I open my eyes widely to try to figure out what is going on. Then I can not see any of the people is still standing right now, but they were having fun on this party just now, only five seconds, how is that possible! I looked around again, but this time I can not find Edward anymore. I turn around, Skyler is like just woke up one second before, and seems hard to breath, but she is breathing anyway. She struggled stand up, walks towards to the place that Edward just stand.

She walks along, tries to find out where did Edward been. She was dizzy at first, but then she is back to professional, search the footprints and smell the perfume that he left.

When we followed the clue for about ten minutes, we saw Edward is trying to light the fireworks with some his "friends".

"3,2,1", thousands of fireworks boomed at one time. Then they take the gun, run towards the wire netting as fast as they can. Skyler rushed out to stop Edward.

"Where are you going Edward!" Skyler shouted.

Edward heard the sound and turned over, looking surprised at Skyler. But then the surprise turned to aversion, his face is just like trying to show "Why you are here! You will just make this worse."

"I'm leaving! Don't follow me!" Edward answerd.

"But why? You said we will be together forever!"

"Look, I have to leave, It is so stupid to just stay here and do some simple killings, it is just a waste of time! I can do a much better job, and be the boss, I am totally enough of this kind of being slaves life, no one can stop me!" as he stopped roaring, he shoots towards her, such cold and detached.

Skyler was shocked of what did Edward just say and do, she has been together with him for ten years, but she never knows that he has such kind of thoughts, he even does not feel any sad or atyakta when he trying to kill me. All the promises they have made, all the things they have done, suddenly become ashes, gone with this crack, drowned in the beautiful fireworks, such quiet.

When Skyler opened her eyes again, all she could see was white.

She thought she was dead.

But then she heard a soft voice is waking her. She opened her eyes and saw a doctor standing beside her. Skyler got serious injury, so she should stay in hospital for almost two months, but Lucifer was angry about Edward's leaving, because Edward took away almost all the best killers in the training camp. Lucifer became so mean to Skyler now, because her ability was available. They did not want such a capable girl to lose their control. So they did not give Skyler any chance to escape the training camp. But anyway in Lucifer' opinion, she still needed to be punished. He didn't allow her to get anymore cure from doctor. He stopped providing her with enough food or proper accommodation. But Skyler had no choice, because Lucifer added more security measures to avoid someone else that also wanted to run away from here. Plus, no more parties.

All Skyler had in her mind was to run out away from here, and kill Edward and Lucifer one day in the future.

Skyler knew that she had to do something. She couldn't stand this without even one word. At least, she needed to escape here.

She started to pretend to be nice to Lucifer. When she got his trust, he would absolutely give her the permission for completing missions outside the camp. That would be the perfect chance to run away.

But it would be a big risk.

About one year later, Lucifer agreed to give her a mission at the outskirts of Shanghai. That was the day Skyler had been waiting for more than 400 sleepless days. She meticulously planned everything out.

This time the target was a guy named Mr.S who worked for the national bank, pretty intelligent, typical wealthy. Unfortunately, his boss was jealous of his greater reputation, and here comes the mission. Skyler really wanted to thank his boss now. The mission was simple. Mr.S was going to take the flight from London to Shanghai at 2 o'clock in the morning. He booked the hotel room 707 and he would be there straight away after he landed at about 2pm. Skyler just needed to go to the right hotel room one minute earlier. When poor Mr.S entered, shoot him down, and mission would be accomplished. Skyler called Mr.S and explained all the situation.



“We have shared interest now. You do not want to die, and I do not want to live anymore. So, I will let you go, but you need to do me a favor as well.Deal?”

Now the show was on.

At 1:50pm, Skyler walked to Mr.S’s hotel room disguised as a hotel staff. When the door opened again, Mr.S walked in, and they quickly recognized and identified each other. There was a single shot. Skyler lied down on the floor, covered in “blood”. Mr.S ran away from the window of the other side, the guys who were waiting for Skyler heard something wrong. They ran up and found that Skyler was "dead". Then they ran away! After a while, Skyler made sure that it was perfectly safe, then stood up and sneaked out.

Skyler escaped from the training camp successfully. That was thrilling.She thought she would be very excited after that.But she wasn’t.She walked along the street, like an ordinary girl she always wanted to be. She was touched at that moment. That was the life she longed for. No killing, no blood, no fear. She didn’t feel the desire to kill anybody anymore. She did not want her fingers to be stained by blood anymore. She was free now. She could start her life again, peacefully and quietly, like she’d always wanted

The New Tales of Old Shanghai – Recollections

Malvern College Qingdao, Wang, Esther – 16

Was there a space, delivering its temperament through time even if it has passed away? Was there a place, leaving its footprints by the stories even as it withered with the bleak fame? If there must be an answer, I would say it must be the old Shanghai I know — vague but elegant; enchanting but wild; caustic but intelligent; snobbish but emotional...

So what does Old Shanghai mean to me?

Was it bitter tales written by Eileen Chang? Was it all her romantic dramas happening in a parallel timeline, performing in every corner of the city?

Unstoppable drizzling moisture the damp streets, accompanied by the sound of rickshaws splashing the puddles beside the pavement. Under the dim toast tan street lamps, a mid-age couple was sharing roasted chestnuts. The man looked like complaining his monotonous life stranded in the small office building, while throwing chestnut shells into the sewer. His wife, paid no interest in the tedious talks, seemed even unable to enjoy the snacks. The only thing she cared about was to figure out a way of saving the tight spending for a new winter coat. Nearby, the outlines of the residences were blurred in the ink blue sky. White light bulbs made windows as regular luminous rectangles inlaid in the cement walls. Intermittent quarrels escaped through the glass cracks, following with the violent clash of mahjong...

The night sheds people's pretty appearance away as it deepened, remaining only their fragile and resentful bodies. At this moment, people devote all their pains to the darkness. The exhausted housemaid have just comfort her master's little child asleep, still having dishes and clothes that must be cleaned in a few hours. A young wife recollecting her mother-in-law's pointy criticisms in the poky bedroom, and finally failed to inhibit her tears while thinking of her husband's unconcerned attitude. Somewhere a household's door was been knocked crudely, and a heavily drunk man rushed into the house while his drowsy wife let him in, foul mouthed.

Chose the white rose as glittering moonbeam, or keep the red rose as cinnabar mole? Entangled by the innermost feelings, life in the old Shanghai was complicated as love.

Was it the passionate celebration sang by the glamorous singers? Was it the fashion posters recording the flourishing pictures of the fascinating fashions everywhere?

Chatty sounds came out from the tailor's shop. Women wearing perfumes are discussing the latest design of cheongsams. Their curved hair shivered when they talked excitingly, uncovered their opulent golden earrings shaking at the same frequency. Opposite side on the road, a man lightened a cigar in front of the Russian coffee shop. He wore an unsuitable hat, which covered half of his face. Under the newspaper he held was a well made raven suit. Of course, all gears were imitated from the Western businessmen he met at the Bund.

When stars began to burn tenderly in the silk blue night sky, the uproars still could not be settled down. On the contrary, the sunset gave birth to endless entertainment. Hasty rickshaws shuttled on the avenues, symbolized the beginning of nightlife. In the clamorous dancing halls, people were shaking their body selflessly trying to omit their tiredness. Blood red lip print stamped on the goblet, the clear sound of glasses striking together witnessed the revelry. Through the bubbling light brown champagne, people's face faded while neon lights flashing crazily looked like impossible to die off. Exaggerate colors entirely mixed together, radiant like fireworks scanning on the swaying flesh wrapped by silk stockings and suit trousers. Cigarette ash flew as they pleased, mingled with the unpleasant smell of body odor. However, everything was concealed by the bewitched scent of rouge and powder. When high heel sandals and leather shoes rubbed against the oily wooden floor, the rhythm of the ballroom have been decided.



Similar to a colorful polyhedron, Shanghai made others turn pale and dull.

Yet, did all of these passed with time flies awkwardly? When scenes blurred deeply in the soil, when happiness overwhelmed unbearably by the war, when everything was inversed, did Old Shanghai disappeared without a trace?

Obviously, she still survived. The remaining obsessiveness of the aged city still breathed weakly, being a fragment of the new world. All the magnificent moments became the most precious memories that could never be replaced. When you found the shadow of her trail, in a few sentences you read, in a few glimpses you recognized, you will trust, she is living vividly, as the new tales of old Shanghai.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Chan, Annie – 16

She glanced at the clock on the wall.
Eight o'clock.

Time to leave.

It'll be two days until she comes back to the mundane work of sewing and stitching. Two days before she becomes an ordinary factory worker again.

She watched as her fellow workers shuffled towards the exit, and she pitied those poor, helpless women who had to watch in silence as their dignity and families were taken away from them from the minute the Japanese occupied Shanghai. And she knew there was nothing they could do about it, for they were not men, but women, who were only expected to cook, sew and take care of the children. Not for the first time, she felt a rush of gratitude for her mother, who despite being illiterate, had insisted upon her daughter's education which consisted of learning from books smuggled from her father's study in the dark of night. She knew she was different from other girls from the moment she touched her first book and she was determined to show that. And every night after her shift in the garment factory, she was given this opportunity.

She passed by several Japanese military men patrolling along the street and her insides boiled with anger as they leered at her, inspecting her from head to toe. Nevertheless, she bowed respectfully at them and kept her head down, knowing she couldn't risk getting into trouble with her new identity. Spotting the familiar wooden sign with a yellow hat painted on, she glanced back to make sure she wasn't being followed before hurrying into the dingy hat shop in the corner.

Behind the counter, Old Chen, the balding hatter, peered up from his sewing and squinted at Ling from his spectacles.

"How may I help you, madam?"

"I would like to collect my written hat please,"

"Code name?"

"Ling," "Very well. Mei, the blue hat for Ling please!"

A spindly woman glided out from a room at the back of the shop and handed Ling a blue hat. The woman smiled at her as Ling thanked her. She was the hatter's wife and unfortunately, a mute. Ling often wondered what they would talk about if she hadn't lost her voice. Her train of thought was broken when she suddenly smelled a hint of jasmine in the air. She sniffed at her hat.

"Oh, it's just my wife's perfume," the hatter chuckled as he opened the door of the changing room for her. Ling stepped into the small space and closed the door behind her. Then, she groped at the overlapping walls behind the mirror and her fingers soon found a small catch. She flipped it and the mirror sank to the ground as a long winding stairwell appeared before her.

"The Headquarters. Now this is my real workplace." she thought to herself as she began her descent. Then, remembering the hat she was holding, she slipped her hand into the tiny compartment hidden in the inner lining of the blue hat and pulled out a slip of paper. But before she even had the chance to unfold it, a hand had already snatched it away. Looking up in surprise, she saw a young woman rummaging her bag and finally fishing out a similar piece of paper.

"Su, what do you think you're doing?" demanded Ling, looking furiously at her.

"General Xiang asked to give you this. There's been a mistake with the hats, they accidentally switched the messages. So, here's yours," Su explained, handing the other slip of paper to her. At the mention of General Xiang, she relaxed her guard and took the paper, muttering a thanks to Su. The young agent puffed up her chest, beaming with pride and Ling rolled her eyes when Su had turned away. Ling unfolded her message, took one look at it and pursed her lips distastefully before slouching off to the radio room.

Ling,

Please try to fix the radios. We need them for contacting the military over the wall before tomorrow morning. Su wrecked three of them accidentally. Sorry about this, but you're the best mechanic we have since the mechanic sector has been deployed to another unit.

General Xiang

Ling woke up, finding herself resting upon a stack of papers. She gave a great yawn and realized she had fell asleep from fixing the radios. She had worked till the next morning, and it was the longest shift she had ever done all these years. Remembering the narrowed eyes of her colleagues when she had entered the radio room yesterday, she had known that she had to make an extra effort to prove that she wasn't a lazy, useless agent after her two weeks of sick leave, so she had decided to stay up late, deciphering documents all night until she fell asleep on her desk. Ling chuckled to herself as she imagined the look on her colleagues' face if they knew she had worked till the morning. She glanced at the clock. It was six in the morning. It was unusual for the office to be empty. At least Yang should have arrived, he was always the earliest and had never been late. Just then, Ling heard a commotion outside and the door burst open, revealing General Xiang and the rest of the agents. Her mouth fell open when she took in the scene before her. A few agents were hobbling with crutches, some with bandages around their head. General Xiang seemed a bit battered and bruised, but otherwise, unhurt. Ling noticed a few of her colleagues were missing, but the hollowed look in General Xiang's eyes were enough for her to deduce that they hadn't survived whatever they had been through.

Before Ling could open her mouth to ask the million questions in her mind, she was held by the shoulders, pushed back to the wall and handcuffed in a matter of seconds. She could only stare back dumbly at General Xiang when he hissed at her, "Well, anything to say, traitor?"

"I don't know what you're talking about! What proof do you have that shows I'm a traitor?" Ling mustered all the courage she had and fired back. The other agents had surrounded her, with a look of fury in their eyes, but they were nothing compared to the cold disappointment in General Xiang's.

"Let's see," General Xiang said softly, his tone dangerous, and a chill went down her spine. "You didn't show up when we retreated, so obviously you had known about the ambush, and—"

"Wait, what retreat? Who said anything about it?"

"Didn't you collect your hat yesterday? Didn't you read your message, Agent?"

Ling ignored the mocking tone and said slowly, "I got the message to fix the radios from Su, but—"

Someone suddenly sniggered, "Who would ask *you* to fix the radios? You overestimate yourself, Ling. The men aren't here for nothing."

Ling flushed and continued, "Su told me the message was from you, General Xiang! So I went to fix the radios and—"

"I only sent you the message regarding the retreat in the morning. We all retreated except for you and also Su, who is too inexperienced, so I told her to go home and rest because she had a sore throat anyway. Apparently, there is a double agent among us because someone must have gave a slip to the Japanese and told them about the retreat, because we were ambushed by a bunch of Japanese soldiers and I overheard one of them mentioning the double agent, we only know it's a woman. We managed to escape by hiding in one of the carts. Well, only some of us. A few didn't make it,"

"Well, I got a message from my hat, but Su gave me another one and told me the one I had was mistakenly put into my hat, so I ignored it. I went to fix the radio as I was told and deciphered some documents until I fell asleep. That's all, I swear, I didn't know about anything! If you don't believe me about the message, you could ask Su about it!" Ling blurted out in desperation.

Someone spoke, "Su's mother just came and told me, her daughter has lost her voice for now. Bad case of sore throat."

Ling looked at General Xiang pleadingly and she could almost see his gears working behind those eyes.

"You're a talented agent, Ling, there's no doubt about it, and you don't seem to be the type that would turn on us," General Xiang said slowly, and there was a collective whisper among the agents. "Su and you are the only female agents here, but Su just joined us a month ago and I don't see the Japanese picking her to be a spy for

them either. She's too careless and clumsy for this kind of thing. I don't see much hope for you, Ling, but I won't do anything to you until I find some proof, and I'll have eyes kept on you,"

"How about the messages Agent Ling received, General? Ask her to show us!" An agent suddenly raised his voice, distrust written all over his face as he looked at Ling suspiciously through his beady eyes.

"I burnt them in the fire like all agents are supposed to after reading their messages," said Ling, holding her head up and trying to keep the tremor from her voice while secretly cursing herself for being such a conformist. The agent made a noise of disbelief and was about to open his mouth when General Xiang cut him off.

"Ok, that's enough for today. Take her to the cell,"

That night, Ling found herself, once again, alone still awake after everyone had gone. But this time, she wasn't surrounded by piles of documents and radio wires, but the bars of her cell. She stared at the blank brick wall opposite to her as she tried to recall every memory she had of Su, the young agent, and find out the clues she had missed pointing out that she was a double agent. Always cheery, young, naïve, and clumsy. That's how she thought of Su before today. Was this all an act? A façade to divert their attention from her true identity? When she snatched away her message earlier that day, was it out of panic that she would read it? Or was it just pure childlike innocence? She knew she could vouch for the loyalty of all the agents here even though she hated some of them, because she knew about them, having worked with them for so long. But for Su, she wasn't so sure.

Suddenly, a creak from the stairs interrupted her train of thought. The words "traitor" and "double agent" quickly crossed her mind and she hurriedly pretended to be asleep, feigning light snoring. Ling heard the softest of footsteps coming from the stairs. Then, a pause of silence. Ling realized she had been holding her breath and quickly resumed the light snoring. A moment later, she heard soft footsteps again, and this time, they were directly behind her. For a fleeting moment, as she lay there pretending to be asleep, she caught the smell of flowers, but that thought was quickly pushed aside when she knew she might be killed by the double agent any second. She cursed herself for facing the wall of the cell when she pretended to sleep. "You fool!" she thought to herself, "now you won't even know who killed you when you die!" Then, as the footsteps faded, she realized the double agent wasn't looking for her, but making for the radio room! The door to the radio room was closed, but she could hear the soft crackle of static and a low raspy voice whispering. Ling strained her ears, trying to catch the words, and her heart turned cold when she realized the whisperings were in fluent Japanese! Ling could understand a little Japanese, but the voice was too soft for her to make out the words. A few seconds later, Ling heard soft footsteps pass behind her and down the stairs. When she heard couldn't hear footsteps anymore, she let out a sigh of relief. As she lay there staring at the ceiling, she tried to put everything together and make sense of all of it. Now she had calmed down, Ling was sure the double agent was a woman as the flowers she smelled could only make sense if they were from a woman's perfume. Then, she thought of the raspy voice, didn't an agent mention that Su had a sore throat and had lost her voice? She must have really had a sore throat, but Ling highly doubted that she had lost her voice, given that it was such a perfect excuse to avoid Ling's questioning in case she wasn't locked in a cell. Yes, it is definitely Su. Now, she only had to think of a way to lure the rat out in the open with a piece of cheese, without revealing the cage waiting to snap it up. Ling smiled to herself as a plan began to hatch in her mind.

The next night, Ling was no longer shackled in her cell, but in full black, crouching in the shadows of the radio room. Across the room was General Xiang and a few other agents, blending into the dark and hidden behind stacks of boxes. If anyone was to come into the radio room, it was unlikely that they would notice three men and a woman clothed in black, each with a pistol in hand, as they were all as still and silent as statues. And that's exactly what happened next. A whisper of footsteps from the stairs. The creak of a loose floorboard. A pause. Then the softest of footsteps again. The soft click of a lock. The silhouette of a woman appears in the doorway. She crosses the threshold. The crackle of static.

For a moment, it seemed to Ling that the tension in the room was almost tangible, like a thick fog suspended in air, threatening to suffocate everyone. Then, the spell broke and there was a movement of shadows, the click of guns, the flooding of yellow light and a rustle as the spindly woman turned her back.

"Agent Su, reveal yourself!" Even as Ling shouted it, she knew that something wasn't right.

The woman lifted the veil from her face and Ling had to grip her gun with both hands to stop the shaking when she heard the horrible sound coming from the woman's mouth.

"Ah, I've missed my voice," rasped Mei in Japanese, with a huge grin

The Heir of Shanghai

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Chan, Miuccia – 17

Sometime later, in front of the building that blinked back at me with its blinding neon lights and flashing billboard, my legs filled up with cement. Despite being a casino hotel, the guards that lined the red carpet seemed to only welcome people who looked like business big shots in their stifling business attire with chubby fingers that donned a dozen expensive rings.

Petrified, I backed away slowly, hoping to slip away before anyone caught sight of me – and bumped right into a guard. Just my lucky day. The guy glared down at me ferociously and at the moment I knew if he actually wanted to eat me, he'd have no problem with it.

I managed to squeak out, “smibodwdcfdgfk.” Frowning, he eyed me suspiciously from head to toe. Following his line of sight, I glanced down in curiosity as well. Apparently I was in a suit, the purpose of which I had no idea, along with the fact that I had somehow ended up wandering here unconsciously.

“Ya look real familiar, chicken,” The guy bent down to get a good look at my face, his scowl twisting into an even uglier scowl. Stifling a yelp, I shrunk back even further, trying to dodge his intense gaze. Something about that ticked the guy off, and he grabbed my wrist angrily, “Don’t squirm –” He froze up all of a sudden and looked down at my wrist with an expression that wrote ‘you’re joking, right?’

Without warning, he let go on my arm like it was a snake or something, and gave me a rude look of disbelief. “Well, c’mon in, sir. The rest of em are waitin’,” he said, beckoning me in the fancy building. And just right then, my body moved of its own accord, carrying me in a dignified way which I had never done so before to follow the guard in.

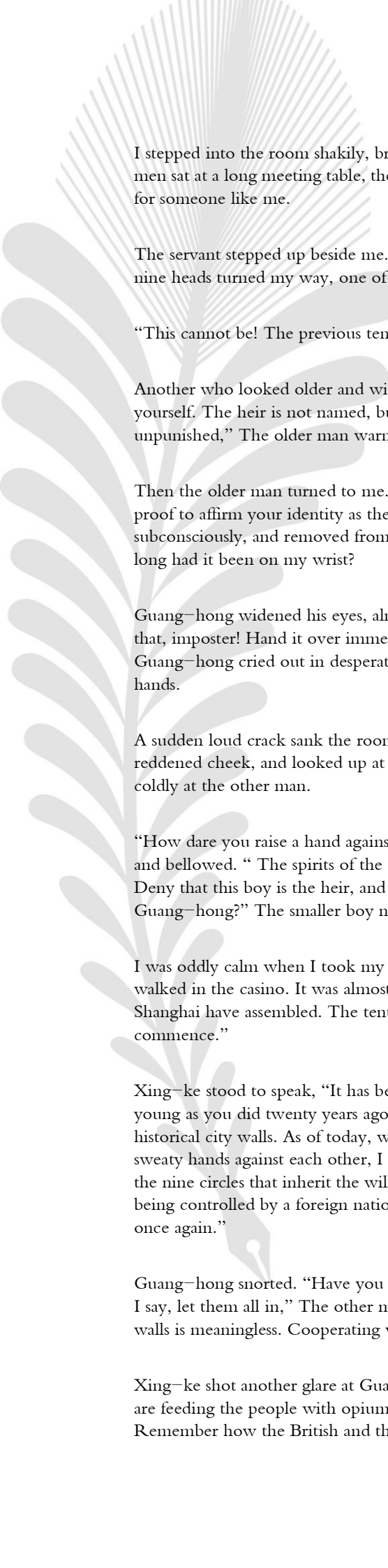
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The place might have looked like luxury on the outside, but I could spot security cameras tucked away subtly in the darker corners. Chandeliers hung above my head like a knife, and bingo machines screamed into my ear wherever I went. I didn’t know where we were going, but the unwelcoming atmosphere forced down any question that I had in my mind, and the guard’s cautious glances at me didn’t help ease my mind any more than the pistol stuffed in the back of his pants did.

We turned into a long hallway flanked by authentic doors, and from some of the half-opened ones I could hear moaning and panting sounds, and I turned my head away embarrassedly. A woman stepped out one of the rooms, wrapped in nothing but a bathrobe and holding her curvaceous body and legs in such a provocative way that she knew exactly what she was doing, as though she had been doing this her entire life. Despite her ravishing appearance, bags hung like weights under her eyes, and when she smoked her cigarette, it sounded almost like she was sighing. Smiling tiredly, she called out to the guard. “New guy there? Let me have him. He doesn’t look all that fresh to this. It’d be a nice change.” For some reason, that comment stung more it should, and I bit my lip to hide how upset I was. Funny I should feel that way; I don’t even remember my name.

“Sorry, beautiful. He’s booked,” the guard grinned toothily at the lady and waved. We carried on in silence. Many questions tugged at my throat, but I dared not ask. The guard stopped suddenly in front of the last door in the hallway that looked the grandest, and knocked thrice on the heavy doors. He turned to me and *bowed*, to my utter shock. “Ere we are, sir. Have a nice evening.” As the guard walked away, my voice refused to budge as I tried to call out desperately, *Hey you’ve got the wrong guy* or *Why am I here* or *What is this place*. Nothing came out when I needed it to.

The door creaked eerily as a servant in a suit poked his head out. “Welcome, sir. The nine circles have assembled.” Just as the guard had done so, the man *bowed* once and ushered me into the wrong. *What is happening?* I wanted to scream, but something was holding my voice back, as though it didn’t want me to destroy this moment.



I stepped into the room shakily, bracing myself. The complete silence could almost pierce me like a spear. Nine men sat at a long meeting table, the seat in the dead middle left empty. They couldn't have possibly been waiting for someone like me.

The servant stepped up beside me. "The tenth has arrived, sir. The meeting shall commence." Almost in sync, nine heads turned my way, one of which immediately shot up, and pointed a trembling finger at me.

"This cannot be! The previous tenth had not named an heir! Who is this imposter?" The man shouted in panic.

Another who looked older and wiser stood up as well, but facing the shouting man. "Guang-hong, calm yourself. The heir is not named, but chosen. If he is indeed the tenth, such discourtesy on your part will not go unpunished," The older man warned, staring down at Guang-hong who sat back with a huff.

Then the older man turned to me. "It is honor to meet you, heir of the nine circles. Please present the circlet of proof to affirm your identity as the real heir." What circlet, I wanted to ask, but my hand reached for my wrist subconsciously, and removed from it a gold circlet of a dragon. In disbelief, I held it up in amazement. For how long had it been on my wrist?

Guang-hong widened his eyes, almost horrified as he patted down his trousers in panic. "H-how dare you steal that, imposter! Hand it over immediately! That is not something you can sully with your dirty hands!" Guang-hong cried out in desperation as he strided over to where I was, trying to snatch the circlet out of my hands.

A sudden loud crack sank the room in complete silence again. Dazed, Guang-hong brought a hand to his reddened cheek, and looked up at the older man who had struck him. "S-sir Xing-ke..." Xing-ke glared coldly at the other man.

"How dare you raise a hand against the heir, Guang-hong?" Xing-ke caught hold of Guang-hong's shirt collar and bellowed. "The spirits of the old city walls choose heir and the heir presented with the circlet of Shanghai. Deny that this boy is the heir, and you reject your purpose as one of the nine circles, do you understand, Guang-hong?" The smaller boy nodded frantically before Xing-ke released his grip.

I was oddly calm when I took my place in the last seat, holding myself in the same dignified manner when I walked in the casino. It was almost second-nature. Xing-ke rapped the table once, "The nine circles of Shanghai have assembled. The tenth has taken his place as heir. The meeting of the nine circles shall commence."

Xing-ke stood to speak, "It has been two decades since we gathered here, yet all of nine circles look just as young as you did twenty years ago. The previous gathering was brought about by the dismantling of our historical city walls. As of today, we gather again as of the invasion of the Japanese and Russians." Rubbing my sweaty hands against each other, I tried to understand every word when Xing-ke gave me a knowing look. "As the nine circles that inherit the will of the old Shanghai city walls, we must protect our city from the dishonor of being controlled by a foreign nation. I hereby call for support and troops that can help rebuild our prized walls once again."

Guang-hong snorted. "Have you gone senile, Xing-ke? Why should we shut out people who bring us money? I say, let them all in," The other men watched their own fingers intently without looking up. "Rebuilding the walls is meaningless. Cooperating with the Russians is much more profitable."

Xing-ke shot another glare at Guang-hong. "I'm not sure if you and your wallet have noticed, but the Russians are feeding the people with opium under the table to make money that you're hiding in your pocket right now! Remember how the British and their opium held back our country!"

"Who cares?" With that, Xing-ke hauled himself at Guang-hong in outrage, and nailed his cheek with a nasty punch before the other six could restrain him. With two men holding his arms back, Xing-ke turned to me, flushed with anger.

"Sir, you must not allow the Russians to do as they please! As heir, you must protect the interests of Shanghai!" I clenched my fists, feeling cold sweat. How could I even begin to tell them that I wasn't the *heir* that they spoke of?

Just at that moment, I saw Guang-hong narrow his eyes at the door, and before I could understand what he was trying to do, a servant burst into the room, out of breath and panicked.

"I—I apologize for disturbing, sirs! But police have shown up asking about some smuggling of weaponry and is looking for Master Xing-ke!" Xing-ke visibly paled at this, nervousness creeping into his face.

"T—the police, you say? W—well, this is a surprise. I don't recall anything about smuggling weaponry." Xing-ke mopped his eyebrows with a handkerchief and stood up. "I must excuse myself, sir. It appears that I have to sort out this...horrible mistake." His eyes darted around nervously. "I shall... sort this out and return to the meeting as swiftly as possible." Without waiting for a reply, he dashed out of the room as though being chased out.

An awkward silence maintained before it was broken by Guang-hong's mad laugh. "That pig talks big about protecting Shanghai, but he's got his hands full with his own illegal business." He wiped tears from the corner of his eye. "Police trick works like charm everytime."

Warily, I glanced around at the other six, who made no attempt to defend Xing-ke or protest. Guang-hong had under control as well, I suppose. Brushing off dirt on his suit, Guang-hong breathed a sigh as he walked over to me.

"Now, about *you*," He bent down to stare at me in the eye dangerously. "I left you at the auction without the circlet. It was still with me when I entered the casino. When did you steal it?"

I tried to explain. "I've been trying to tell you this, but I don't remember any—" It was almost fate that it was at this precise moment memories chose to wash up like waves hitting shore. The terror of being thrown on a stage naked and chained. The shame at being sold like toy to the rich of Shanghai. The humiliation of being violated by another male. The amnesia I experienced was probably a side-effect of the trauma.

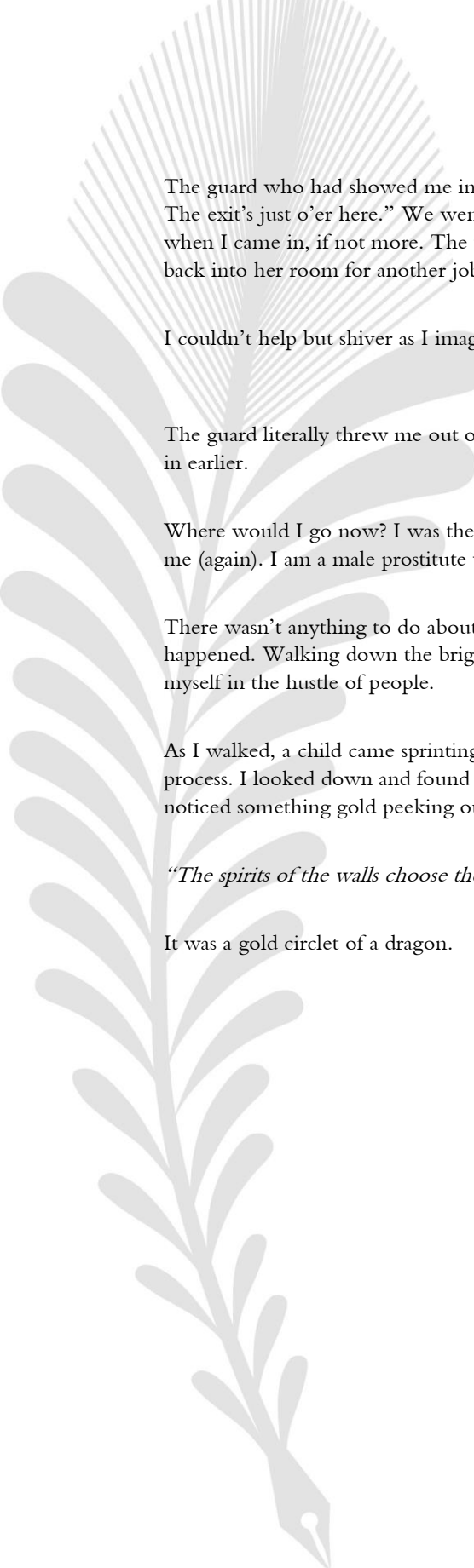
I grabbed my arms to stop the trembling, as my breathing hitched. The feeling of another man's hands on my body still lingered on my skin. My memories were a haze, but I clearly remembered a face in my head that I would not ever forget. The face of the person who took from me a circlet and threw me into an auction for prostitutes. My blood ran colder than the rings of Hell as I recalled the experience. I would do anything to leave right now.

The same face was smirking into my face. "But I guess that doesn't matter now anyway. I need circlet more than you do. Hand it over now. You don't know how much that's worth. Or would you like to shipped to some rich Russian pervert? You didn't seem to like that a lot the last time, or so my client told me."

Silently, I unclasped the circlet from my wrist and pressed it into his palm while maintaining eye contact with him and making sure he knew I absolutely loathed him. Guang-hong's lips turned up into a gleeful grin as he inspected the gold circlet.

He held the circlet carefully in the light, biting his lip to contain his excitement. "With this, all of Shanghai's most powerful bourgeoisie will have no choice but to obey me, and now Xing-ke won't be around to stop me!" He shrieked maniacally, slipping the circlet on his wrist with shaking hands, expression crazed with lust.

With a snap of his fingers, the remaining six circles left the room at his command. As a servant handed him his coat, Guang-hong raised an eyebrow at me, pondering. "I could have you shipped to Russia, but I'm feeling generous today. Someone show him out before he pukes all over me."



The guard who had showed me in gripped my arm firmly as he dragged me out of the room. “C’mere now, sir. The exit’s just o’er here.” We went back the way we came in, and the casino felt just as unwelcoming as it did when I came in, if not more. The woman who had called out to us when we came in had disappeared, probably back into her room for another job.

I couldn’t help but shiver as I imagine the women at the auction, sold alongside me.

...

The guard literally threw me out of the casino, lacking any of the delicacy he displayed when he had showed me in earlier.

Where would I go now? I was the heir of Shanghai for thirty minutes before my symbol power was taken from me (again). I am a male prostitute who escaped from his owner. I had no home.

There wasn’t anything to do about it, so I just wandered down the street, hoping to make sense of what had happened. Walking down the brightly-lit streets of Shanghai city numbed the memories of today, and I lost myself in the hustle of people.

As I walked, a child came sprinting down and I narrowly avoided a collision, nearly tripping over my feet in the process. I looked down and found my laces loose and untied. Bending down, I reached to tie up my shoes – and noticed something gold peeking out the sleeve of my suit.

“The spirits of the walls choose the heir, and the heir is presented with the circlet of Shanghai.”

It was a gold circlet of a dragon.

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Cheng, Emiri – 17

Chau felt as if the heat of the scorching sun was penetrating his very being. His trolley has never felt this heavy, and his sweat has soaked through his white tank top. The sky was a radiant blue that reminded Chau of his mother's favorite vase, but he might be able to appreciate it more if he didn't feel as though he would melt at the slightest touch. The heat was merciless, not unlike the years he endured through hard work, sweat and tears.

"I really should retire soon," Chau thought to himself. Yet he knew that he was merely humoring himself, as there was no way he could afford to stop working. Not much of a living can be made by selling meat buns you see, and that was the only thing Chau knew how to do. It wasn't much, but it was enough, for now.

Beads of sweat slowly made their way Chau's wrinkled face, down past his eyelids and in a swift drop, dripped down into his untrimmed moustache. Chau hated this weather. No one wanted meat buns in this weather anyways. He might as well rest. Nodding to himself, he parked his meat bun stall into a dark alley and started towards the nearby teashop.

What are the chances out of all the teashops in Shanghai that Chau walked into this one? Oh, Chau knew this teashop. It was *his* teashop. Shanghai may have changed throughout the years, yet this teashop somehow eluded time's embrace. The same aroma lingers through the air, while the wallpaper on the wall remains a dull, murky grey. With a wave of his hand, Chau beckoned the waiter over. A friendly face floats into view.

"Tea sir?"

Chau scoffed at him. "No, I'm here for your scintillating company." Rolling his eyes, he blathered on. "Yes, I want tea." Wasn't it obvious? It was a teashop. "Oolong. Piping hot."

"Right away sir." the waiter answered, his smile unwavering on his face.

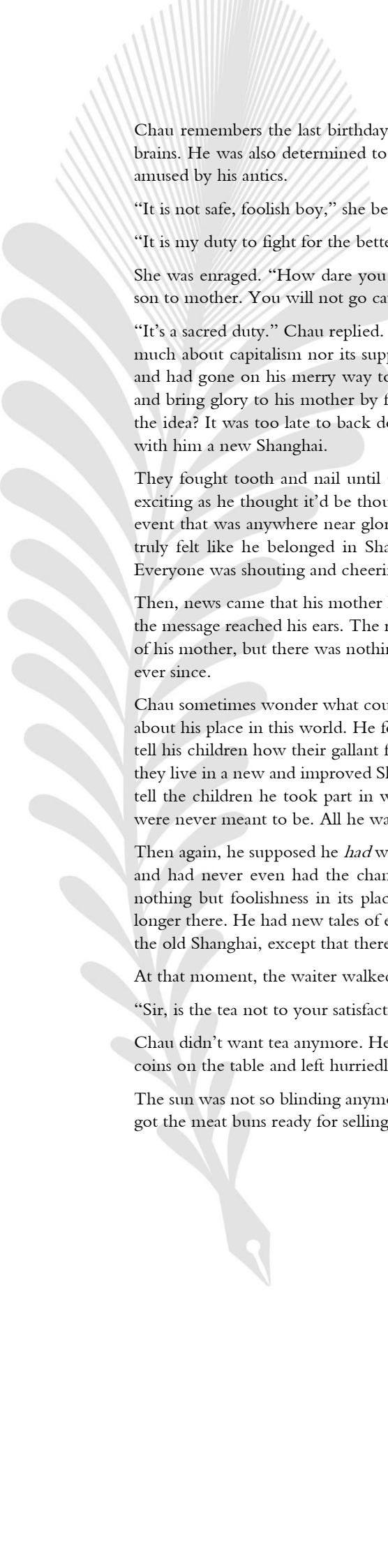
Honestly, what was the damn waiter smiling about? He didn't know him. He didn't know he was a regular customer until *it* happened. He had no business smiling at a complete stranger, It was not as if he cared about him.

The sound of tea sloshing around in his cup distracted him from his musings. It was the same waiter, and he was still wearing that maddening grin. Though more than a little irritated, Chau's fingers tapped on the table on its own accord as a way of saying his thanks. His mother had instilled manners well into him, though through questionable methods.

Chau cursed. His thoughts always ended up back at his mother. It has been twenty-six years since it happened, yet the pain of his mother's death never subsided. The image of his mother was as clear as crystal, and is, and perhaps forever will be, ingrained into the cortex of his brain. All those years had passed, and every little detail of the new world he lives in still reminded him of her.

He went down the memory lane again. Huangpu was her name. She was spirited, and a woman of substance—though he might be biased, he was his mother's son after all. His mother hated her name. She always thought being named after the local river was unbecoming, something about having big shoes to fill and not being worthy. Chau thought she was worthy though, and so did everyone who knew her. She was fierce in reinforcing Shanghai traditions and superstitions, especially to her son. Not even forces of nature could've stopped her when she's made up her mind to do a task, and hell hath no fury when someone challenges her decisions. She was like her namesake this way, oh—so—very stubborn and equipped with a deafening roar.

The very table he was sitting on was diagonal to the table his mother favored when they visited the teashop together. His mother always brought him here when it was his birthday every year. She always smuggled Chang Shou Mian into the teashop, and all the waiters would turn a blind eye because they liked his mother. Then, she would make sure he doesn't cut the noodles, as it symbolized longevity of a person's life. She truly believed that his life would be shortened had he done so, so she screeched at him every time his chopsticks applied a fraction of more pressure onto the strands of noodles. His mother's obsessiveness on superstition exasperated him then. He knew better now though, for it was a stark contrast to how he celebrates his birthday now. He still eats the same food, and now since he's alone, he had the freedom to completely annihilate the noodles. He would sit at his home and eat the noodles with gusto, so he could resume his job that he hated as soon as possible. Same old Shanghai, but the warmth and love that he associated with the place has long faded, and had turned into long gone memories of the past.



Chau remembers the last birthday he had with his mother. He was young and hot-headed, all brawn and no brains. He was also determined to join the revolutionists and fight for capitalism in China. His mother was not amused by his antics.

“It is not safe, foolish boy,” she berated him. “I forbid you to go.”

“It is my duty to fight for the betterment of Shanghai, and you are in no place to stop me.”

She was enraged. “How dare you do this to your mother? Your duty is to your home. Your duty is one from son to mother. You will not go cavorting with the men.”

“It’s a sacred duty.” Chau replied. That was what it said on the posters anyways. To be honest, he had not knew much about capitalism nor its supporters. He had merely read about it on a fluttering poster on his way home and had gone on his merry way to join them. It had seemed like a good idea then, to have a cause to fight for and bring glory to his mother by fighting for Shanghai. Who could’ve known that she would be so opposed to the idea? It was too late to back down anyhow. He thought she’d see reason when he returned, bringing along with him a new Shanghai.

They fought tooth and nail until Chau had left for the army in the middle of the night. Army life was not as exciting as he thought it’d be thought it’d be. Less heroic battles and more training with sweaty men. The only event that was anywhere near glorious was the soldiers gathering together and toasting to a better future. Chau truly felt like he belonged in Shanghai then. All the men beside him were his loyal brothers for the night. Everyone was shouting and cheering, and at that moment, he swore he was invincible.

Then, news came that his mother has died. He was no longer in the army then, and he rushed home the second the message reached his ears. The rest was history. He fervently regretted his actions, especially the abandonment of his mother, but there was nothing to be done. The funeral was a quiet affair, and he began living this half-life ever since.

Chau sometimes wonder what could have been, had he not succumbed to teenage foolishness. He often thought about his place in this world. He fought for the revolutionaries because he thought it might get him the right to tell his children how their gallant father bravely fought against the big, bad communists and was the reason why they live in a new and improved Shanghai. He wanted to be in the winning team. It would have been wonderful tell the children he took part in writing the new tales of old Shanghai. Yet those were mere pipe dreams that were never meant to be. All he was was a failure to his mother. To Shanghai.

Then again, he supposed he *had* written a new tale for old Shanghai. He singlehandedly broke his mother’s heart and had never even had the chance to mend it. He ripped through what meant unconditional love and left nothing but foolishness in its place. The old Shanghai where his loving mother and all her love was was no longer there. He had new tales of emptiness and bitterness to share. The “new” Shanghai was exactly the same as the old Shanghai, except that there was no longer a place for him in the “new” Shanghai.

At that moment, the waiter walked up to him.

“Sir, is the tea not to your satisfaction?” he enquired. “You haven’t touched it yet.”

Chau didn’t want tea anymore. He didn’t want to stay in this teahouse for a second longer. He threw a couple of coins on the table and left hurriedly.

The sun was not so blinding anymore, but the sky was still the bright hue it was then. Chau retrieved his cart and got the meat buns ready for selling. Chau scoffed. A new tal

Safe Haven

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Tong, Rachel – 16

“O il”

I jumped, fingers darting instinctively away from the window pane I had been leaning on, to fumble at the undid fabric buttons that lined my collarbone to shoulder.

“How many times have I told you? This is private property! Shoo, you peasant girl!”

I tugged at the hem of my tattered blouse which had rode up in my eager expedition in leaning over onto the glass pane in front of me as I turned, and found myself staring right into the narrow-eyed fury of the caretaker of the property. Startled at the proximity, I bowed my head until the bangs that usually grazed the top of my brows stuck out towards the ground at an awkward ninety-degree angle, and apologized in feverish Shanghainese as I backtracked down the grassy lawn to the pavement that led me to the city center.

I didn't really understand why I did it. Why my feet took the steering wheel every single day when I went out to run errands, why it brought me to this manor to stare into the big glass windows at the dainty little rich people sat all around in plush sofas, the men making their grand gestures as they spoke, while the women crossed their legs under their cheongsams and clinked their little black heels against the wooden floors as they set them down. I guess I could call that my only source of entertainment, as my father had become a drunk after my mother's death a year ago, and things started going downhill along with his problem since then, with him constantly carrying the heavy raincloud—the risk of losing his job as one of the guards of the city wall—around with us. Gone was my ability to laugh at the little things in life, and the only thing that made me smile, if not bitterly, was the rich and their overly-flaunted wealth.

As my feet auto-piloted me down the stone roads, I let myself sink into my own little negative world.

Suddenly, I felt myself being plucked out of my thoughts like a cork out of a bottle as the scent of buns wafted through the air, and my nose lifted itself to try catch it before it was too late. The Chans had put their stall out again, and a small crowd had already gathered around in the shade of the roof-tile lined tops of the buildings to get a taste of the infamous spongy delight. My hand immediately reached down my right pocket—my left had a hole I had not yet had time to repair—and pulled out the few round coins I had on me. But I hesitated. Father had told me to buy a bottle of wine for him, and handed me the money that very morning. Feverishly counting them off, I prayed silently to the city gods that I would have enough for a bun that would mean my first lunch in months—as we could only afford dinner now. And lo and behold, a plunging sense of disappointment came along with the realization that I only had enough for a bottle of the cheapest wine in the city. My feet started inching me across the street, my hunger taking dominance, but with the intrinsic obedience of Chinese girls kicking in, I finally turned away and ducked, instead, into the shop where they sold wine and paid for a bottle. My stomach was growling like a little lion by this time and my mood darkened to a pitch black.

I didn't go back to my father straight after that. I needed time alone. So instead of moving towards the backstreet that would bring me to the rusty door of the house I was forced to call home, I turned away and started walking down the path I used to go on when I was a little girl. I let my lip slide under my upper row of teeth as memories of my late mother started making their way into my brain. For once, I let them flood, adding and pushing until my throat started burning and the same burn passed through my nose, which pushed at the moisture that had started to well up in my tear ducts.

Before long, I had reached the undergrove that bridged the city and the city wall that wrapped its pale yellow arms around the place, and finally left the clashing noise and color behind as I started making my way down the deserted trees.

Apart from the birds that chattered ahead and the crickets calling back at them with serene approval, I was quite alone.

At least I thought I was.

After a snap of shoe against twig, I was not so sure.

I turned, my eyes wide open and my heart rate picking up, and scanned the trees behind me. There was no one in sight. Shaking my head to clear it, my feet picked up into a light jog that pushed me through the trees in seconds and brought me to the wall. My fingers tumbled over the tiles of stone as I ran down it towards the usual crack which led me to my escape, and, as I had expected, I found the hole in the wall still intact, the

afternoon sun sieving its knowing rays through it as though it had expected me too. I knew that not reporting this hole that protected the city from pirates and outsiders would cost my father his job and risk myself being captured by the authorities, but I would lose this hideout from the city bustle, so I kept my mouth shut about it.

I climbed through the wall into the overgrown grass outside of the city, the breath I didn't know I was holding soothed out of my lungs. The view of the moat was obscured, but the drafts of wind that brought me its moisture already gave me an eerily strange sense of calm. The sun danced through the unkempt grass, tinging everything into a bright gold, turning the little wildflowers into inferior beings as its might warmed the land and the top of my head and tips of my fingers and everything within sight.

I was finally out of the confines of the wall that trapped me inside along with the painful memories and the noise and shapes of people pushing me against an invisible wall every single second, and the relief of it made me slide down the wall into a crouching position, arms hanging limply over each respective knee as I took in the scenery of my sanctuary.

My reverie was broken once again by another snap of shoe to twig, and I turned, jumping up and leaning against the wall and thrusting a hand over my mouth to muffle any utterances.

To my horror and utter exasperation, I found myself staring at a black-heel-clad foot extending in through the crack, along with its owner— a slender leg and a cream-colored cheongsam bound body, and finally, the head, with rigidly set curls bouncing and pearl earrings swaying dangerously as the girl who came through balanced herself against the wall with a pale plump hand.

“And you are?” I asked, eyebrows threatening to disappear above my bangs.

“I’m Xiaolian! Remember me?” the girl steadied herself and peered at me through the long lashes that framed her large almond shaped eyes.

Realization hit. She was one of the girls who lived in the manor. I recognized her instantly.

“You live in the manor do you?”

“Yeah, and today I decided to follow you,” she said matter-of-factly.

I crossed my arms.

“Leave. This is no place for people like you.”

“I saw you by the Chans’ stall. The buns were too— *expensive* were they?”

The way she said expensive was no way rude. It was only a mere utterance of curiosity of a child saying a word it didn't understand, a dipping of toes in water by a person who did not know how to swim.

She held out a brown packet, a grin pulling at the corners of her carefully drawn-over mouth. I was hit with the scent of fresh buns that almost brought my hand upward to accept it, but instead, glared at it, feeling pathetic.

“No thank you. Now leave.”

Xiaolian looked at me imploringly and stepped forward, with the packet still extended.

“I said NO!” I said angrily. “Now leave!”

The girl looked a little disappointed as her hand retracted, along with the mouth-watering scent, and took a step back.

“At least tell me your name before I go,” Xiaolian said, perfect brows knitted.

“I’m Yangzi,” I told her my name just to shut her up.

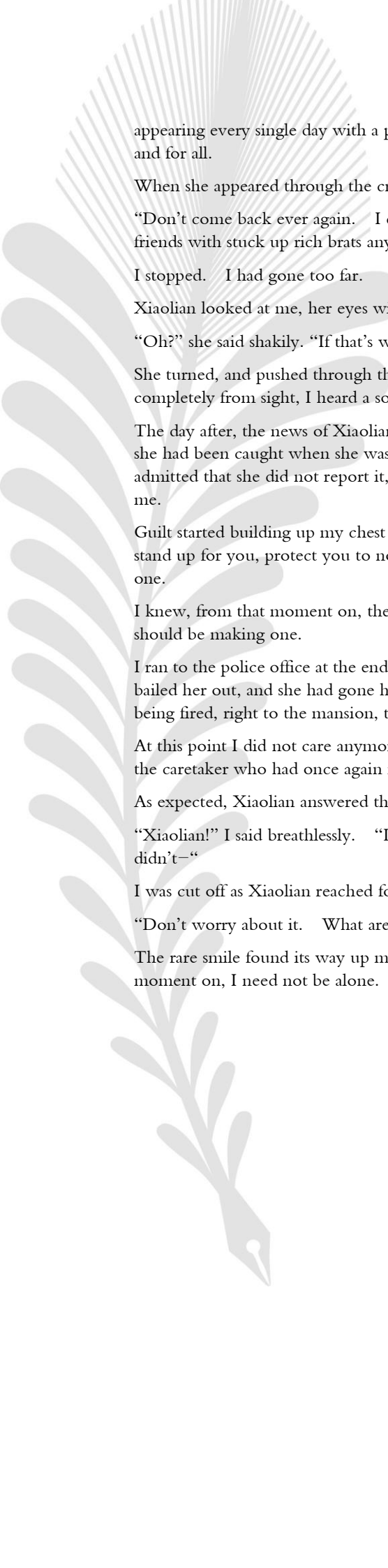
She turned, satisfied, and slid through the wall.

The next couple of days, to my anger and disbelief, Xiaolian turned up at my safe haven every single time I went there, her hand extended with a packet of hot buns in them. And every time I pushed her away, stifling the sense of guilt that came with it.

I didn't need friends, especially not friends like her, these rich people being good for nothing but behaving like stuck-up brats who tried stuffing poor people with food and act like they did something kind and generous.

However, as the days passed by, I started realizing that this Xiaolian was unexpectedly lonely. Being that rich pushed away people I supposed. The poor despised them and the rich made friends just to liaise. I mean, who would want to make a friend and stay true to the richest in the city right? People got close just for the money.

But still, her being lonely was no means for me to make a friend. Losing Mother was already a blow. I didn't need to make friends just to lose them all over again. I simply couldn't afford that. So after a few weeks of her



appearing every single day with a packet of buns that I firmly pushed away, I decided. I would end this once and for all.

When she appeared through the crack the next day, I turned to her, arms crossed protectively over my chest.

“Don’t come back ever again. I don’t need friends. You’re not one and never will be okay? I don’t make friends with stuck up rich brats anyway—“

I stopped. I had gone too far.

Xiaolian looked at me, her eyes wide, tears evident in the corners of her eyes.

“Oh?” she said shakily. “If that’s what you want, sure.”

She turned, and pushed through the hole with as much dignity as she could possess. But before she vanished completely from sight, I heard a sob that escaped from suppression.

The day after, the news of Xiaolian being captured came as the talk of the city was passed about. Apparently she had been caught when she was running home, and people found out about the hole in the city wall. She admitted that she did not report it, and was taken away immediately. And she didn’t say a single word about me.

Guilt started building up my chest to a point of no return. True friends, friends that would stick up for you, stand up for you, protect you to no cost did exist after all, and even the rich people of Shanghai city could be one.

I knew, from that moment on, the fear of losing a friend should be put last in the line, and the first priority should be making one.

I ran to the police office at the end of the main street and demanded to see her, to find that her father had already bailed her out, and she had gone home. Without hesitation, I pelted down the street again, like a cannonball being fired, right to the mansion, the guilt propelling me forward.

At this point I did not care anymore. I banged at the door of the mansion, shouting Xiaolian’s name, ignoring the caretaker who had once again moved out to scold me away.

As expected, Xiaolian answered the door.

“Xiaolian!” I said breathlessly. “I’m so sorry! For all the bad things I said to you! I’m so so so sorry. I didn’t—“

I was cut off as Xiaolian reached forward and circled me in her arms in a tight hug.

“Don’t worry about it. What are friends for?”

The rare smile found its way up my face and tugged at my mouth. And she smiled too. I knew, from that moment on, I need not be alone.

Walls of Freedom

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Wong, Pauline – 15

That summer my father walked out of our house's door and never looked back.
I was six years old.

It was a few days of seeing that empty chair at our dinner table when I popped the question. "We Chinese are very strong, stronger than those laowai..." my mama replied while furiously scrubbing the belly of our teapot.

That teapot was a wedding present from my father. Mama loved it dearly and paid more attention to it than any fittings of the house, treating it like a pearl on her palm. She loved it dearly.

"It's what reminds me of Papa," she once said to me.

I stared at her frantic movements in silence before she sighed and put down the teapot gently. She reassured me that he went to join the army and would be back very soon.

I wasn't sure. There was an edge to her voice. I wanted to ask more, but one death glare from those obsidian eyes and I dropped the topic.

Our family had few to our possessions. We were quite poor. Everyone was poor. Everyone but the corrupted government officials that only smoke opium all day. They lay their backs on the hard-wooden beds, one hand holding the long pipe to their mouths, another holding a Dragon Li to their chests. Mama loathed them. I envied their children. They carried around their guoguo when they went out onto the streets, their chirping filling hustling streets.

My only toy was my bamboo-dragonfly. Made of dark oak wood, the wings were a handsome shade of brown as it gleamed in the sunlight. Despite not being the toy I could wave around and catch somebody's eye, I was proud of it. My father bought it off the streets for three dollars when I was five. Ever since, it had been my companion when my parents were busy with their mundane work of fishing and sewing, I would allow the porous tissue to slide between my palms, before releasing it as it rose higher and higher into the air, gliding along the winnowing wind before my very eyes, piloting into the binding rays of the sun, before dropping onto the ground meters away.

Every day I would bring my dragonfly with me, going to wherever it took me, exploring the city, delving into narrow alleys, climbing onto rooftops. Time passed, the sun hid herself behind the horizontal line, and the chants of my mother calling me home echoed through the streets, the alleys, the rooftops.

Every day was the same, until that night when I met mama's solemn face as she sat at the dinner table. The usual Lion's Head Meatball and rice was served, and with a slight nod I slipped into my regular seat, a sideways glance at the empty chair where my father usually sat.

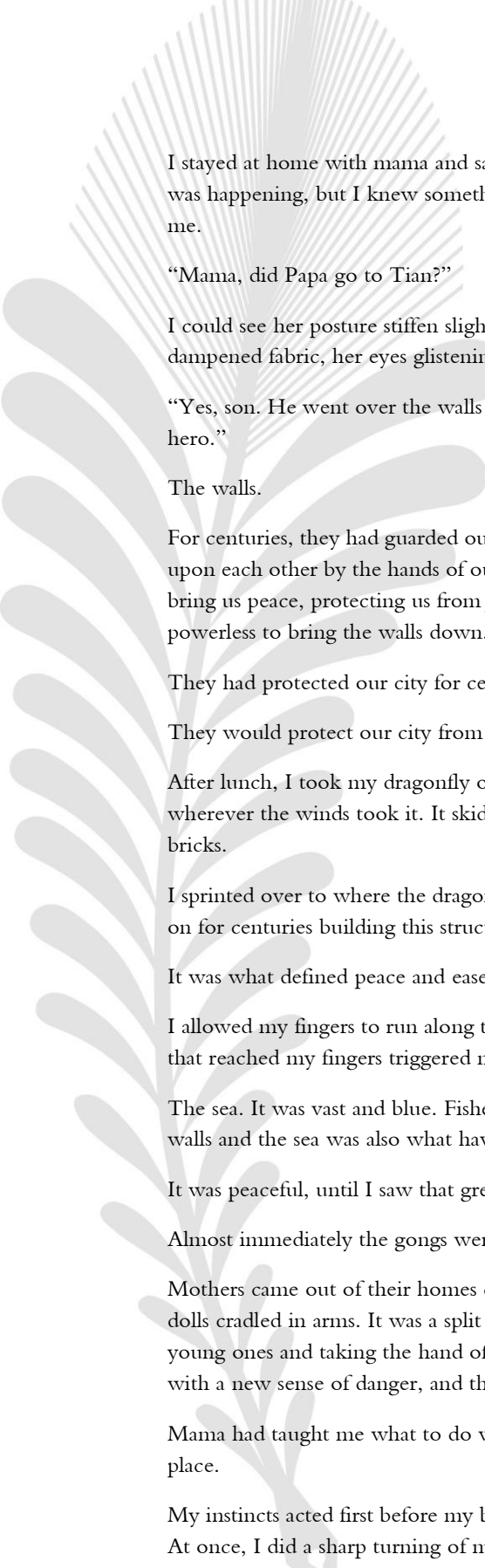
Mama must have caught my eye. "He's not coming back," she whispered.

"Wha?"

"Bombed up by a canon, neighbor Lee told me earlier. Hers was gone too..." she drifted off, her fists clenched tight. She took a deep breath, slamming down her chopsticks. "Those DAMN laowais." With that, she pushed herself away from the table and left the room.

I stayed at my seat, eyeing at the empty chairs around me, frozen. I was still confused about what had happened.

The sun shone brightly as usual the next day, contrasting the darkness that hovered over the village. In just one night family members had been lost, tears had been shed and life moved on despite the lingering shadows under red watery eyes. Life could not wait.



I stayed at home with mama and sat next to her while she sobbed into her shawl. I didn't really understand what was happening, but I knew something was wrong. Mama was strong and she never cried before, not in front of me.

"Mama, did Papa go to Tian?"

I could see her posture stiffen slightly, but she tried hard not to show it. Slowly her eyes lifted from the dampened fabric, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Yes, son. He went over the walls into Tian where he's living happily now," she took a deep breath. "He died a hero."

The walls.

For centuries, they had guarded our beautiful city of Shanghai. Each and every piece of the strong bricks was laid upon each other by the hands of our ancestors. They went through blood and sweat, hoping that this wall would bring us peace, protecting us from jeopardy. For centuries, they had left enemies out of reach, their weapons too powerless to bring the walls down. We took pride in these beautiful walls, and we cared for them regularly.

They had protected our city for centuries.

They would protect our city from the British too.

After lunch, I took my dragonfly out again. Again and again it flew down the streets and passed people, going to wherever the winds took it. It skidded around the corner and landed at the foot of a magnificent wall of stone bricks.

I sprinted over to where the dragonfly lay in the soft stubbles of verdant grass, to where men had worked on and on for centuries building this structure.

It was what defined peace and ease in Shanghai.

I allowed my fingers to run along the cracks of the walls, the ebb and flow, the wax and wane. The small crevice that reached my fingers triggered my curiosity.

The sea. It was vast and blue. Fishermen relied on this beautiful expanse for their living, the moat between the walls and the sea was also what have kept us from danger and trouble for so long.

It was peaceful, until I saw that grey ship firing red balls at a distance, and it was coming towards us.

Almost immediately the gongs were struck from the watch tower, the boisterous ring enveloping the entire city.

Mothers came out of their homes carrying their babies; children waddled out of their backyard, ball in hand, dolls cradled in arms. It was a split second when everything turned to chaos. I saw mothers scooping up their young ones and taking the hand of another, their faces were a mixture of fear and worry. The air was clouded with a new sense of danger, and the gong was still ringing in our ears.

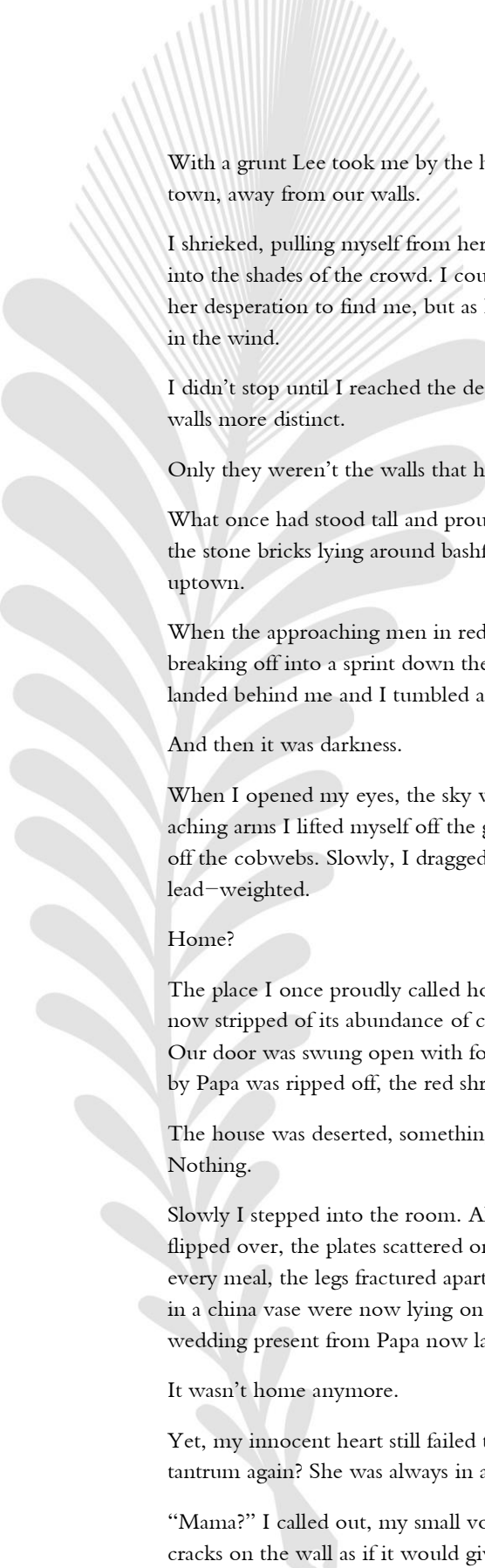
Mama had taught me what to do when the gong was struck: get home immediately, and find yourself a hiding place.

My instincts acted first before my brain did. I was halfway home when I realized I left my dragonfly by the walls. At once, I did a sharp turning of my body and started running back to where the walls were, close and closer to danger. I slipped past waves and waves of bodies, parents that were rushing back home at the sound of the gong.

"Chao!" I heard a voice call my name. When I turned around I saw Lee running towards me, her expression frantic. "What are you still doing here? You have to go back home right now!" A loud barrage resounded at the tip of her words.

I shook my head, that dragonfly was my everything. It was my only toy and my only memory of Papa, I would not let it go. Lee seemed frustrated. "What are you waiting for? RUN!"

I made no move.



With a grunt Lee took me by the hem of my sleeve, and started dragging me back into the crowds, back into the town, away from our walls.

I shrieked, pulling myself from her firm grip, clawing at her arm. I broke free finally, and quickly disappeared into the shades of the crowd. I could hear her voice echoing in the crowd, her frustration and fear reflected onto her desperation to find me, but as I ran faster and faster her voice finally resembled nothing more than a whisper in the wind.

I didn't stop until I reached the deserted piece of greenery, where the walls were closer, and the cracks on the walls more distinct.

Only they weren't the walls that have protected us anymore.

What once had stood tall and proud at the end of Shanghai now turned into a pile of ashes, the broken pieces of the stone bricks lying around bashful and still. The air was brimming with dusts and flakes, it's no longer quiet uptown.

When the approaching men in red and blue came into sight, I slowly backed away from the debris, before breaking off into a sprint down the streets. But my little legs only took me a few steps when a loud explosion landed behind me and I tumbled and fell.

And then it was darkness.

When I opened my eyes, the sky was dyed in a shade of grey and blue, and the streets were desolated. With aching arms I lifted myself off the ground, my limbs covered in dry dust. I rubbed my scalp, and tried to shook off the cobwebs. Slowly, I dragged my body back home, my legs hardly bearing my chest that was now lead-weighted.

Home?

The place I once proudly called home was now shadowy and dilapidated. Our once humble vegetable yard was now stripped of its abundance of cabbages and carrots. They lay abandoned by the trenches, cold and barren. Our door was swung open with force as it now hung precariously by the ledge. Our "fu" word that was written by Papa was ripped off, the red shreds dangling like a rag doll.

The house was deserted, something I have always feared since a young age. No love, no one to come home to. Nothing.

Slowly I stepped into the room. All the furniture in the house was destructed in a way— the dining table was flipped over, the plates scattered on the floor. Our chairs, the three chairs that linked our family together during every meal, the legs fractured apart, a broken family. Flowers, the beautiful Peonies that were once placed nicely in a china vase were now lying on the floor, the petals scattered around the stems. The china vase which was a wedding present from Papa now lay in broken pieces around the petals. It was a horrible scene.

It wasn't home anymore.

Yet, my innocent heart still failed to acknowledge what really was going on. I was confused. Did Mama have a tantrum again? She was always in a bad mood these days.

"Mama?" I called out, my small voice echoing in the deserted house. I gazed around the room, reading the cracks on the wall as if it would give me some sort of hint of where Mama was.

Minutes passed and... nothing. I started panicking, I ran across the rooms, crouching and crawling, looking high and low, still, there was no sight of my beloved mother. It was when I got to the front yard did the emotions of fear and anxiety kicked in and I started screaming "Mama! Mama!"

Memories flashed back to olden days, when our family was one and Mama was happier. As a child I was less attracted to strangers. In fact, I was terrified of them. I would much rather play with myself than play with other children of the village. However, sometimes, drawing on sand or playing with pebbles were just not enough. Mama and I would play together whenever she's free. I would sit by her side as she sewed fabric together, my eyes watching in wonder as those threads weaved in and out of the needle, until my torn clothing was good as new, a patch added as an addition decoration. After that we would play hide-and-seek at home, giggling as I

caught Mama hiding behind the chairs, laughing when I was scared from behind, discovered from my hiding place. I could always easily find Mama, not today.

My screams and shouts must have alerted the neighbors when I saw Lee running from a distance.

“Chao... shhhh little boy shush,” she whispered in an undertone. “How could you run away from me yesterday? Did you know how dangerous it was?” Her angry voice did not help my situation as I continued to sob. I watched with teary eyes and a blurry vision as her eyes softened. “Okay now, it’s okay. You are fine. What would your mother say if she knew you have been crying, hmm?”

My head sprang up upon the mention of Mama.

“Mama?” I said, I didn’t know if it was a question or not.

“Yes, Mama,” she said. “Go get your Mama, okay?”

“Mama where?”

Her eyes narrowed and her eyebrows furrowed in worry. “Chao, have you seen your Mama?” I tilted my head and looked at her in confusion. Slowly I shook my head no. I watched as Lee’s face transformed from worry to realization as the horrible truth hit her.

“No, this is not good. Oh my heavens where did she go?” she whispered to no one. She turned to me. “Chao, go in and play by yourself okay? Don’t leave home.”

I nodded, my tired body now finally hitting my senses. Almost drifting off, I tumbled back to the house and climbed into bed, falling asleep almost immediately.

When I woke up, there was a buzz in the house. I could hear Lee talking loudly, shouting out orders to people. With groggy eyes I went into the background, where at least 5 people were gathered around the household well. It was for a while until the crowd noticed my presence and Lee immediately ran over and scooped me up, putting myself in her arms. She patted my head, gently pressing my head into the crook of her neck. It was supposed to be a sign of reassurance, of comfort and love. But something was wrong. The atmosphere did not feel right. She was hiding something from me.

I confirmed my instincts when I looked up, as she immediately tried to take me back into the house, but alas I saw what happened.

There, by the well, a body laid lifeless. The crowd was grave with misery and whispering to one another, shaking their heads. I couldn’t see the face clearly, but one look at their hand and I knew who it was.

Clutching my father’s teapot in her hand was my mother’s body, her clothes damp from the well. “Did she get splashed by the waves when she went to wash our clothes by the sea?” I asked myself. My eight-year-old self was innocent and too childish to understand the truth.

“MAMA!!!” my shout was full of happiness, delighted to see my beloved mother again. I could see the crowd smiling at me, but the smiles looked forced. I wanted to ask questions but all I could do was to continue kicking at Lee, shouting for my Mama as she quickly brought me inside the house.

It took months, months of explanation when I finally understood that Mama wasn’t coming back anymore. It took a long time, years until I understood what really happened. Mama had hidden herself in the well, ready to wait the night till the chaos were over. Over the night, the oxygen in the well was used up and she died of cerebral hypoxia. Even by death, she held close to Papa’s teapot.

A few weeks later I clung onto Lee’s hand, and watched as the tall soldiers marched into our beautiful village of Shanghai. All the villagers were standing by the streets as these strangers took over and invaded the village. Tears were shed and anger was expressed. The years went by and I lost count of the days. I was brought up by Lee till I was an adult. I worked hard for a living and got married. I made sure that my children could grow up in a complete family— being an orphan was one of the most painful experiences I have ever encountered. Every day was the same work and the same routine. Life wasn’t interesting to say the least.

Three generations passed and I watched as my great-granddaughter sat foot on where I once called home, now a popular tourist spot of the 21st century.



I gazed down upon her as she held her sketchbook close to her chest, looking around at the old city of Shanghai. She was an artist, a very talented one may I say, and she's back at my hometown to find inspiration for her new project. I had always enjoyed observing her as she drew, each and every stroke of that pencil a story itself, and she made sceneries of landscapes and buildings turned into stories.

Right now she is standing near the walls, which has been dismantled and built again over the years. They still look the same as old days, but the memories are wiped away.

She is looking at something. I watch as she settles down on the grass and takes out her pencil. I allow myself to move closer and peek behind her back. I smile.

Laying between the stubbles and grass is a single toy bamboo—dragonfly. It is made of dark oak, and the blades gleam in the sunlight. It looks just like my very own toy that has been lost in the war.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Marymount Secondary School, Lowe, Kate Ellen – 16

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my worn out folding chair, listening to the radio.

“September 15th, 1951.”

There had been small heroin seizures all over the city, and the police were embroiled in the hunt for the T kingpin. That second part wasn't on the radio— I had colleagues on the case. I guess compared to them, I wasn't much of a police officer, but it was a tumultuous time in Shanghai, and my only experience was as an overnight traffic light operator afraid of the dark. I was not inclined to seek out a heavier assignment.

The control tower was an unassuming thing in the middle of an intersection, rusting inside and out. It overlooked the Bund, though there was nothing to see in the dark. All you could tell of your location was the sound of waves lapping at the harbour overnight, romantic when I started, but after almost a year's time, relentless. I sat there alone night after night, shuffling between green and red for the sparse traffic. There wasn't much on the line. But there was a girl.

The boredom that swirled like fog in the tower stilled when she walked past. From five metres up and two lanes of traffic away, she was the size of a figurine. She wore a yellow floral cheongsam, and her hair was always immaculate. She would cross the street just before dawn, walk into the sleeping Jewish liquor store, and come back out half an hour later, cross the same street and leave in the same direction as the river. Watching her disappear into the distance felt like waking up from a dream.

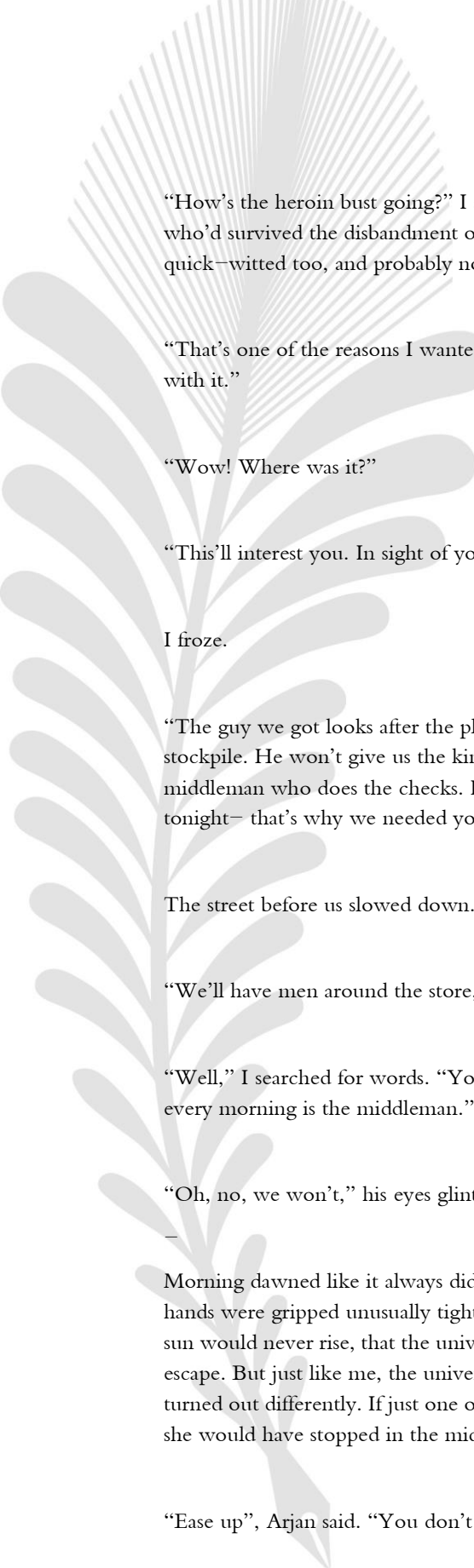
I hadn't yet figured out what she did in the store, but I liked to think there was a secret switch in there that turned the silent street on every morning, and it was her job to flip it. When she strolled away, the shop doors would open in her wake, and you could hear the tram engines rumble at the depot nearby.

Schoolchildren knotted their ties, businessmen read their newspapers, and the port began to bustle. When the sun rose on Shanghai and the reds and greens of its streets emerged, everyone knew it was morning.

I had been up all night in a grey capsule. The ghostly glow of the traffic lights made faces appear in the dirty windows. Sometimes, I felt them lunge at me, felt the tower start to fall over, caught a glimpse of my own body on the ground five metres below. I had had no rest. To me, she was the morning.

I didn't know her. All I had ever seen her do was walk and open a door. Yet, for some reason, I mourned our alternate timelines, thought about her sleeping while I was awake, imagined her activities as I fell asleep. Five metres up and two lanes of traffic away, her presence gleamed so bright it felt like company. I imagined opening a window one morning and calling out to her. Perhaps she would stop in the middle of the crosswalk. If there was traffic, I could keep it safely away from her as long as I wanted. She would look up, her hair shining, and her eyes questioning, and I would manage to stutter something sufficient to convince her I wasn't a maniac. And later on we would get something to eat.

The imagining didn't amount to much. Not long after she left that September morning, I finished my shift and met a friend at a bar nearby. They weren't strictly open, but the owner knew it was my dinner time and always had a meal ready for me with their breakfast. We sat facing the street, already abuzz with people.



“How’s the heroin bust going?” I asked him. His name was Arjan, and he was one of the rare Sikh policemen who’d survived the disbandment of the Municipal Police two years before. He was tall and imposing, but quick-witted too, and probably not afraid of the dark. An all-around effective officer.

“That’s one of the reasons I wanted to talk. We found the stockpile yesterday afternoon, and a man to go along with it.”

“Wow! Where was it?”

“This’ll interest you. In sight of your post. That Jewish liquor store is a front.”

I froze.

“The guy we got looks after the place full time, but someone does come around at dawn to check on the stockpile. He won’t give us the kingpin, but we made a deal.”, he went on. “He helped us with a sketch of the middleman who does the checks. If he plays along until tomorrow, he walks. We’re planning a stakeout tonight— that’s why we needed your help.”

The street before us slowed down. “What do you need my help with?”

“We’ll have men around the store, but they can’t be visible. Our eyes will be in your control tower.”

“Well,” I searched for words. “You’ll have a hard time figuring out which of the 20 people who goes in there every morning is the middleman.”

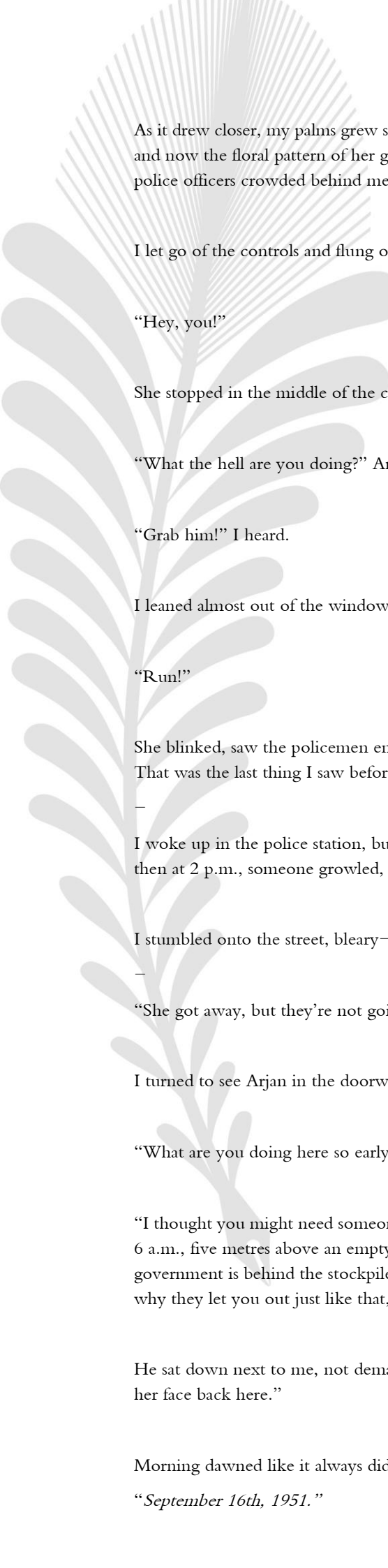
“Oh, no, we won’t,” his eyes glinted. “She’s a woman.”

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my folding chair. Only this morning, there was no radio and my hands were gripped unusually tight around the controls. I didn’t know what I had expected— maybe that the sun would never rise, that the universe would conspire with me to give her enough time to figure things out and escape. But just like me, the universe messed up. I thought about the many millions of ways things could have turned out differently. If just one out of hundreds of mornings I had opened a window and called to her, perhaps she would have stopped in the middle of the crosswalk—

“Ease up”, Arjan said. “You don’t have to do anything differently. Just act like we’re not here.”

It was hard to ignore the crackle of the walkie-talkies, but I wiped my brow and stared at the street that ran alongside the Bund, waiting for her to appear. I didn’t know her, but I had wanted to. She was the only one who ever kept me company in the mornings. She was the one who turned the street on. Maybe I had created a mythology out of her, but I wasn’t going to let it be ruined.

A dot of yellow appeared in the distance.



As it drew closer, my palms grew sweatier, slipping off the traffic light controls. I could see the gleam of her hair, and now the floral pattern of her gown, and now her presence filled up the capsule I sat in, and washed over the police officers crowded behind me. The street was silent. She was serene.

I let go of the controls and flung open a window.

“Hey, you!”

She stopped in the middle of the crosswalk and turned to me, her eyes questioning.

“What the hell are you doing?” Arjan yelled.

“Grab him!” I heard.

I leaned almost out of the window and locked eyes with her.

“Run!”

She blinked, saw the policemen emerging from the shop doorways, and took off in the direction of the river. That was the last thing I saw before someone yanked me back into the room and knocked me out.

—

I woke up in the police station, but they didn’t keep me there for long. No one said a word to me for hours, then at 2 p.m., someone growled, “You can keep your job.”

I stumbled onto the street, bleary-eyed. It was well past my bedtime.

—

“She got away, but they’re not going to go after her.”

I turned to see Arjan in the doorway.

“What are you doing here so early? My shift doesn’t end for an hour.”

“I thought you might need someone to talk to. I don’t know why you... did that, but she’s off the hook.” It was 6 a.m., five metres above an empty street, but he lowered his voice to a whisper. “There are talks that the government is behind the stockpile. The heroin was due to be smuggled to Osaka. No one wanted a fuss. That’s why they let you out just like that, too.”

He sat down next to me, not demanding a response, but added after a second, “She probably won’t be showing her face back here.”

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my worn out folding chair, listening to the radio.

“September 16th, 1951.”

Port Boy

Sha Tin College, Yung, Jess – 14

There is someone at his boss' desk.

He doesn't know what to do, stunned as he stands in the doorway. It's early in the morning, the office swallowed in black, but whitewashed sunlight bleeds through faded blinds, seeping into the floor and revealing the top of the desk. There is just enough light to make out a face that is not Mr Ching's.

A click sounds in the room. Once, twice. On the third time a yellow flame accompanies it, dancing before it goes out. He hears an inhale, sees a spot of red appear for a moment and then smells smoke.

He should run. He should tell the police, but he's sure that most of their minds are in the skies from *yapian*.

But, before he can even move, a hand materializes from behind the desk, motioning for him to come over.

He finds himself walking towards it. The wooden boards under him complain about his weight, creak and groan from age, only stopping once he does, in front of the desk.

Sea wind rushes in through the window, blowing ice into his ears. A crate is unloaded on Shanghai's ports, a distant metallic thud.

"Where's my boss?"

There's a dull, uninterested sigh, and smoke swirls out of the dark. Then light hits, shadows are made, and they make out a figure, leaning forward on the desk. "Your *laoban* gave over his job to me. I'm your boss now."

It's a foreigner, a man with charcoal hair, curled like wisps of fog, eyes dark as ink. There are no tell-tale signs of age at the corner of his eyes and mouth, but his gaze is hardened, without a hint of emotion. The pointy splinters in the port's boards remind him of this person, a cigarette pinched between his lips, jumping as he talks.

"My name, is Cole Bennett." All this— except his name— he says in Chinese, and he hears a slight accent in his words, an occasional off tone. "You're one of the *matougongren*, the port boys."

An indescribable feeling of frustration washes over him and he speaks up, indignant. "My name is—"

"I don't need to know your name." Cole Bennett says plainly. His dark eyes stare dully at him, never breaking contact as he takes the cigarette between his fingers. The tip turns red, then grey smoke envelops him as the man blows straight into his face. Eyes water, a nose burns, but he makes no move to do anything.

"All I need to know is that you work, Port Boy."

"So, the foreigner is our boss now." His colleague, A Fei, remarks.

All he does is nod, busy finding his grip on the cargo in his hands. A Fei is doing the same.

It's the first shipment they've had under Cole Bennet's supervision: wooden crates, with a white rabbit painted on their sides, *baitu*—white rabbit— printed under the animal. They're unusually heavy.

His colleague huffs. "You know, this Cole Bennett person, I don't like him. Bet he's one of those foreigners who think they're better than us." Their cargo goes down with a thump at the drop off site, both turning back to take more from the large pile of shipment. "His Chinese is horrible. I can hardly understand what he's saying."

He lets out a breathy chuckle. It's not that bad. A few tones off here and there. Nothing too serious."

A Fei snorts. "Yeah, that's only what you think." He picks up another rabbit painted crate. "I'm impressed you can make anything out of what he's saying. He should make more of an effort to learn."

He doesn't reply to that, a grimace busying his face. "These are really heavy. Do you know what we're shipping? Mr Ching used to tell us."

A Fei shrugs.

He almost drops the cargo.

Cole Bennett's dull eyes are narrowed dangerously. The man's supporting the side of the crate that almost slipped. "Careful." He hikes up the crate roughly, and he wipes his sweaty hands on his pants, before taking back the load. Cole Bennett lets go.

"Don't spill it."

Yapian smoke is a constant. _

Kung pan t'ou, Pak t'ou, Kem fa t'ou; all opium, all *yapian*.

Their smiles are vacant, pleasure temporary. They depend on the drug like how a fish needs water.

They're building a new pub.

The workers show no sign of stopping, continuing to tinker as midnight draws close. Even now, the Bund is just as lively as ever, if not more so. Ladies in *cheongsam* flock the streets in groups, men in suits swigging bottles of alcohol. Building and architecture scream 'Western', tall and regal, music and intoxicated laughter rolling onto the streets.

The pub is one of the many that litter Shanghai. They came with the foreigners, popping up here and there, until the streets were filled with them before anyone realized it, like water that trickles through cracks, dripping and dripping until suddenly, there is a flood in their midst.

The workers are currently making the sign. It says *huanying*, and above it the blocky characters he has come to recognize as the English alphabet. He knows the pattern; it means 'welcome' as well.

From where he is, a couple of shops away, he sees a man walk past the pub, before stopping, backtracking. A street light shines down on him, illuminating a dark coat, a lit cigarette, and disinterested eyes.

Cole Bennett stays where he is, unmoving, stare fixed to the sign. Then, to his confusion, his lips start to move, the cigarette jumping. The man's eyes start to dart, back and forth, and he follows his gaze to see he is looking at *huanying*.

He hasn't realized how his feet have walked on their own to bring him next to the man, how close he has gotten to be able to see such details; curiosity is suddenly an instinct.

He doesn't mean to speak, but interest controls his tongue. "That's *huanying*." He points to the characters, one by one, watching from the corner of his eye as Cole Bennett's gaze follows his hand; his mouth has stopped moving. "*Huan. Ying.*"

He goes silent, waiting for a reply. It doesn't come. Seconds suddenly feel like they've extended into minutes and he's just about ready to excuse himself when he hears the man ask, "*Huanying*, as in 'We welcome you'?"

The words are a relief and he nods. "That's right."

Cole Bennett looks at the characters again.

"*Huanying*. Strange. I don't feel like we are."

He mentions it to A Fei during lunch break. "I saw our boss trying to read Chinese words yesterday."

It earns him a scoff. "Try? So you mean he can't read it?"

"I guess. I helped him, though. Accidentally bumped into him. He was trying to read *huanying*." He is a bit taken aback by how he is, in a way, defending Cole Bennett.

"I don't really know why you bother. You don't have to be nice to him. He's not even nice to us."

He's not that bad. You said he wasn't trying to make an effort to learn Chinese. I think what I've told you means he is."

“And so that makes him a good person? He snapped at one of us because he was a minute late to work today. It’s like he doesn’t have a heart.”

He frowns. “He *did* tell us to come earlier today. Said that there was a lot of cargo.”

“I didn’t hear that. Neither did the rest of the crew.”

“Maybe you have bad hearing.”

“What are you doing? Sucking up to the boss?”

He doesn’t respond, unsure himself.

His colleague has accidentally dropped the cargo.

From the distance, he can see its contents spilling all over the deck, a black mass that spreads over the port.

He runs to them, terrified. “Pick it up!”

They don’t turn to look at him, or acknowledge what he says. They all look at the black, and as he slows down to a stop next to them, he thinks he knows why.

The black comes from a bag in the crate; he bends down to find that they are small little balls, sticky to the touch.

Dread settles in his stomach. He wants to believe that it is not what it is, that it’s a new foreign product, but he knows otherwise, and by the looks on his colleagues’ faces, they know as well.

“It’s not white rabbit, *baitu*.” He hears A Fei mumble, “It’s *Pak t’ou*. White ground. Opium.”

It’s drizzling, the first of many to a Shanghai winter. Even now, he can smell *yapian* float through moist air, blending in with the fog.

It has been a week since they had found the opium. They had packed it back into the crate as best as they could, pretending like it had never happened. Everyone else seemed to get on fine, but he carries the cargo with a heavy heart. Mentioning Cole Bennett’s name is taboo.

“Hey there, pretty lady. Got somewhere to go?”

It’s loud, cocky, and he looks up, immediately spotting what it is; a little woman, cornered against a wall by two men, both big and burly. The street lights don’t do any justice to show their features but he knows that one has a tattoo running down his arm, the other on his leg; they’re the same tattoo: *Qingbang* in green ink, a dragon winding across the words— the Green Gang.

His blood runs colder than the rain. No one would not know them, not know the people who controlled the Shanghai life; they waved the promise of opium over their heads, and just like that, millions of people were their puppets.

He slows down his pace, but only just a bit; he is prepared to run at any time if they turned to him.

They don’t. Instead, their attention —and his— find a man that has stopped in front of them, hands in coat pockets. He recognizes who it is in a heartbeat, and as much as he dislikes Cole Bennett, and the fact that he is another opium dealer, another puppet, he desperately hopes that he will not take the gangsters’ side.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

A tattooed arm snakes its way around the lady’s waist, making her whimper. “Hey now, we don’t mean any trouble. We were just going to have a nice night out with this lady. Ain’t that right, miss?” The lady doesn’t answer.

“I suggest you let her go.” Cole Bennett takes a step forward and he hears him *sigh*, as if he has better things to do. “Clearly she doesn’t like it.”

One of them steps out onto the street, facing the man; all he can see is his back and the winding tattoo on his leg. “Oh, shut it. What are you doing here anyway, *waiguoren*? There’s no need to be so uptight about it. You can come join us. She’s a nice one.” Anyone could hear the smirk in his tone.

Cole Bennett raises a brow. “No thank you.” He declines politely, and before any of them can react, he has knocked a solid uppercut into the gangster, who crumples to the ground.

The man dusts his hands, eyeing the darkness. "Would you like to be the next one?"

It's not a question. The arm around the lady's waist is gone, and the second man stumbles out of the black, throwing his friend over his shoulder and running.

The lady is quivering, and she goes up to thank Cole Bennett fervently, who gives no other reply than to take off his coat, wrapping it around the woman's shoulders. "It's raining." Is his reasoning, "Young ladies like you won't want to catch a cold."

He watches as he leads her away, hand placed courteously around her shoulder, disappearing at the corner to leave him with the rain and misty feelings.

There's no use being here at the police station. He knows that they're just as bad, but his thoughts have brought him here, confused feelings leading him to the reception.

He spots a policeman behind it, legs kicked up on the desk like a Westerner. However, he puts them down when he spots him. "How can I help you?"

His words stumble over each other. "My boss, he, he's called Cole Bennett, he sells opium. Isn't that illegal?"

The policeman looks at him for a moment, before laughing, shaking his head. "Kid, kid." He titters, and he wills his hands not to curl into fists. "Alright, yes, it is illegal. They passed a law for it at one point. But can you really call it illegal when no one cares?"

The legs kick themselves back up onto the desk. "I could help you tell, try and find some policemen who actually do care. See if they can help you get your boss. What was his name again— Cole Bennett? How does he look like?"

His answer is abrupt. "He's a foreigner. His hair and eyes are black. He's young."

And with that, he stomps out of the police station.

Things are confusing. Life is confusing. His boss, Cole Bennett, is confusing.

Everything is as clear as *yapian* smoke.

It's late. They've just finished sending off the last of their cargo. A Fei and the others have already left, anxious for dinner. He doesn't have an appetite.

He goes to retrieve his belongings, or what little he has of them. The smell of cigarette smoke stops him short.

Cole Bennett sits at the desk, the room illuminated by the lit end of his cigarette and a halfway done candle, providing the littlest of light. His shadows are the other way around, giving him a ghostly look.

Inky eyes look down at a photo frame; he's unsure whether it is the wavering flame that makes them look watery.

He must've made a noise, some creaking in the floor, because Cole Bennett looks up. Immediately, an apology waits on his tongue, and his body tenses, ready to run. But what he gets instead, from the way the man motions with his head, is an invitation to come in.

He treads lightly, and when he gets to the desk, the blanket of silence he first felt when coming in is now stifling. "Um," He starts, looking down briefly. "What's that?"

There is no need for him to refer to what he is talking about. After a heavy beat, Cole Bennett turns the photo frame around.

It's a little girl with a wide smile, a stuffed bear held tightly against her chest. Her hair is dark, curly, and her eyes are a brilliant, shining coal.

He has a hunch. "Your daughter?"

A simple nod is his reply as Cole Bennett turns the photo back to him. Slowly, slowly, a smile cracks through the man's face, and it's almost —dare he say it— fond. "She lives with her mother. I just send money that I make here back to her. I wonder if she remembers me."

This is not the Cole Bennett he knows. This is not a Cole Bennett he knows. He only feels more confused about this man, about what he is.

A cold man, a father. An opium dealer, a kind man. A foreigner, or one of them.

Everything swims, and he *must* ask, must know.

“Mr Bennett, are we shipping opium?”

Cole Bennett stiffens. He stares at the picture, then gently puts it down, photo against the desk, as if not wanting the little girl in the photo to hear or see what he’s going to say.

“Yes.” And the heavy fog, the confusing fog, finally disappears.

The man looks out the window, sighing, taking a drag from his cigarette, wrapping himself in smoke. “I know it’s illegal.”

“People don’t really care anymore.”

Cole Bennett doesn’t reply to that.

“I don’t want to do this.” He says instead. There is no persuasion in his tone, no want for him to believe. He lays it out for him, just as it is.

“I know.”

Something shifts in those dark eyes. “Just know that if the police come, they won’t be coming for any of you.”

He comes to work the next day to see policemen.

A Fei and the others are gathered in a group next to the ports, whispering amongst each other. “What’s happening?”

“Didn’t you hear?” A Fei’s words are an excited, whisper. “A policeman told some of the others about our boss shipping opium. The *waiguoren* is being arrested!”

Oh no.

Oh no.

He rushes to the office, to Cole Bennett’s office, when two policemen come out with the dark-haired man who, for the first time, has his head down.

“Cole Bennett,” One of them announces, holding the man’s hands behind his back, “You are under arrest for the illegal shipping of opium. You have the right to remain silent—”

He can’t believe this, he won’t. “How can you say it’s illegal when you probably use it for yourself?!” His words are fiery, loud, uncontrolled, “You disgusting people! How dare you! Won’t you have to arrest yourselves first?!”

The crew falls silent behind him, but to his anger and dismay, the policemen burst into laughter. “You’re funny kid, but no.” One of them chuckles. Then his laughter disappears, and he barks at the rest of them. “We’ll be coming back to take the opium later. I want you all to put them in a pile.”

They walk past him, and it’s then he catches one of the policemen’s pants hike up; there is a flash of green words, a winding dragon, a tattoo.

His eyes widen, mouth opening to protest, but Cole Bennett turns back to see him, and shakes his head.

“Thank you, Port Boy.”

And Port Boy can only watch as he is taken away.

Decades to Wait 'til Sunrise (I've Heard of You)

Shanghai American School, Cheung, Lauren – 16

It started out with whispered prayers, spoken by the elderly who still remembered a time long past. *I've heard*, some of them said, reverent and wistful, *that they're coming back*. Word spread quickly, like tufts of dandelion seeds dispersing; people spoke into the wind, and in turn the wind told the birds as they began their annual migratory journey back into the city. They flew with zephyr and soul under wing, carrying with them the desire to find their way home and bitten-out wishes they had caught in the wind.

(I've heard, I've heard, I've heard that—)

In the city, telephone wires hummed with energy electric-sharp; streetlamps winked to a rhythm of a song only they heard; trees shivered, leaves tousled.

The susurrus of the wind blew southwards. Whispers became murmurs, disjointed and jumbled, kicking up leaves and dust and sand. The birds watched and listened to snatches of thoughts left unfinished.

(—they're coming back.)

A thrush landed not a meter away from the foot of a drunkard who laid prostrate in an abandoned back-alley. *Haven't you heard?*

I've heard that—if you repeat something enough, it will come like manna from heaven—*that they're coming back*.

The bird chirruped. The man stirred. Oh, it'd been so long since he's heard the sweet whistle of birdsong.

Come back, the bird sang. *Come back*.

And he listened.

Listen:

There was a man who, in the middle of a ferocious revolution, could do nothing but stand at the sidelines and watch as buildings fell into smoking ruin, watch as bayonet tips became spotted and rusted with blood. *Do you know*, he asked the wind, *how quickly buildings can crumble?*

The wind ruffled his hair in consolation and in reply.

I will make sure, the man vowed, *that memories will not erode as quickly*.

The people fought for him. His name fell from their lips in a litany of battle songs, swelling into a chorus above the wind as their hearts beat in tandem to rapid machine-gun fire. The man swallowed, tasted ash and copper in the back of his throat as bullets defaced the marble façades of buildings and marred the bodies of young revolutionaries foreign to the throes of battle. *I'm sorry*, he doesn't say, because the people never asked for his forgiveness, only for his blessing. He kept vigil under the archways of *Shikumen* buildings, *un ange qui pleur*, and he learned:

There is no dignity in death.

There was a man who used to pick up empty wine bottles and hold the lip of them to his eye like an explorer would to a spyglass, looking towards city horizons distorted and tinged green (*he saw nothing*). An explorer he became, a self-learned connoisseur of wine and liquor, an imitation sommelier of the city rats; the captain of a barque ship sailing endlessly towards the horizon, towards the bottom of a bottle. He jumped from city to city, chasing the sun, his own shadows, the sour taste of liquor on his lips. If alcohol could cleanse wounds, he reasoned, then perhaps it could absolve his body of sin.

Come back.

The man heaved himself up from his place in the gutter, limbs controlled by a clumsy-fingered marionettist, feet tripping over cobblestone. He regarded the bottle in his hand with little more than a sharp

exhale and pressed his knuckles to his rheumy eyes. Blinking rapidly to drive away the swarm of spots that danced in and out of his vision, he looked up and saw—huh.

Curious. Just who he'd been looking for.

Under a streetlight stood a dainty figure, a ghost in the dead of the night. The harsh fluorescent light cast a ghastly pallor to her skin; she was a sculpture made from mortician's wax, or perhaps the subject of a blurry high-exposure photograph. Her *qipao* was diaphanous, woven with neon and faded starlight, ethereal in her intangible beauty; at the crown of her head rested the city skyline, a glittering diadem of concrete and glass and steel.

As planets are drawn to the sun's gravitational pull, he found himself inexplicably stumbling towards her, movements sloppy and unbidden.

"Hey! Over here!" He cried out, waving his arm about carelessly.

She whipped her head towards him, drawing up to her full height. A bird tittered nervously overhead.

"Who goes there?" She coughed; her ribs creaked in protest.

Her posture was indistinguishable from that of a proud sovereign, unperturbed and calm even in the dingy and crudely-lit alley behind—he looked up at the street sign—Fu Xing Road. It was under a different name last time he was here.

The man scoffed in mock affront. "What, you don't recognize me?"

"Should I?" She rasped, wrapping her shawl tighter around herself. Her hands had become bloodless in the stinging bite of the wind.

"Maybe. I don't suppose you do. It's been quite awhile since we've last seen each other, after all."

The wind whistled, filling in the silence. *Haven't you heard?* it said, but the woman did not hear.

She exhaled sharply. "No normal person has been able to see me in a long time. How—" she paused, scrambling to find the right words. "How are you doing it?"

The man lifted his bottle and stretched his lips into a grin in lieu of a verbalized answer.

"Alcohol is hardly a hallucinogen."

"No, it isn't. But I still see a lot of things." He paused to take a swig from his bottle and swiped his mouth with the back of his hand, barely hiding a grimace. "Bah. You are what you eat. Or drink, I suppose."

"So, you're an alcoholic."

"Sure."

"What, you drink to forget?" She asked. Her lips twitched downwards, hiding no small amount of disdain. "I hardly find that an honorable... pastime."

"I don't suppose you do." He let his eyes flutter shut. "But no, I drink to remember." It was difficult, he realized, to look at her directly without being blinded by her presence, highlighted in stark contrast to the shadows surrounding them. Light seemed to bend towards her in a fluorescent halo, energy and radiance amassing behind her head as if she was the subject of a Renaissance painting dappled in chiaroscuro.

"Nothing that drives you to the point of alcoholism, I think, is worth remembering."

"Names," he sighed out. "Names and faces and dates of battles."

"You're a veteran?"

"Of sorts, I suppose. Though I believe I am a better historian than I am a soldier."

"There hasn't been an uprising here in decades," she said slowly, "and you can't possibly be older than—"

"I've been around for a very long time," he swiftly cut in.

"I don't understand."

“On the contrary, I’m quite sure you do.”

“Tell me,” she said challengingly. “I have all night and more.”

The wind murmured in assent. The man’s lips thinned. “Alright,” he acquiesced. “You know where we are, yes?”

“Somewhere in the French Concession.”

He nodded. “There was a great battle here back in the late thirties—a lifetime ago—and I am here to keep a promise to those whom I’ve lost.

“I was here at that time, on this very street, you know. I watched my comrades fall one by one...” He trailed off momentarily. “Route Lafayette, this road was called. Yes. I remember now. I couldn’t do anything for them.”

“And you were there to see it all happen.” There was a quaver to her voice.

He wet his lips. “I was.”

“You couldn’t do anything to help?”

“I couldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t, or couldn’t?”

“I couldn’t interfere. That’s not my job.”

The woman recoiled, her face contorted into a mask of disbelief. “It’s no wonder you’re a bad soldier. Mutiny,” she hissed. “How could you have abandoned your blood-brothers, stood idle as you watched them fall?”

“Ah,” he continued, paying no heed to her accusation, “think of your brethren. Think of Xi’an, with his hair still dusted with terra-cotta after several millennia. Think of Beijing and the way she threads concrete highways through the temples of old. How do you think they came to be? I just gave them the hint of a suggestion, a push towards the right direction.

“You were there at the battle, too.” He smiled mirthlessly. “So young a city you were, and yet you dealt with the mire of war like no other. You and I both marched with those who came to fight voluntarily. All these revolutionaries came of their own volition.”

She wavered where she stood, uncomprehending. The gossamer sheen of her clothes seemed to dull all at once. “You know I’m a city?” She shook her head. No. Her revealed identity mattered not now, not when she could recall absolutely nothing of what the man spoke so fervently of. “What battle? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“But of course. I know the cities like no other.” He glanced downwards at his knobby hands, worn and weathered with time. “*Think*,” he said, his voice edging on desperation. “Remember the city that rests beneath our feet. Remember the people who fought for us—for you—so dearly.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Her voice was sharp, acerbic.

“The Battle of Shanghai, back in the thirties.” His eyes hardened with sober clarity. “Look around you now. The *Shikumen lou* behind you, once pockmarked with bullet-holes, are now being pulled down by apathetic machines. The people—your people—are forgetting their mother tongue in steady increments.

“There was a woman I once knew, storm born and made of heavenly spitfire, a maelstrom of rage and beauty and vigor. Her hands, once battle-hardened with callouses, have gone soft.” He looked at her pointedly, voice rising like the tide. “What has become of her? Where is she when the people need her? How—”

A car sped past; the man broke off in the middle of his diatribe. The first strains of sunlight filtered through the clouds, muted and watery.

“And to think you didn’t recognize me,” the man finally wrung out. “No—I was wrong. I am the one who doesn’t recognize anything. I dared to hope for the best. I’m sorry for wasting your time.”

He’d hardly finished his sentence before the wind cut through the air in recrimination. *Can’t you hear can’t you hear can’t you hear*, it shrieked. *Come back come back come back—*



The woman gasped as wind tore through her lungs, ripping through decades—old accretions of ash and dust and smoke that had settled in her bronchioles. Sunlight broke through the clouds in the east; understanding dawned in her eyes.

“*Liberty*,” she breathed. Her voice rang clear and true; absently, she noted that his name on her lips tasted of dried plums and *huangjiu*. “It’s you, oh, how could I have not—?”

As she stepped out of the sickly lamplight, the telltale signs of fatigue shadowed her with every step and clung to the lines of her body. Tears welled into her eyes: sweet morning dew.

“I’m so sorry,” she choked out. “I’m so sorry, oh, I remember it all now—how could I ever forget? All that grief, and I carelessly locked it away, oh, Liberty, nobody remembers what happened here—”

Liberty quirked his lips humorlessly and enveloped her in his arms. “Welcome back, Shanghai.”

In the trees, the birds broke into their morning song. *Welcome back. Welcome back.*

The True Spirit Remains

Shanghai American School, Ma, Allison – 16

A light breeze trickled into the room, squeezing through the tiny crack in the window that was left open by a certain absentminded dreamer. On the plain cot by the window sill, a woman of wise age raised her head lightly at the tingle of her neck, only to see the dull sky jabbed with lofty architecture. *Progress?* She huffed. *They promised us growth but instead the city withered.* Her eyebrows furrowed at the dark memory, the folds of her wrinkled forehead manifesting itself. *The pleas of the dead spirits will never be silenced. They will forever be screaming for their youth and their houses. I, too, am one of them.*

She restlessly drifted back into her wistful sleep, dreaming the same dream she had for years. In this world, the sky was a beautiful ocean blue, sprinkled with feathery clouds. Dagger-like buildings like such in real life were replaced with a trail of delicate flat-topped houses, and the usual laborious touch to her stroll was swapped with a vivacious zest of juvenescence. Strung across her shoulders was a tattered army green messenger bag. The coarse strings flayed at the ends and the rusted zipper proved itself useless, yet she gripped its strap tightly all the same, tracing the bumpy texture of a patch sewn onto it.

The whines and wails from a distant memory echoed in her ears. "Ma, everyone at school are getting those cool messenger bags! Why can't I have one too?" Her mother's creased eyes lined with fatigue had drooped as she smiled faintly. "In a few days, Ting. I promise." For the next few weeks, even hours after sun down, when Ting peeked through her door, she would watch as her mother worked by the oil lamp, her frail fingers sewing together pieces of muddy green cloth. One night, Ting could no longer hide her excitement, and she pranced out into the living room and into her mother's lap, as if she were a child again. Together, the mother and daughter spent nights together, sewing a piece of their warmth and love into this messenger bag.

The embroidered patch was a birthday present a few years after the magical making of the bag. "This is you," her mother told her, tracing her finger around the silhouette of a little girl in braids, "and this is me," she finished, pointing to a taller figure weaved in the embellishment. Ting gazed at the small needlework in her hands in awe. She jabbed a finger at the box outlined with ornate dragon patterns that surrounded the tiny figures. "What's this, Ma?"

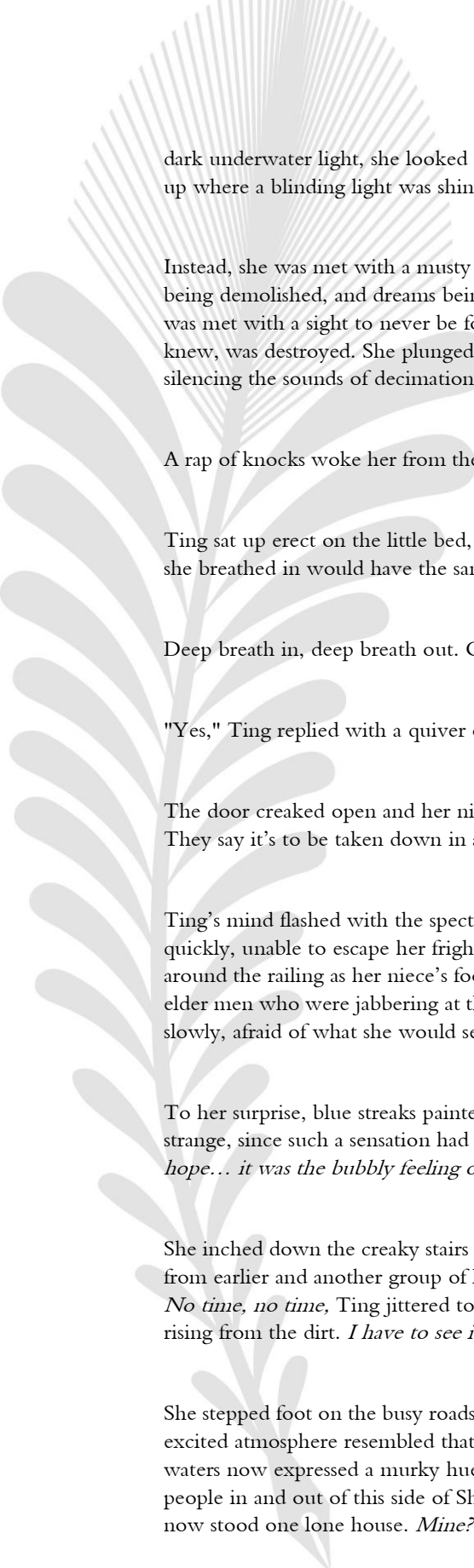
"This is our home, Ting. This is Shanghai."

As Ting ran along the roads of the most contemporary part of the ancient cultured China, sounds of bicycle bells and chattering crowds all screamed the same thing: *This is Shanghai!* The birds chirping on newly constructed roofs exclaimed it. The exclamations of neighbors playing cards on the side walk, the ring of the cashier bell sounded by the clerk chatting with his denizen, the clashes of dishes being scrubbed and of local dishes being cooked at famous restaurants... *This is Shanghai.* Nothing could stop the endless chatter about Shanghai's progress and the pride it brings their mother nation.

The low tone of the horn of a steamboat rung in Ting's ears. She wound up to the harbor, her sweaty hands gripping the metal rail bordering the shore. She looked down to see a glistening, disfigured reflection of herself. The rest of the river glistened with the sun, and she closed her eyes, listening to the sounds of the boats and the people and the crashing of the waves.

"Shanghai," Ting whispered. "Shanghai is my home."

The waters below her rippled on cue, as if recognizing the name. They began to bubble violently as if it were boiling water on a stove, then all at once, it gushed upwards and warped up to engulf Ting. She sunk, and in the



dark underwater light, she looked around frantically, strands of her hair floating up beside her ears. She glanced up where a blinding light was shining down, and paddled until she broke the surface, gasping for air.

Instead, she was met with a musty scent. Her nose caught wisps of old brick walls tumbling down, leaky roofs being demolished, and dreams being knocked down. She gingerly steered her head towards the shore line, and was met with a sight to never be forgotten. Bulldozers, tractors, fire... Everything she loved, everything she knew, was destroyed. She plunged into the water once more, and this time she let the chilly water envelope her, silencing the sounds of decimation outside.

A rap of knocks woke her from the end of her reoccurring nightmare. "Ting," a voice called out. "Auntie Ting!"

Ting sat up erect on the little bed, sweaty and distraught. For a few frantic seconds, she had thought that the air she breathed in would have the same metallic, dead taste as the so-called "Shanghai" later in her dream emitted.

Deep breath in, deep breath out. Clean air.

"Yes," Ting replied with a quiver of relief to her voice. "What's the matter?"

The door creaked open and her niece's head came to view. "You should go visit your childhood house, Auntie. They say it's to be taken down in a week."

Ting's mind flashed with the spectacle of destruction, her house lit into blazing flames. She shook her head quickly, unable to escape her fright. She slid off the bed and pulled open the window, wrapping her palms around the railing as her niece's footsteps down the stairs diminished. She looked down, only to see the group of elder men who were jabbering at their lousy cards, shaking them in the air with rage. *The sky...* Ting glanced up slowly, afraid of what she would see.

To her surprise, blue streaks painted the sky. A warm feeling inside her was reignited once more, and it was strange, since such a sensation had not been felt since decades ago. *What was it called? Yes, it was youth... it was hope... it was the bubbly feeling of Shanghai.*

She inched down the creaky stairs and made her way out the door. She walked briskly, passing the group of men from earlier and another group of ladies who were gossiping over the best sales at the supermarket a block away. *No time, no time*, Ting jittered to herself in her mind. A sense of urgency grew in her, like a bamboo shoot rising from the dirt. *I have to see it now.*

She stepped foot on the busy roads, although now bustling with cars and shiny metallic vehicles, the nervous, yet excited atmosphere resembled that of the bicycle-filled roads of her own time. She passed the harbor; while the waters now expressed a murky hue, the waves still crashed rhythmically against the backsides of boats, taking people in and out of this side of Shanghai. She turned the bend. Where the row of familiar houses used to be, now stood one lone house. *Mine?* She tested. *Was that... my house?*

And indeed it was. All Ting could manage to do was stand and gape from afar, the shadows of her dreams evanescent and light rays of her childhood dancing as they took over her spirit once more, memories playing and replaying like old cassette tapes in the same battered little house.

"You're still here, Shanghai," exclaimed Ting, after moments of apprehension left her once frightened heart.

"You're still here."

We'll Never Be Apart

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ang, Joey – 15

Hayden stays at the French Concession in Shanghai. She's been in Shanghai for very long and has been enjoying her time in Shanghai. It seemed like an ordinary day when she heard a knock on her door. She went down from her room and went to the main door. She opened the door but no one was there. She went to the mail box to see if anyone left anything in there for her.

When she opened the mailbox, Hayden had gotten the doll in the mail. She didn't know who it was from, seeing as there was no name on the box and no return address. The doll was beautiful. It stood three feet tall and had long dark brown hair. Its blue eyes looked far too real in her porcelain face. The doll's features had been made to give her a delicate and pleasant countenance.

As she took the doll out of the box it had come in, Hayden noticed a sealed envelope attached to the bottom. She looked at the front of it, which read, *"to you,"* took the card out and began reading:

*Now that I've found you,
We'll never be apart*

Hayden was totally unaware that she had been reading the message aloud. As she continued looking at the card, she was suddenly overcome with a weird, eerie sensation as though someone was watching her. She looked down towards the doll and saw the doll was looking right back at her, which she swore her head had been turned down when she had taken her out of the box. What was even creepier was the fact that it looked as if the doll was trying to hold back a smile; the type of smile that said, "I have a secret."

Putting the note on the table, Hayden picked the doll up and stood it in the corner of her living room. For the next ten minutes she walked through her apartment tidying up and trying to shake off the eerie feeling she had gotten from the doll. At about two o'clock that afternoon, Hayden thought it would be a good idea to get out of the apartment for a while, so she decided to visit her sister. Her older sister, Paige is the only family member she had left. Ever since they were little girls the two of them had been extremely close. As she walked out of her apartment building, Hayden hailed for a taxi. Fifteen minutes later, the driver pulled up to her sister's building.

Hayden walked up to the building's intercom and rung for her sister. When Paige opened the door, Paige welcomed her with a loving hug.

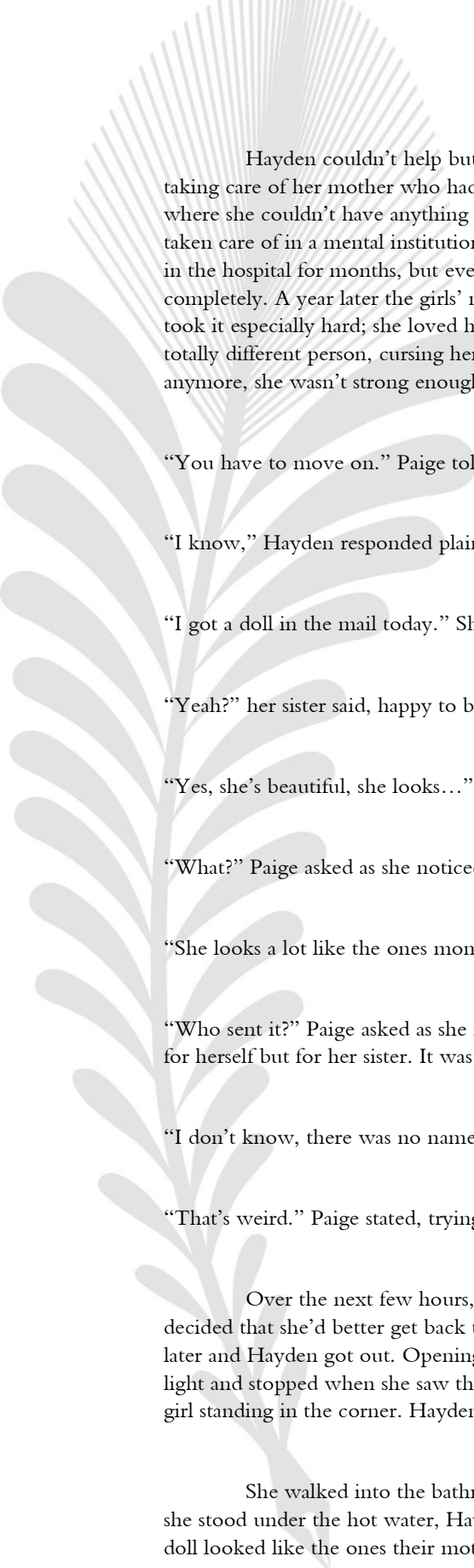
"Hey Paige."

"So how are things?" She continued as the two of them walked to the apartment.

"As good as can be expected." Hayden responded. When they reached the apartment, Paige made some tea and the girls sat down.

"I've been thinking about mom a lot lately." Hayden stated.

"I hope you haven't been blaming yourself for what happened. You know that wasn't your fault." Her older sister responded seriously.



Hayden couldn't help but think about the hard time she had been having over the past couple of years, taking care of her mother who had developed schizophrenia. Her mother had made her miserable to the point where she couldn't have anything else to do with her. Hayden had decided that their mother would be better taken care of in a mental institution, to which Paige had agreed. Both girls had continuously visited their mother in the hospital for months, but eventually their mother became more violent and the visitations stopped completely. A year later the girls' mother died alone in her room at Shanghai Mental Health Centre. Hayden took it especially hard; she loved her mother more than anything, but during her last years she had become a totally different person, cursing her out, hitting her, and having hallucinations. In the end she couldn't take it anymore, she wasn't strong enough for it; she wasn't strong at all.

"You have to move on." Paige told Hayden. "Mom would have wanted both of us to."

"I know," Hayden responded plaintively.

"I got a doll in the mail today." She said, deciding to change the subject.

"Yeah?" her sister said, happy to be talking about something else.

"Yes, she's beautiful, she looks..."

"What?" Paige asked as she noticed her sister had stopped talking.

"She looks a lot like the ones mom used to get us when we were little girls, only this one is taller."

"Who sent it?" Paige asked as she felt a sensation that was one of fear creeping up the back of her neck; fear not for herself but for her sister. It was ridiculous she knew, but she couldn't help it.

"I don't know, there was no name or return address." Hayden responded.

"That's weird." Paige stated, trying to shake off the strange feeling.

Over the next few hours, the girls drank tea and Paige decided to fix dinner. Pretty soon Hayden decided that she'd better get back to her own apartment. The driver pulled up to her building fifteen minutes later and Hayden got out. Opening the door to her apartment, she walked to her living room, turned on the light and stopped when she saw the doll. Hayden couldn't help but think that the doll looked like a real human girl standing in the corner. Hayden crossed the living room, far too aware that a pair of eyes were following her.

She walked into the bathroom and jumped into the shower, turning the water as hot as it would go. As she stood under the hot water, Hayden thought back to the conversation she had with her sister about how the doll looked like the ones their mother used to buy them when they were children.

Hayden eventually turned the water off and stepped out of the shower. Wrapping the towel around her, Hayden suddenly froze; there was laughter coming from the living room; a way too familiar laugh. Opening the bathroom door, Hayden slowly made her way down the hall toward it.

As she stepped into the room, Hayden's eyes collided with the dolls and a fear so great seized her that she could hardly breathe. The dolls facial features seemed to be changing. Its eyes now were so intense and alive that Hayden felt as if this thing wasn't really a doll at all but something very different, something evil but at the same

time, familiar. As she stared at the doll, Hayden realized that it was beginning to look more and more like someone she knew: It was beginning to look like her mother.

Grabbing the doll, Hayden ran to her hallway closet and threw it inside, slamming the door shut. She kept telling herself she was being ridiculous and that she needed to get some sleep; but she couldn't knock the fear or the feeling that her mother was still around. She closed her eyes shut, but when she opened her eyes because there was a noise coming from the hallway. It was the sound of a door creaking open, and then the small patter of footsteps.

Her door was cracked open and she couldn't for the life of her move to close it. The footsteps continued and then stopped, right outside her door. Hayden could now see the shadow of two very small feet through the crack at the bottom of the door. Slowly her door opened a little wider and the doll pushed its head through the opening, the delicate look on its face now replaced by a look of pure evil.

The doll stood in her doorway staring at her, the eyes which had once looked alive and life like, now looked black and dead, but still as intense as the first time she had took her out of the box. The doll was saying something, it said,

"You know what you did."

"What do you want?" Hayden suddenly screamed at the doll as she found her voice.

She stared in horror as the doll began walking toward her and Hayden heard its voice for the first time.

"Now that I've found you, we'll never be apart."

Hayden screamed at the top of her lungs as she realized she was staring face to face not with a doll anymore, but with her mother...

But when the darkness came, she didn't try to fight it...

"How long has she been like this?" Doctor Niles asked the nurse as he observed her through the one-sided mirror.

"She's been like this for hours, all she does is stare blankly at the wall; she hasn't said a word," The nurse responded. Doctor Niles opened the connecting door and stepped into the room that Hayden had been in for the past few hours since being transferred from the hospital.

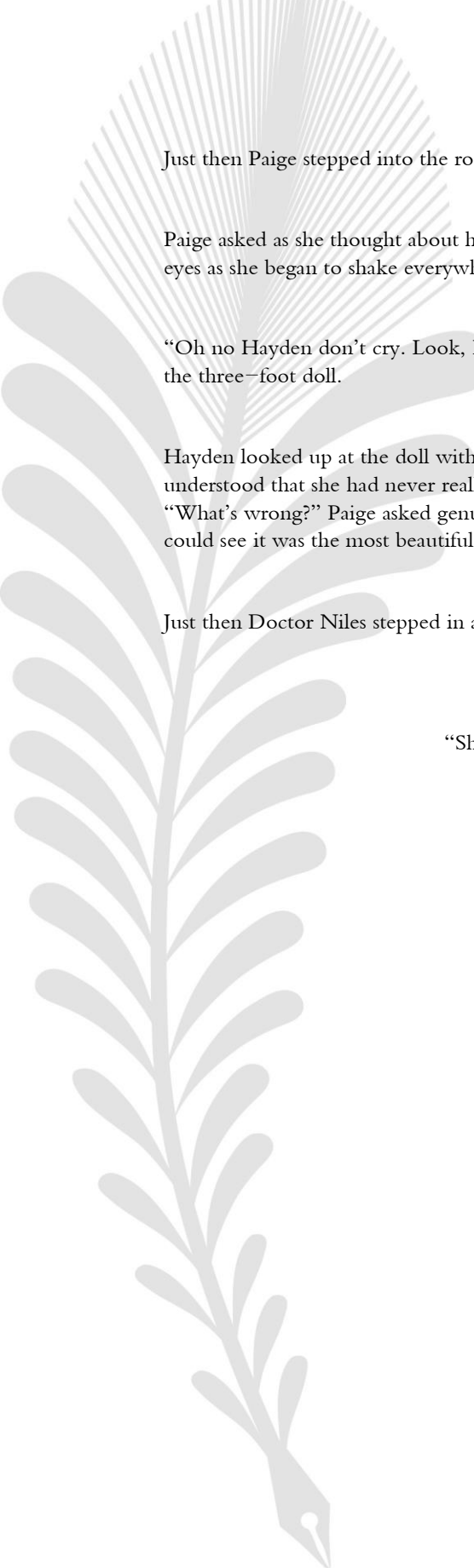
"Hello Hayden, I'm Doctor Niles. You're at Shanghai Mental Health Centre."

Hayden continued to stare blankly past the doctor, mumbling something inaudible. Doctor Niles continued, "Can you remember what happened?"

No response. Doctor Niles tried a new direction. "Your sister has arrived. I'll go get her so that you can talk to her."

As Doctor Niles left the room, Hayden continued to stare blankly but her voice grew a little louder.

"Now that you've found me, we'll never be apart."



Just then Paige stepped into the room holding something behind her back. “Hi sweetie, how are you feeling?”

Paige asked as she thought about how familiar this whole situation was. Hayden could feel the tears stinging her eyes as she began to shake everywhere.

“Oh no Hayden don’t cry. Look, I’ve brought you someone to keep you company.” Paige stated, holding up the three-foot doll.

Hayden looked up at the doll with her mother’s face and screamed at the top of her lungs, as she now understood that she had never really gotten away from her mother in the first place, and she never would. “What’s wrong?” Paige asked genuinely perplexed as she looked from her sister to the doll. From what Paige could see it was the most beautiful and pleasant looking doll she had ever laid eyes on.

Just then Doctor Niles stepped in and turned to Paige, “I think it would be wise if we keep her here for now.”

“She’s beginning to show signs of schizophrenia.”

The Letters of You

Shanghai Singapore International School, Chen, Jarrod – 15

Hey. It's me. It's been a while since we last talked. I was wondering how are you doing? Where are you now?

Today, while I was walking back to our house from Gu Bei Carefour opposite the street, I saw this little girl looking at me. She was hiding behind a tree, her little head slightly poking out, enough for her eyes to spy me. She had a pair of brown eyes.

Do you remember? The first time we met.

We both went to the same high school in Shanghai. Just 2 ordinary teens among the vast bodies of students in our school. We were in the same class. I remember, that day, as I walked into class and sat down. I looked up to find a pair of brown eyes staring at me from across the room. I was startled at the sheer beauty of your eyes. It was like a masterpiece. The rims of your eyes were a darker shade of brown, whereas around the pupil was a brighter shade. And when light was reflected in your eyes, the brown in your eyes shone gold, and the lines in your eyes flickered. Your eyes danced as you looked at me.

The teacher called my name, but I didn't hear it. I was lost in your eyes. After, the teacher came in front of me and blocked my view. That snapped me back to reality. Everyone laughed as I blushed shades of red. And out of the corner of my eyes, I think I saw the edges of your mouth curve up.

~

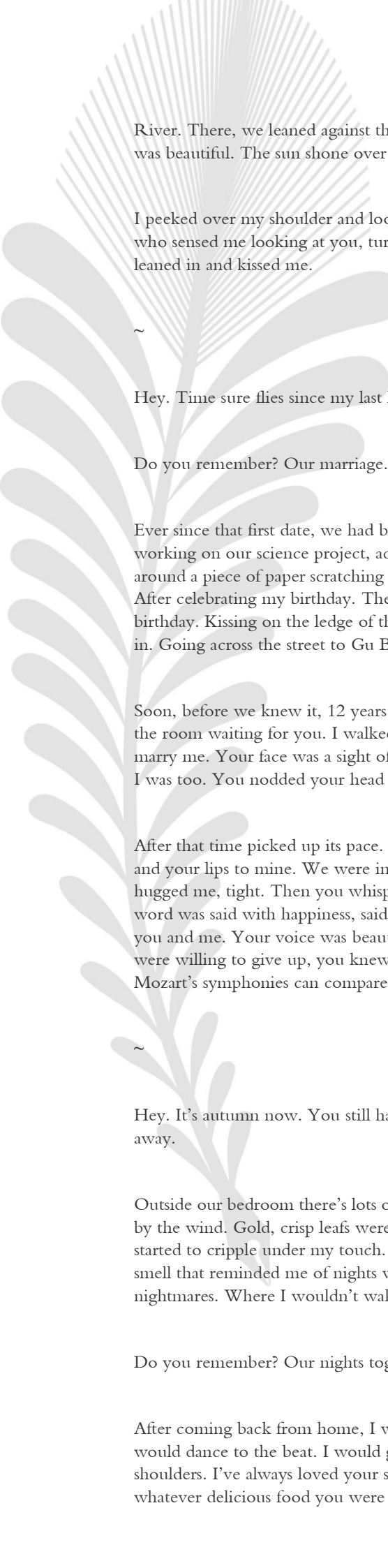
Hey. How are you? I am sorry I haven't write you another letter any sooner.

These days, I don't have much to do. Well, to put it in a better way, I can't do much. Ha ha. So I've been watching a lot of TV shows. You know, those Korean dramas and Chinese comedy shows. I remember, as I was watching this episode of a drama series, the male actor and the female actor kisses. For quite a long time as the camera zoomed in closer to their faces.

Do you remember? Our first kiss.

Shortly after we first met, we started dating. Our relationship developed rather slowly. We were both shy. We both were never in a relationship; both don't know what to do. We just chatted. Non-stop. For most days we even chatted through the night. Talking about fashion, clothes, school, studies, friends. I remember. Those days deep into the nights, where the moon was high in the sky. I would sit on the window ledge and lean against the window. Looking out over the slumbering city of Shanghai. The lights were beautiful. It gave the dark sky colors. From where I lived in my compound, I could see many tall buildings, and somewhere in the distance, was where you were, most likely sitting on your window ledge too, leaning against the window, looking out into the distance. Wondering if you could see me. I remember it was on one of these nights, that you told me you liked watching the setting sun. You liked how it's radiance would light up the world in a warm orange light.

Then, the next day. After school, I took you out for our first date. We first went to have dinner together along the street of West Nang Jing Road. Nothing fancy. Just some local Shanghainese noodles that you liked. When the time was right, I took your hand and brought you to the Bund, where we had a good view of the Huangpu



River. There, we leaned against the railings of the bridge, reaching out trying to grab the radiant setting sun. It was beautiful. The sun shone over the river, turning it gold.

I peeked over my shoulder and looked at you, with happiness and wonder written all over your face. And you, who sensed me looking at you, turned towards me and smiled. One that reached deep into your heart. You then leaned in and kissed me.

~

Hey. Time sure flies since my last letter. Its spring again.

Do you remember? Our marriage.

Ever since that first date, we had been together. Time whizzed by. I can still see some of those times. You and I working on our science project, accidentally blowing up our beakers. There were also those times when we sat around a piece of paper scratching our heads, trying to solve a complicated math question. Then there was prom. After celebrating my birthday. Then the exams. After school dates. You meeting my parents. Celebrating your birthday. Kissing on the ledge of the school roof. Graduation. University. Graduation. Jobs. Got a house. Settled in. Going across the street to Gu Bei Carefour to buy our milk teas. Laughing at McDonalds.

Soon, before we knew it, 12 years passed. It was spring again. I remember you came back one day, and I was in the room waiting for you. I walked to you, knelt down, pulled out a box and asked whether you wanted to marry me. Your face was a sight of happiness, shock, and tears. You were crying, and laughing at the same time. I was too. You nodded your head vigorously. I stood up and embraced you.

After that time picked up its pace. Soon you were in your bride dress and I was in my suit, you were in my arms and your lips to mine. We were in a church, our families cheering and clapping for us. You broke apart and hugged me, tight. Then you whispered into my ear 3 simple words. I love you. Short, but full of emotion. Each word was said with happiness, said with the will to give up everything for me, said with the love that connected you and me. Your voice was beautiful too. Soft but firm. You knew what you were doing, you knew what you were willing to give up, you knew the life you wanted. Your voice was the best I've ever heard. Not even Mozart's symphonies can compare to your voice.

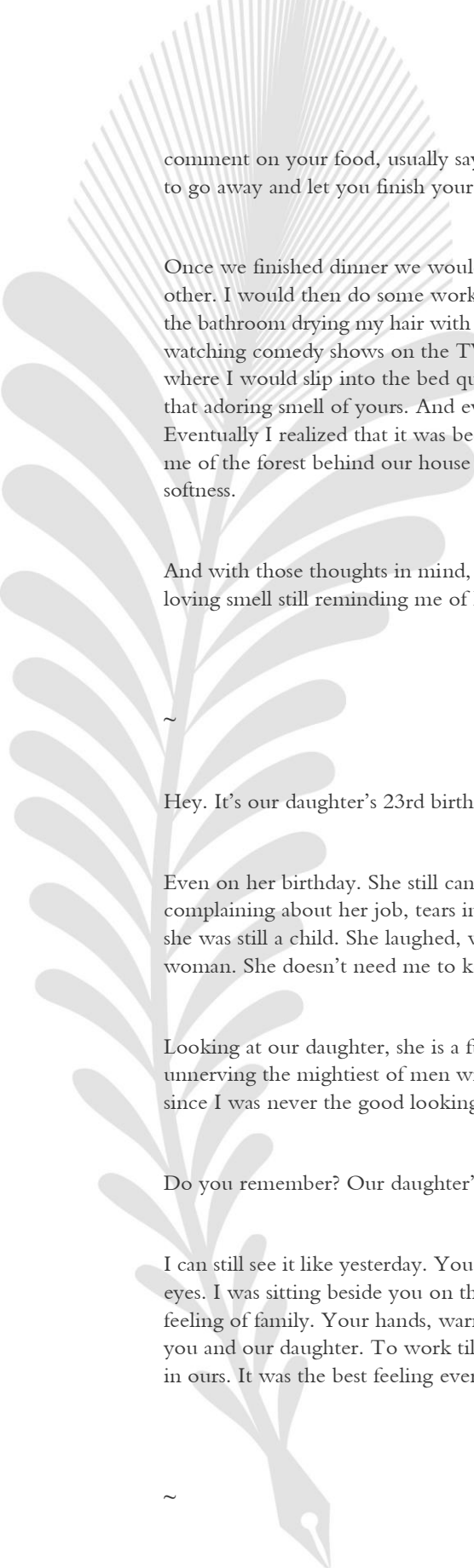
~

Hey. It's autumn now. You still haven't replied to any of my letters. Sometimes I wonder what's keeping you away.

Outside our bedroom there's lots of trees. And falling leafs. This morning, I woke up to find the window opened by the wind. Gold, crisp leafs were floating into my room. One happened to land on our bed. I picked it up. It started to cripple under my touch. I sighed. A gush of wind flew into the room. And with it carried a lingering smell that reminded me of nights where I could sleep in comfort, where I wouldn't wake up in pain or nightmares. Where I wouldn't wake up knowing you're never coming back.

Do you remember? Our nights together.

After coming back from home, I will always find you in the kitchen, cooking. You had music playing and you would dance to the beat. I would go over and put my arms around your waist and bury my face into your shoulders. I've always loved your smell. It reminded me of something. You would smile, take a piece of whatever delicious food you were making, and let me try it. With food in my mouth, I would chew and



comment on your food, usually saying its bad jokingly. You would then laugh and swat my head, a sign for me to go away and let you finish your cooking.

Once we finished dinner we would wash the dishes together. Sometimes we would splash water or soap at each other. I would then do some work for my job. Then I would shower and change. Sometimes, as I come out of the bathroom drying my hair with a towel, I would see you reading on the balcony. Sometimes I would find you watching comedy shows on the TV. Sometimes I would find you in bed, already sleeping. Its on these nights where I would slip into the bed quietly, put my arms around you and bury my head into your hair, indulging that adoring smell of yours. And every time I would think about why I can't stop loving that delicate smell. Eventually I realized that it was because your smell reminded me of home. A place where I belong. It reminded me of the forest behind our house when I was young, filled with adventure, wilderness, sweetness, beauty, and softness.

And with those thoughts in mind, I would drift into sleep with your comforting presence in my arms. Your loving smell still reminding me of home.

~

Hey. It's our daughter's 23rd birthday today. Can you not even send something to wish her happy birthday?

Even on her birthday. She still can't find happiness. Not without your presence. She came home today, again complaining about her job, tears in her eyes. I wished her a happy birthday, and told her to not complain, as if she was still a child. She laughed, wiped her tears and told me off, saying she was 23 and was an independent woman. She doesn't need me to keep telling her what to do. I laughed back.

Looking at our daughter, she is a fully grown woman. A strong independent woman indeed. Capable of even unnerving the mightiest of men with her words. She has a striking resemblance to you. Guess that was good, since I was never the good looking one. Haha.

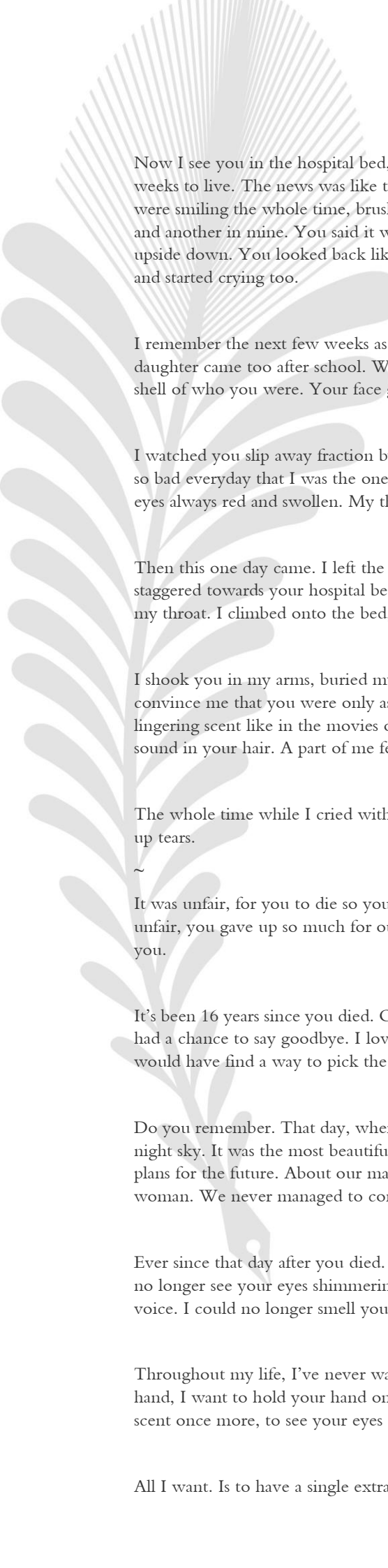
Do you remember? Our daughter's birth.

I can still see it like yesterday. You in the hospital bed. Holding her in your hands. You had tears and joy in your eyes. I was sitting beside you on the bed. Holding your hands and hers in mine. It was an amazing feeling. That feeling of family. Your hands, warm and gentle against mine. I felt a sense of responsibility then. To take care of you and our daughter. To work till I'm old and make money for you two. Our daughter's little new-born hand in ours. It was the best feeling ever.

~

I remember that day, I was working overtime when I got this call from our daughter. She sounded frantic, scared. I asked her what happened, but she was crying so hard she couldn't form words. I rushed back home. My head spun. I couldn't think straight. I didn't dare think what could have happened. I slammed open the door and rushed in. Following the sounds of our daughter screaming for you to wake up, I ran into the kitchen. You were lying on the floor, unconscious, our daughter was beside you, shaking your shoulders begging for you to wake up.

I screamed your name, but it was cut off as panic and sobs filled my throat. I told our daughter to call the ambulance as I rushed beside you and held you in my arms. I kept calling you. But you wouldn't wake up.



Now I see you in the hospital bed, the doctor beside telling us you had a terminal cancer, and you only had weeks to live. The news was like the end for me. My mind stopped working. Our daughter cried. But you, you were smiling the whole time, brushing off the news as if it was nothing. You had a hand on our daughter's head and another in mine. You said it was alright. But it wasn't. Nothing was. I looked at you as if the world was upside down. You looked back like it was not. But it was all too much for you. Eventually your mask dropped and started crying too.

I remember the next few weeks as me taking care of you. I would stay by your side the whole time. Our daughter came too after school. We watched you grow weaker and weaker everyday. Soon you were only the shell of who you were. Your face grew hollow; your flesh shrank into your bones.

I watched you slip away fraction by fraction each day. I watched you die slowly. It was painful for me. I wished so bad everyday that I was the one lying on the bed dying instead of you. My mind was fuzzy all the time. My eyes always red and swollen. My throat raw from talking to you.

Then this one day came. I left the room to get us some lunch. When I came back, I dropped our trays. I staggered towards your hospital bed. I took your hand. Cold, death cold warmth seeped into me. A cry escaped my throat. I climbed onto the bed, and held you in my arms one last time. Your whole body was stiff.

I shook you in my arms, buried my nose into your hair. Trying to find that familiar scent of yours, anything to convince me that you were only asleep. But no, even your scent was taking away by death. There was no lingering scent like in the movies or books. Pain stabbed my heart, over and over again. I screamed without a sound in your hair. A part of me felt like it was ripped out. The pain was more than anything I've ever felt.

The whole time while I cried with you in my arms, you had a smile on your face. And there was traces of dried up tears.

~

It was unfair, for you to die so young, at the age of 35. It was unfair, I still had so much to say to you. It was unfair, you gave up so much for our family. Yet you could only experience a part of the happiness that awaited you.

It's been 16 years since you died. Our daughter learned to cope with the pain eventually. But I never did. I never had a chance to say goodbye. I loved you dearly. I loved you with all my heart. I loved you so much that I would have find a way to pick the stars in the sky down for you.

Do you remember. That day, when we were still teens. Where we laid at night on the grasses of a park under the night sky. It was the most beautiful night I've ever seen. The stars were shining at us. We would talk about our plans for the future. About our marriage, our kids, our jobs, our house, our retirement, our days as old man and woman. We never managed to complete our plans.

Ever since that day after you died. Life was never the same. Our house no longer had the warmth to it. I could no longer see your eyes shimmering with mischief. I could no longer kiss you. I could no longer hear your voice. I could no longer smell your scent. I could no longer hold your delicate fingers.

Throughout my life, I've never wanted much. However, as I sit here in our living room, pen and paper in my hand, I want to hold your hand once more, to hear your voice once more, to kiss you once more, to smell your scent once more, to see your eyes once more.

All I want. Is to have a single extra second, to be with you once more.

Old Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Chin, Serena – 15

"FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!" The crowd cheered as they formed a circle around the two best fighters in their regiment. However, neither moved a muscle as they stared at each other, daring the other to make the first and maybe final move to end the friendly faceoff. Unexpectedly, one of them raised his fist and punched the other in the face, as a few badges fell from his uniform.

He ran straight towards me, yelling "Hey, Hey, Hey! You need to leave the village right this moment!" Though, I didn't know what he meant, I looked at him with a frown on my face, waiting for him to explain. He then anxiously explained that he found some odds in the hills. It was some unusual badges, but nothing really special. Though, he emphasized that it's not the special features of the badges, but whom it belonged too. He claimed that he recognized the badges, as they were similar to the ones he saw during his military training. He believed that those badges belonged to a high Japanese general. He then further explained, that those badges were probably dropped there by accident when the high general passed by, and he isn't far. He then further exclaimed that the Japanese army is nearby, and would attack the village anytime sooner or later. Not only he was trying to leave, he was also persuading the rest to leave with him, telling others that it isn't safe anymore.

However, barely anyone believed that the Japanese would attack in the village. Neither did my parents and me. Thus, we stayed while a few cowardly families ran. Overtime, there were rumors that the Japanese soldiers would attack the village. As the rumors spread, more people believed. More families started to pack their belongings and leave, believing that the Japanese would really attack, and ran when they had a chance too. While others that still didn't believe in the rumors, stayed. As days passed, the rumors sounded more and more reliable as more people left the village. In spite of those rumors, my family didn't believe it, and stayed.

Until, one day, my brother came back from his morning exercise in the hills. He ran back into the house, full of sweat, in shock. He opened his mouth, ready to blurt out what he saw, but he stopped and didn't. He then walked close to us, and whispered. Stating that he saw soldiers from the other side, walking into the direction of the village. We started panicking, and hurriedly packed our items in fright. Once we were all packed up, we scurried to the entrance of the village, as it was the only way in and out of the village. Though, it was too late. By the time we were at the entrance, we could see the soldiers. And we were quite sure if that we could see the soldiers from where we were, they would be able to see us if we continued to walk out.

We ran back in. We were bewildered, and had absolutely no idea what to do. We hid back into the house, thinking of coming out with plans. My brother suggested to leave the village at night, though it was impossible. They would be on duty, and patrolling around the entrance; there wouldn't be any chance we could slip off. Therefore, the only way was to stay inside the village. We knew we would get caught one day, but it was the only way. We planned to stay in the village, and hide. We believed we knew the village well enough, and were familiar about the alleys in the village. And were sure that our knowledge of the village would prove to be an advantage in avoiding the soldiers nearby.

The first few days the soldiers were in the city, they loafed. They practically did nothing other than finding the best house in the village. The longer they were here, the more we planned. We decided to take shifts, watch every single movement they take. See what they were doing, and what are they up to.

Till one day, they started walking around the village. They divided into a few groups, and each group had a leader with a notepad in his hand. They were jotting down stuff as they walked. At that time, I was on the shift, and was supposed to see what they were doing. Though, I didn't quite understand what they were doing. I went back home, and told my parents. They weren't sure at first too, but then, they thought, "Could it be a map they're trying to draw out?" my father suggested. Then, my mother continued with a surprised voice, "It is very much possible!"



Later that night, something ran through my brain. I thought that maybe we could draw a false map and replace it with the real one. Even though I knew it would be risky, but if it works, we would have a safe hideout that they wouldn't know. I built my courage, and told my parents the idea. Unexpectedly, they said it was a good idea, and planned out how it might work out.

The next day, we carried out the plan. We followed one of the teams, and waited for our chance to steal the real map and replace it with the fake.

Weeks passed by as we stayed in the alley without getting caught. Till, one of the soldiers saw an extra alley that wasn't on the map. At first, he thought it was just a mistake the other soldier didn't add. Nevertheless, he went back and told the soldier, however, the soldier insisted that he had added that alley into the map. And they started to suspect. They inspected the other maps, and checked if there were any problems with the others. Though, this was the only piece that had a problem. They went back to the inaccurate part and wanted to check what happened.

We were clueless that they would be even coming. We lived our lives in that alley, and thought nothing would happen since the soldiers never ever thought this alley even existed.

We were just chatting, when we heard their footsteps by the mouth of the alley. We were stunned and didn't know what to do. Our first instinct was to hide.

We hid behind an old mattress where we heard their footsteps come close.

All Tied Up

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ho, Jerriel – 15

The yellow beams of the streetlights glistened alongside the radiant moon, illuminating the invading darkness of the Shanghai night. Silence fell upon the city; the faint chirping of the crickets filled the air. The shrubs were being blown about, swaying in the light breeze.

There was a sudden thud; the numbness of my body was replaced with the tingling sensation running through my back. It was as if I was being thrown onto a metal surface. My head hurt and I couldn't think straight...where was I? I could not remember anything that had happened. I felt restricted; I fumbled my hands and legs about, only to find that they were bound together. I lay there...helpless. I brushed across the sides with my fingers; there was some fabric...canvas. So this is how those little grains of rice feel being crammed together in a sack. Thoughts of why I was being tied in a rice sack started racing through my mind. My fear of small spaces did not help at all. I started to feel claustrophobic, my head began to hurt again, my body reeked with sweat and my hands shook in nervousness.

There was a jerk; I felt the surface below me beginning to move. There was a rumble and a growl, like the sounds of a truck revving its engine. Rattling and screeches of dragging metal disturbed the peace of the silent night. The noise was coming from next to me, it sounded like a loose metal bumper dragging along on the road, trying its best to keep up with the speed of the vehicle. The rattling sound of tools knocking about in the truck bed. I tried once more to wriggle myself free, but to no avail. In fact, it felt as if the ropes were tightening around my skin even more as I moved. All this while, I was busy trying to free myself from the bindings around my limbs, that I have forgotten that my mouth was free. I began to shout; I didn't bother to think before shouting, screaming out whatever that had come to my mind first. Ugh! I felt a sudden beat to the gut; it was a kick, a really hard kick, followed by a command to stay quiet. He shouted something in Chinese, his voice, deep and rough. It was dark, I couldn't see him but I roughly guessed he was a big-sized man with muscular arms. He sounded like a guy you wouldn't want to have any troubles with, unless your aim was to break a few of your bones. "Why am I here?" I asked with all my courage, hoping to get an answer. The only answer I received was another kick to the stomach. I wasn't the toughest guy with the greatest tolerance for pain, no, I was just a wimp; weak, frail and undersized, a kick to the stomach felt like a bullet flying through my body, exiting the other way.

Ten minutes passed and I was still laying on the cold metal surface of the truck bed, arms and legs tied up and kept in a rice sack. As I was just about to give up and go to sleep, it stopped. The wind gushing through the tiny gaps between the stitches too came to a standstill. Fear took over me as I anxiously waited for something to happen. I could hear muffled voices in the background. The voices slowly neared me and became clearer, however, not being able to understand Chinese, the voices sounded like gibberish to me. I felt something press against my body, like two hands, as I was being rolled on my left side. One moment I was being rolled on the surface and the next, falling mid-air and then hitting the ground. Suddenly, a gush of white light blinded my eyes. The rope holding the sack I was shoved in was cut open. I could barely open my eyes as they struggled to focus. It took a long thirty-seconds for my sight to finally return. I was sitting lying on the ground, a single light bulb swinging around above me and two men, armed with metal pipes, standing across from me.

I stood up and looked around, the place seemed familiar. I looked down on the floor below me; it was tiled with a huge circular logo in the middle of the entire complex. The logo looked familiar, "Russo-Chinese Bank" it read on the top on the symbol. Why was I brought here? Why would they kidnap me and take me to a bank? In a flash, everything came back to me. I knew why they brought me here! My name is Roy Caden, head manager of the Russo-Chinese Bank. The only reason they would have brought me here would be to get me to



open the vault for them, especially after the delivery of new cash to the bank this afternoon. I tried my best to remain silent, but my heavy breathing attracted the attention of the men. I looked up to find two men dashing towards me, one wielding a large knife, the other holding a metal pipe in his right hand, shouting out loud in Chinese. I looked around to see many other men, many without shirts on, showing off their crazy tattoos. The loud shouting caught the attention of many others. The bang of a loud gunshot filled the air. I began to run as fast as I could. Soon, at least ten men were running towards me with vicious grins. Without thinking, I ran straight towards the door. My legs were free but my arms still tightly bound together. I crashed through the door and ran straight into the darkness, as fast as my legs could carry me. It was pitch black outside, as if a black velvet blanket covered the entire city. The shouting behind me began to fade as I continued to run further into the darkness. There was a loud screech and a sudden bright light. I fell to the ground...

Uncertainty

Shanghai Singapore International School, Johny, Derrick – 16

Sitting on his window ledge and looking out into the distant land, Bo knew that there was something wrong in his life. He was lost in his thoughts. He went back to the days when he was fighting a case. He remembered the time when Cheng, his lawyer and close friend, ran towards him with an outstretched arm. In his hand was a piece of paper. He declared, “We won the case!! The land belongs to us. The court has given the current owners a 3-day period within which they will have to vacate the house. Number 257 is all ours. We can start a restaurant, or maybe a night club.”

Cheng went on and on as Bo blankly stood there and watched him speak. Bo was just completely devastated by what happened 10 minutes earlier. Bo interrupted Cheng and said, “She left”. But Cheng continued talking not realizing what Bo just said. Bo decided to ignore him and just walk down West Nanjing Road towards Jing'an Temple.

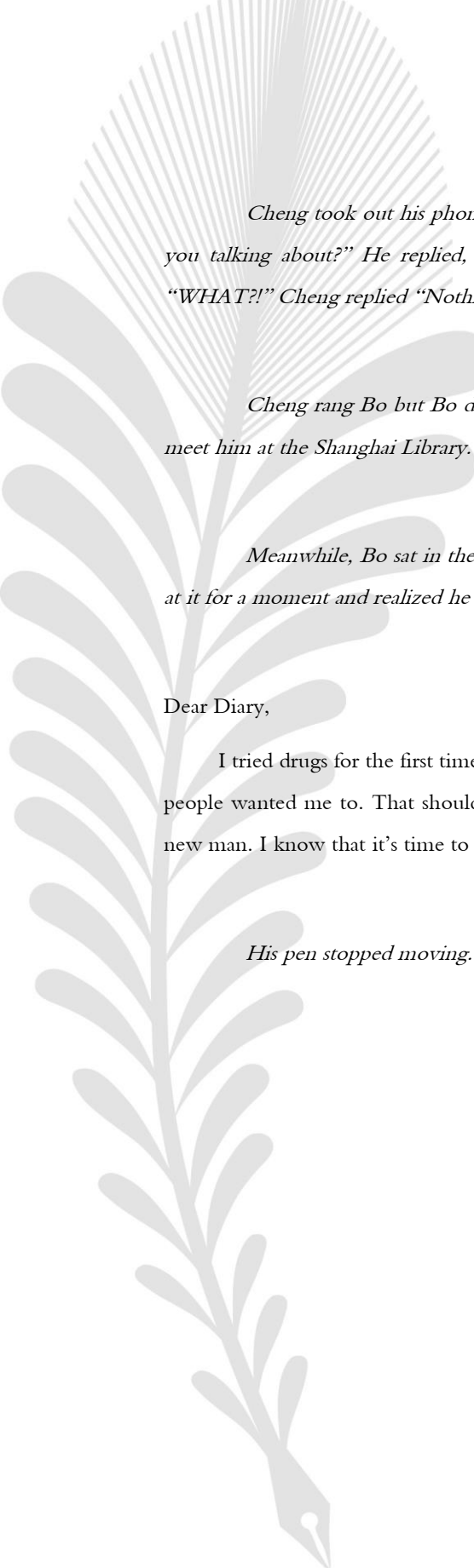
“Yes, Yes!!” Mao exclaimed.

That’s it. I finally got a start to my story. That’s when his English teacher, Ju-long, calls him up and asks him to show his draft. Ju-long is a short man with a goatee. His eyes are blood red and he has bushy hair. His face is clustered with ripe yellow pimples. Ju-long looks at the paper that Mao laid on his desk, looking at the piece of paper which is only half filled. Ju-long grabs the meter stick, which is on his desk and asks Mao to stretch his hand out. Mao unwillingly puts his hand out and closes his eyes. There is a loud thud. The meter stick snaps in half and Mao feels the pain go right up his arm. Now Ju-long looking at the other half of the ruler shouts “I gave the entire class a simple task to do last night. Yet, you give just half a page of gibberish writing. Mao looks back up at Ju-long. They silently stare at each other for a second. Then Mao stammers, “I’m sorry!” Ju-long demands, “What are you sorry for, now go back to your seat and just continue doing your work.”

Mao walks back to his seat with his head facing the floor so no one sees the tears rolling down his face. He sits on his seat and continues writing the story.

Cheng followed Bo closely. “We’re getting a divorce!” exclaimed Bo. Cheng was shocked. It took him a moment to figure out if he heard that right. Then he looked at Bo and said “But I thought you guys were like lovebirds. You and Xiu were the perfect couple. Why would she leave a guy like you?” Bo replied with a rough and harsh voice “She says I’m an alcoholic!”

Cheng gave him a confused look and declared, “Maybe you drink a bit but that doesn’t mean you are an alcoholic right?” Bo mumbled, “She is right”.



Cheng took out his phone and dialed Xiu. He asked her “What happened?” she answered, “What are you talking about?” He replied, “Bo told me that the two of you are getting a divorce”. She exclaimed “WHAT?!” Cheng replied “Nothing, never mind.” Then he looked around and realized that Bo was missing.

Cheng rang Bo but Bo didn’t pick up the call. After half an hour Bo called Cheng and told Cheng to meet him at the Shanghai Library.

Meanwhile, Bo sat in the library got into deep thoughts. He took his diary out of his backpack. Stared at it for a moment and realized he had a story to tell. He started.

Dear Diary,

I tried drugs for the first time and realized that I haven’t lived the way I wanted to. I lived it the way other people wanted me to. That should change. The change is happening, I can feel it happening. It’s time to be a new man. I know that it’s time to lea

His pen stopped moving.

Last Love in East Paris

Shanghai Singapore International School, Khadka, Ajendra – 16

The cold April winds howled into my face as I stood on the edge of the soaring Victorian building known as the Customs House. I looked down at all the concessions like a bird. My heart and my mind raced like the city used to. A kaleidoscope of memories flooded my eye lid. All.. all of it ca..came back, but she nev... never will. I tried to push the thought back, but it demands attention.

All I see is her face. Her hazel brown eyes staring right into mine, her short brown finger waved hair. Her smile that could light up all hearts. Above all she was the only who accepted me as who I am. An orphan.

I still vividly recall that July 9 in the year 1920.

The pinewood floor gave a creek as I paced through the empty living room. I eyed the two Birchwood cabinets standing tall against the cream white walls. I stare at all the memories they hold. There is only one thing that could burn them, the marble fireplace crammed in-between. Above hangs a picture in a frame. An image of Chen An 's parents.

Tired of standing I collapsed into one of the two chair made out of Maplewood, I reached across to turn on the radio that rested on top a Birchwood table. The lively beats of jazz music erupted out across the house.

I relaxed but I still had my eyes on the door in font of me waiting for her to burst through the door.

Then almost as if the ending of the song was the queue. The door gradually opened to reveal a worn out but alive Chen An. I stare at the clock above the pictures. It was 10:30.

As late as she was, all my anxiety faded to black. I rushed to her to asked her if she was alright. She responded coldly "I am fine I just need to rest" then she walked on.

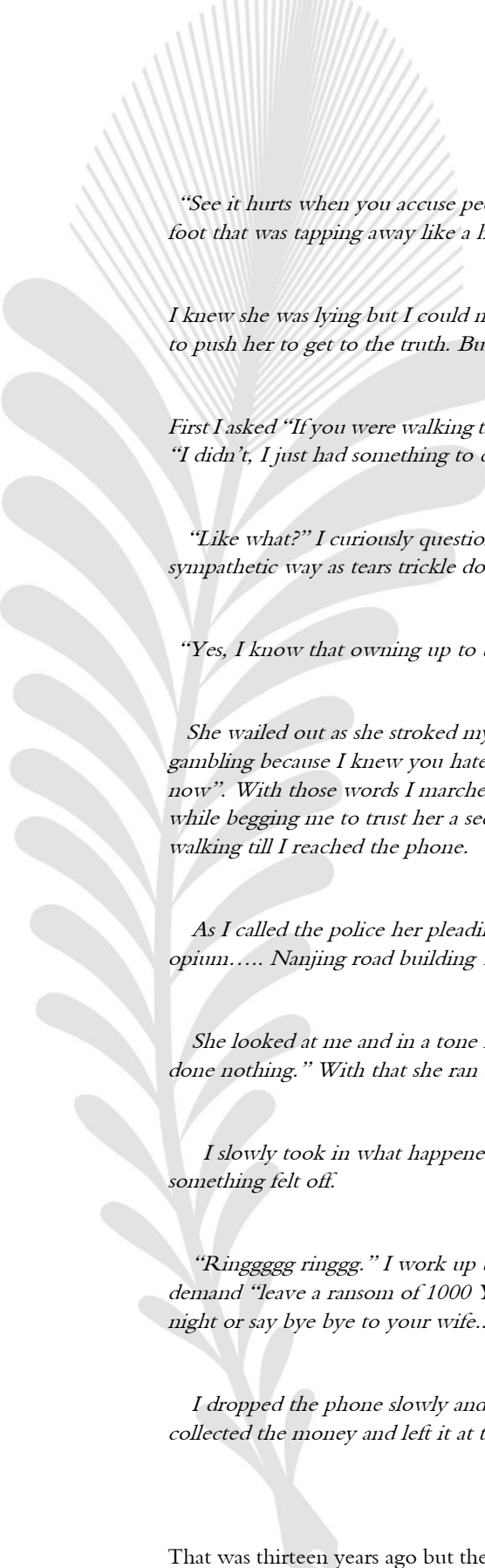
Something smelled fishy, or was it that hypnotic scent that lingered in the air that trailed along with her.

As she walked away towards her room I yelled out the words that would changed my life. "You were smuggling opium! At the sound of "opium" she turned to face me. Her face lit with dismay, "Did you just accuse me of smuggling Opium?" she cried. My mind raced to find the words but all I managed to stuttered was "I...I...I... didn't...". Cutting me she howled "don't deny the words that you spoke! I heard it all!"

She stomped towards me until our brown eyes met. "It's not like you have never came home at an odd hour at night!" She declared under her breath as she turned the nob of the radio off.

Trying put out the fire, I calmly said "Mine is strictly business related. Unlike your reason that is illegal and a play with fire." She pushed my chest and mockingly said "yea, we have a thousand Yuan because of your hard work while I smuggle drugs. Oh, I forgot that we still can't afford our own house yet. I wonder why? Maybe because I spent all of it buying opium, paying off gangsters and gambling..."

"Stop" I called out but she blabbered on. I repeated again but she ignored me. Memories of the orphanage came to my head. "STOP!! I screamed at the top of my lungs as I slammed my hands against the wall. She stood as if she had seen a ghost and then I saw her crooked smile. I think She knew that she had finally broken me.



"See it hurts when you accuse people of crimes that they didn't do." She said victoriously. Starring down at her foot that was tapping away like a heartbeat she managed to say "I was going for a walk."

I knew she was lying but I could not bring my self to pick up the phone in the corner of the room. I knew I had to push her to get to the truth. But how? Then I formulate a plan.

First I asked "If you were walking than why as such a late time, it's not like you have anything to hide." She replied "I didn't, I just had something to do."

"Like what?" I curiously questioned next. "I can't tell you because it would break you." She replied in an over sympathetic way as tears trickle down her face, she used the sleeves of her red colored qipao to wipe them off.

"Yes, I know that owning up to the fact that you smuggled can break me." I said halfheartedly.

She wailed out as she stroked my face "I am innocent; I didn't even come close to opium or neither did I gambling because I knew you hated it. Please believe me." I pushed her hands away and firmly said "this ends now". With those words I marched over to the phone while she laid on the floor grabbing hold of my left leg while begging me to trust her a second time. I tried to shake her loose of she just would let go. So I continued walking till I reached the phone.

As I called the police her pleading crescendo. "I would like to report a illegal smuggling of drugs... opium..... Nanjing road building 158... ok thank you."

She looked at me and in a tone I never heard her talk she says "You will regret what you have done for I have done nothing." With that she ran out in to the cold sullen night.

I slowly took in what happened as I sat on the same chair. I tried to convince my self I acted correctly but something felt off.

"Ringgggg ringgg." I work up to the sound of the phone. I lifted up the phone and I hear a coarse voice demand "leave a ransom of 1000 Yuan in front of your house and remember don't call the cops like you did last night or say bye bye to your wife.."

I dropped the phone slowly and a I stare into the distance with a panic-stricken look. What have I done? I collected the money and left it at the door. The money was gone but she never came back alive or otherwise...

That was thirteen years ago but the memories are still fresh like the crimson red gills of a fish, what is worst is that it is a wine stain on my shirt. Now I look down at the sealed of city. The once bussing road now empty just like my heart.

Tic tok tic tok goes the clock, almost as if it's saying your time is up.

But before I go, if you are still there Chen An I would give up everything for one miracle if that miracle was to see you again...

I am truly sorry for everything...

I close my eyes and I let me mind guide me.

3,2,1.....



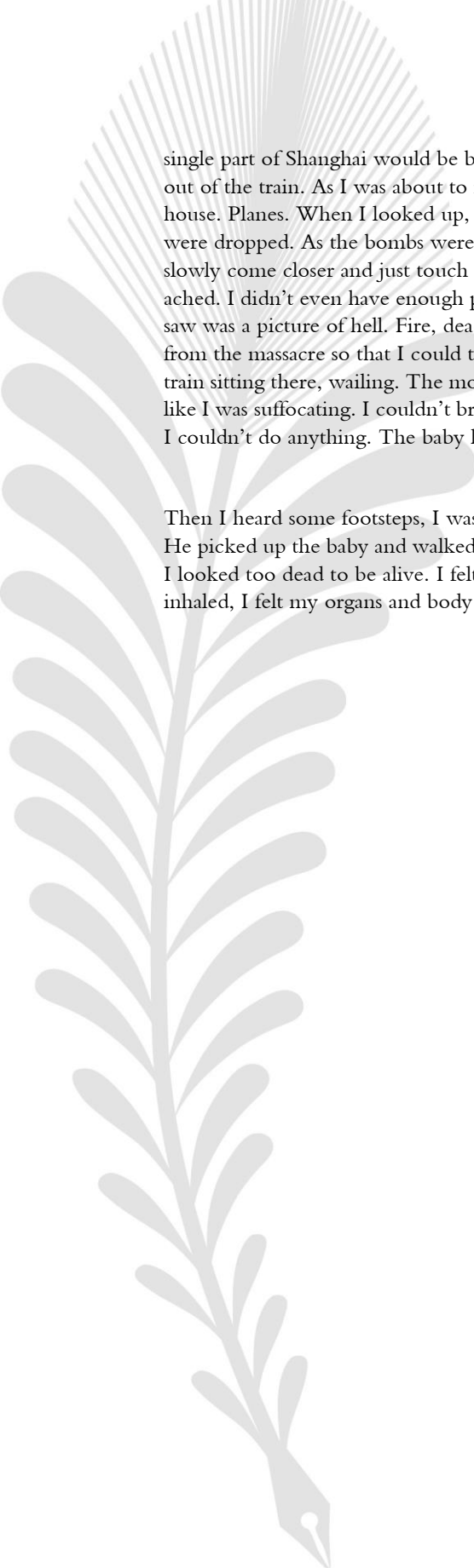
Shanghai's Punishment

Shanghai Singapore International School, Kulkarni, Atharva – 15

I hated this. I hated this so much I wanted to die. My right shoulder ached. A delivery man crashed into me with his bike while I was on my way from a park nearby. Turned out the delivery guy was delivering drugs – opium to be exact. China had lost to the British 50 years and before even you knew it, everybody has opium. They all had it. It is even more obsessive than the delicious meat dumpling that I eat every morning in front of my house. How do I know that it was this obsessive? Well, I live right in the center of Shanghai. I roamed around the house thinking about how much I hate this world and its vicious inhabitants. Murder, crime, kidnapping, drugs had conquered over every single inch of Shanghai. I believed in god. I believed that he would send some kind of message or even punishment to punish what these people were doing. It wouldn't be surprising if god would send the Japanese to attack us as punishment. I would still be scared even if it is god who sent it. I lived alone. I had no friends. I decided not to engage with the dangerous faction or group of people called society. I bought a newspaper and read the headline on the first page. It said, "Manchuria, at the tip of China and beside the Soviet Union had been conquered by the Japanese." I was appalled by this. I couldn't believe it. If the Japanese had entered Manchuria, they could enter mainland China. It was already evening by the time I thought about what could happen to me, what could happen to China. I went to sleep panic-stricken about what was going on.

When I woke up, I decided to leave Shanghai in a couple of days. I never even liked Shanghai. The countryside is much better according to me. I turned on the radio to hear what had the Japanese done after taking over Manchuria. "The Japanese have started to build a railway and have named it, Manchurian Railways." I thought about why they would need a railway. Maybe they want to bring in food and water to Japan. Maybe, that is why they took Manchuria. The voice came on again, "The Japanese are importing food, water, guns and worst of all, slaves." I was exasperated. Why are they importing guns and slaves? They maybe need food and water since Japan is small and are in urgent need of them. But why guns and slaves? "Be careful. Flee the main big cities because the Japanese might start bombing them. They want war. The Nazis in Europe have inspired them. Europe has been invaded. We will be invaded too." The word 'war' echoed in my head. "They could bomb us anyti..." The voice went off. I heard rumbling noises over my apartment. I quickly rushed to the roof of the building to see what it was. I barged through the roof door and came onto the flat marble stones. I looked up and gasped. I saw 10, no, 20 planes flying in the sky. At their tail, a Japanese flag. The radio person was right. "The Japanese could bomb us anytime" and here they are. All I saw was one plane fly right over my house and towards the city center. It dropped 5 oval shaped things onto the ground. I didn't know what they were or what they did. They made a sound like "pheeew" as they fell to the ground. I saw them disappear into the cluster of buildings and then my eyes suddenly closed. When I opened them, all I saw was a huge mushroom-looking cloud ascend into the sky. The cluster of buildings was now small hills made out of stone and brick. I ran, I wanted to get on the ground. Flat ground. All the buildings will be in the same shape as that cluster. The whole city is itself a cluster. Even if the Japanese bomb a few spots in Shanghai, the buildings will come down like a row of dominos.

When I came out of my building I saw people screaming and running while some were outraged. Some just stood like they didn't care what was happening. Some were already dead. I ran towards the end of the street. If I could somehow get away from this cluster... the Shanghai South Railway Station! The Railway station was in the center but the government had restricted any tall buildings near the station. The buildings usually were 7 or 8 floors high. Sometimes even 10 floors. I ran towards a main street which was named Ferguson Road after Lt. Ferguson who was the main commander in the sea battle between China and Britain. The road ran right through the middle of where the government building and the railway station was. The city was filled with people trying to flee. There were injured who were totally abandoned and left behind. I somehow pushed the people that were trying to push me off the the road. I barged through the huge gap that the people were trying to go in. I successfully was able to board an overcrowded train. I went all the way to the back of the train. I saw a mother and her baby crying, hugging each other tightly. The train slowly started to move, shaking while it gained full speed. I thought about whether the Japanese will come back again and bomb the station. The baby had stopped crying, so had the mother. The train had started to slow down. All the people on the train shouted. They were scared. They wanted to get of here. Then there was loud boom which looked like it came from the other side of the city. I didn't even need to look. I could tell without looking that was a bomb dropped. Then the realization hit me. Of course, the Japanese will keep on bombing until they are satisfied. That means every



single part of Shanghai would be bombed. Even this railway station. I hurriedly pushed the people aside and ran out of the train. As I was about to run away, I heard some rumbling noise, the same noise that I had heard in my house. Planes. When I looked up, I saw about 50 planes flying over. The planes hatch opened and the bombs were dropped. As the bombs were sky diving to ground, everything became slow motion. I could see the bomb slowly come closer and just touch the ground. Boom!. I felt like I was flying. Everything that I held in my body ached. I didn't even have enough power to breathe. After I forced some breaths and slowly opened my eyes, all I saw was a picture of hell. Fire, dead bodies, people with burns on their backs pleaded for help. I crawled away from the massacre so that I could take in some fresh air. As I somehow stood up, I saw the baby who was in the train sitting there, wailing. The mother lying with her eyes open. Dead. I tried to move my legs. I couldn't. I felt like I was suffocating. I couldn't breathe properly. I fell to the ground. Even lying on the ground seemed painful. I couldn't do anything. The baby kept on wailing.

Then I heard some footsteps, I was able to get a glimpse of who it was. A man with a camera. A photographer? He picked up the baby and walked away after looking if anybody was still alive. Apparently, he didn't notice me. I looked too dead to be alive. I felt death coming close to me. I took a deep breath, the best I could ever. As I inhaled, I felt my organs and body systems go out. I thought I am glad that baby was able to live.

Sleepwalking

Shanghai Singapore International School, Wiethoff, Anselm Hermann – 16

I was walking in the dark abyss, half asleep. Following me was my own very faint shadow cast by the flickering streetlights. I could almost see 10 meters away; it was as if I was wearing sunglasses during the evening. Two sharp beams of light in the thick fog formed, parallel to the road. Minutes passed like seconds, I could hear a soft humming noise getting louder, and two headlights appeared. The scorching light blinded me, and I could see a sharp outline of what seemed like the figure of a car.

As the car was halted, I hid behind a nearby tree, peaked over and saw a dark figure of a man walk out. When he disappeared in the thick fog, my pumping curiosity drew me to the back of the car and I couldn't stop myself. My hand reached for the trunk and lifted it up while struggling. I turned my head to each side to check if anybody was looking, but the coast was clear. I silently hopped into the trunk and dragged it down just enough so that there is a gap to look through and most importantly so I could breathe. I was exhausted and overwhelmed at the same time – I fell asleep.

All of a sudden, I woke up to the sound of the car engine starting. The car started and began to move. My heart was pounding from the adrenaline. The man kept driving and I could barely see where he was driving. The car drove over a bump, and something sharp and metal-like shoved towards me, I turned my head to look. Below me was a set of knives, but not just any kitchen knife, they were special knives that a killer uses to kill someone. My heart filled with regret and panic, and my mind filled with anxiety. I wanted to get some rest. I closed my eyes, and slowly fell asleep.

The car slowly started decelerating and finally come to a stop. I recognized a 6-story building that was covered in scaffolding and large pieces of green cloth covering the structure. This must be 'Dashijie' I thought to myself, it was an old building that had gangsters inside who gambled, and sing-song girls in the 1900's – It was 10 minutes away from my home. A rush of urge to flee back home shivered down my spine, but it could be a dangerous task. I wondered why the man stopped here, the place has been abandoned ever since it was mistakenly bombed back in 1937!

The car door opened and I heard the man quietly step out, as if he was a tiger that just spotted its prey. My heart pounding, gave me a feeling of failure and regret. "Why did I get myself into this" I thought. He seemed like a determined and powerful man. As the sound of his footsteps slowly faded away, I started thinking if I should make a run.. I waited 5 minutes and still hadn't heard anything. "It's now or never", I whispered to myself. I slowly lifted the trunk and quietly made my way out in slow motion.

The cold night's breeze blew past me and the sound of rustling leaves broke the silence. I looked around with my eyes wide-open, filled with paranoia. Every shadow from the trees that moved, and every sound of clicking machinery from the building's water tanks made me jump. I crossed the empty road, and spotted a glowing blue sign reflecting the streetlights that said 'Yan An Dong Lu'. At that point, I knew exactly where I was and casually started walking towards the direction of where my home was.

I turned my upper body 45 degrees while still walking so I could catch a glimpse of behind. Halfway through turning my head back, the man smashed into me from the direction I was walking towards. The man looked at me for a second, but didn't say anything, getting up in a hurry ran towards the direction where I came from – I decided to watch him. He ran through the fog and disappeared – the surrounding was dead still, not even a leaf moved. Two headlights turned on, shining directly on me and I heard the engine start. I was petrified; something stopped me from running. Something glittery on the ground beneath caught my attention, small flashes of light reflected from the object. I bent down to my knees to reach for it. My eyes still adjusting to the darkness, finally noticed that the object I was holding was a knife covered in specs of fresh blood. I immediately dropped it and sprinted forward as the sharp noise of the steel dropped and scraped the coarse road.

Soon, running out of breath, I finally reached the gate to my apartment. As I opened the door to my living room, a warm coloured bright light blinded me as if I had just came out from a long coal-mining month under the earth – followed by a ear-piercing scream. My mum in front of me with her eyes wide open, looking like she had seen a ghost exclaimed, “Why are you covered in blood!”



Mars Articles

Shanghai Singapore International School, Mah, Xian Ying – 14

N^ovember Issue

Date: 11/19/2136

UNCANNY PHONE CONVERSATION UNCOVERED,
CHANGES THEORIES ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED
TO EARTH

Many believe that Earth was completely destroyed and dominated a century ago by Earth's malfunctioning robots. No living Earthlings remained. However, yesterday, cyber archaeologists uncovered a series of texts and phone conversations in a phone. The source is from a century ago, in Shanghai, China, Earth. "It might be a conversation between two Earthling girls. One of them is named Blind Mushroom while the other is still unknown," says archaeologist QW11.

Cyber archaeologists couldn't screenshot the texts. However, they have successfully typed up a transcript of it for this article.

Transcript of text messages:

Unknown: I lost my shoulder bag!!

Blind mushroom: ??

Unknown: help!!

Blind mushroom: where did you lose it?

Unknown: ...

Blind mushroom: right sorry

Blind mushroom: wait...isn't ur bag tied to ur phone?

Unknown: erm I m holding my phone rn so no

Blind mushroom: No I mean tied

Blind mushroom: the app that lets ur phone locate ur keys or whatever

Unknown: oh yea right! Im so not used to modern tech

Unknown: Location: Shanghai Hongqiao TXMall

 Block B, 2nd floor, Basic Dep Co.

Unknown: I found it

Next article: UNITED NATIONS OF
MARS STARTS TO LOSE TRUST
IN OUR ALLY, JUPITER

JUPITER DENIES THAT THEY
ARE AGGRESSIVE

Blind mushroom: where is it?

Unknown: the changing room

Blind mushroom: OMG AHAHAHAHAH U COULDVE SEARCHED THERE FIRST

Blind mushroom: hello?

Blind mushroom: dude don't be mad

Unknown: *typing...*

Blind mushroom: im sorry i forgot that ur sensitive

Blind mushroom: hello? Call me

Blind mushroom: nvm I call u

A phone call started immediately after the texting. Cyber archaeologists also successfully recorded a transcript of the phone call. Cyber archaeologists found the location of the unknown Earthling. Unknown was not in Shanghai Hongqiao TXMall anymore and seemed to had been teleported to a random abandoned factory in Guangzhou, China, Earth.

Transcript of the phone call:

Blind Mushroom's squeaky voice appears first. "Hello?"

A weird static sound comes from the other side of the line. There is a muffled voice of the other girl. It sounds like she's forcing her mouth close from bursting.

"Oooooooooohh!" sings Blind Mushroom, "I know you are there!"

Nothing but loud screeches, resembling the scratching of fingernails on chalkboard, comes from the other side. This lasts for about a minute.

"HELP—" the other girl screams.

"Hello?" says Blind Mushroom, "d—dude, this is so not funny!"

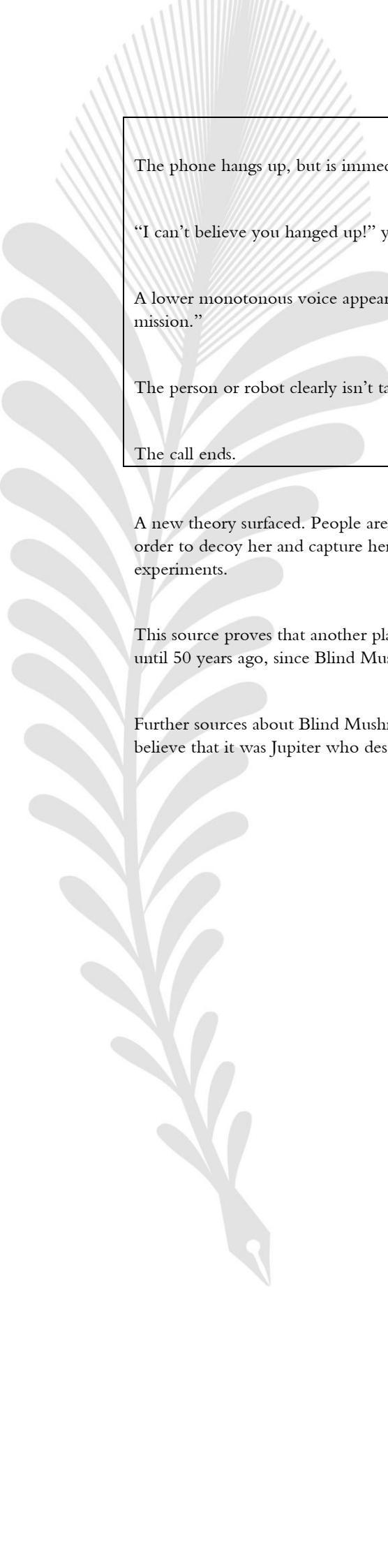
More screeching noises.

Suddenly, a monotonous voice booms, "Calm down, Earthling. You have nothing to fear here."

"Who are you?" Blind Mushroom says with a quivering voice, "where is my friend?"

"You have nothing to fear," the monotonous voice repeats, "your comrade is safe with us."

"W—what... Who the hell are you? Stay away from my friend!" Blind Mushroom yells.



The phone hangs up, but is immediately dialed again by Blind Mushroom.

“I can’t believe you hanged up!” yells Blind Mushroom, “Leave my friend alone! Don’t mess with me!”

A lower monotonous voice appears. “Dangerous Blind Mushroom is a threat to us. Abort mission. Abort mission.”

The person or robot clearly isn’t talking to Blind Mushroom.

The call ends.

A new theory surfaced. People are thinking that the robots placed Unknown’s bag in the changing room in order to decoy her and capture her. The robots might have targeted her to be one of their subjects for their experiments.

This source proves that another planet has seized Earth. Some also say Earth might still have living Earthlings up until 50 years ago, since Blind Mushroom had discouraged the robots’ war effort.

Further sources about Blind Mushroom and her friend were defaced by Jupiter’s spy agencies. Our spy agencies believe that it was Jupiter who destroyed Earth.

The War On Shanghai in 2050

Shanghai Singapore International School, Parmar, Dhyana – 14

It was a cold windy and icy night of the month December 2050. Somewhere in Shanghai, Chenguang was sitting in a destroyed street, thinking of all the memories in her life. Then she closed her eyes, and started thinking about the things that happened that ruined her life and Shanghai.

The story started in the year of 2036, when the city was the most beautiful and advanced city of the world. The population had increased a lot, but new technology took care of it. The city had high rise buildings, and the schools and vehicles were all so advanced. The buildings had new shapes and designs. The shapes were like triangles and diamonds. The cars were all in new shapes like something compared to Ferrari or even better and with high-tech, they were all two seaters, and some cars ran with the solar power and the others ran by charging them, only a few cars used petrol to run, few will run with environmentally-friendly fuels, the cars will have fingerprint identification for security, automatic breath sensors to prevent drunk driving and use satellite and map discs for navigation. The schools were the best things, they had all the new technology, for example the blue screen in the air, that you could pop out from you watch or your phone, and every class used that to help them study and almost all the age groups used laptops and this kind of air screen for their research and for finding out more information. The library was all unique they had a speaking system where the students had to tell the speaking system which book they want and the library will find it for the students. The Study halls which were highly advanced, the study hall was in an open area of the school like its compound or garden. where there was a pole and there where round shaped sitting area along the pole, like from top of the pole one after another there was a round shaped sitting area. The phones were also really advanced, by that year iPhone 28 was already out and many other new phones had been introduced.

In that time there was a girl whose name was Chenguang. She was so beautiful that her parents named her Chenguang, which means sunshine and beauty. She was 18 years old, she was as beautiful as an actress. She had an oval face with bright face with a small mouth. She had long black wavy hair but she usually wore it in a ponytail. Her skin was so beautiful that it reminded people of the colour of coffee with milk. You could see her anger and happiness in her big expressive deep blue eyes, which reminded people of a lake on a stormy day. She had a little curved nose, and her mouth looked like if it was painted light pink outlines by puffy lips that she often accentuated with glossy pink lipstick. Her slightly arched chestnut brown eyebrows highlighted her emotions by moving up and down as she reacted to the world around her. She wore dark jeans, with long boots, a crop top with a black coloured hoodie. She used to smell like lemons, and she used to love eating pizza and drinking lemonade.

Even though being the most advanced and beautiful, the city had many social problems. Japan and Shanghai were still enemies. Japan was not happy with the progress that Shanghai made and Shanghai was not happy with the progress that Japan made. The hate got worse and worse and suddenly one day Japan decided to attack Shanghai secretly. Japan made their army really strong and called a war against Shanghai. Japan invaded Shanghai in 2048. They came and killed all the soldiers and destroyed all the buildings and the streets. The Japanese also killed all the people in Shanghai and took over the resources that Shanghai had. They killed every single person very harshly, and took few workers and children to work for their country and to make them like Shanghai. In this war Chenguang was hiding from the Japanese and their soldiers, she was buried under the pieces of the Financial tower, when she went out with her friends and the Japanese bombed the Financial tower and she got buried. She had been hiding for almost 2 years, now she decided to come out now because she needed some resources like water and food, she couldn't survive any more if she didn't get them. She went looking for water and somewhere she found a girl just like her and same as her age facing her back to Chenguang, she was holding a can of sprite. Chenguang got so excited about the drink because she was so hungry, she had a hope now, but then suddenly she realized that the can is with the other girl and she will drink it and will not give Chenguang. So Chenguang silently picked up a piece of broken glass and stabbed the other girl, then Chenguang took the can and ran away.



When she got tired of running and stopped at a place where there was little pool of dirty water were she saw her own reflection and she started panicking, she acted really wildly, she also loss the control of the situation after looking at her self. Chenguang had changed so much. She was so not beautiful at all and her name Chenguang didn't mean like her at all, which meant sunshine and beauty but she looked totally different. She was 20 years old now. She had an oval face with dull face. She had long black wavy hair but now they were all around her face and they were so messy. Her skin was so black that it reminded people of the colour of coal. You couldn't see her eyes that clearly they were all covered in dirt. She had a little curved nose which was all covered in dirt, and her mouth looked like if it was painted dark black and her lips looked like if she putted black lipstick on it. Her eyebrows were highlighted all brown and black. She wore dark jeans which were half torn, with long boots they had holes in them, a crop top which was all black and a bit torn with a black coloured hoodie which was torn and lose. She smelled like shit and all muddy and disgusting.

Broken Promise

Singapore International School, Cheng, Nancy Nanqi – 15

Lu Yuanhuan hummed Debussy's famous piano piece Clair De Lune while he drove past The Bund and the city's early birds. Back then in West Point, there were only males in the school; everyone was formal, cautious, as the school rules allowed absolutely no sloppy behavior. Shanghai was definitely much different. As Yuanhuan kept driving, he saw housewives chit-chatting while purchasing raw materials for lunch; he saw rickshaw men devouring down a whole bowl of sweet soya bean milk at the street-side food stand; and he saw ships full of cargos getting ready to sail. Indubitably, people were all moving at their own comfortable paces. Nobody came to push them, nor did they themselves look in haste.

"How pleasant to be a common man," Yuanhuan pitied himself, pulling the car key out of the keyhole after firmly parking the car. He could only walk for the remaining five hundred meters because he had reached the old uptown – where most longtangs were located.

Growing up in a family with military background at the time provided Yuanhuan a comfortable living environment. He had been overprotected until his father brought him to the house he once lived in, which was a small attic in one of the longtangs. Ever since then, Yuanhuan formed his habit of having breakfast uptown several times in a week. The habit had been obtruded for four years, thus, he was eager to gain it back.

"Lu xi sang? Long time no see!" A hawker cried out while Yuanhuan's tall, erect figure sauntered towards his stall.

Showing his perfect porcelain-like teeth, Yuanhuan answered, "Of course it's me. Long time no see Zhang bebe. Same as before, one bowl of soya bean milk, ten xiao long meitou."

Mr. Zhang replied in a gleeful voice, and then ran to start working. Despite sitting outdoor, Yuanhuan could still smell the fragrance of freshly grinded beans suffusing through the air. In deep nostalgia, he took a mouthful breath of that comforting odor.

"Lu xi sang, your soya bean milk is here. Please enjoy." A girl who was about the same age as Yuanhuan gently left the pottery bowl in front of him. She was very petite; with almond-shaped watery eyes, narrow nose, and thin pink lips. She was not unbelievably beautiful, but she gave Yuanhuan an ineffable palpitation.

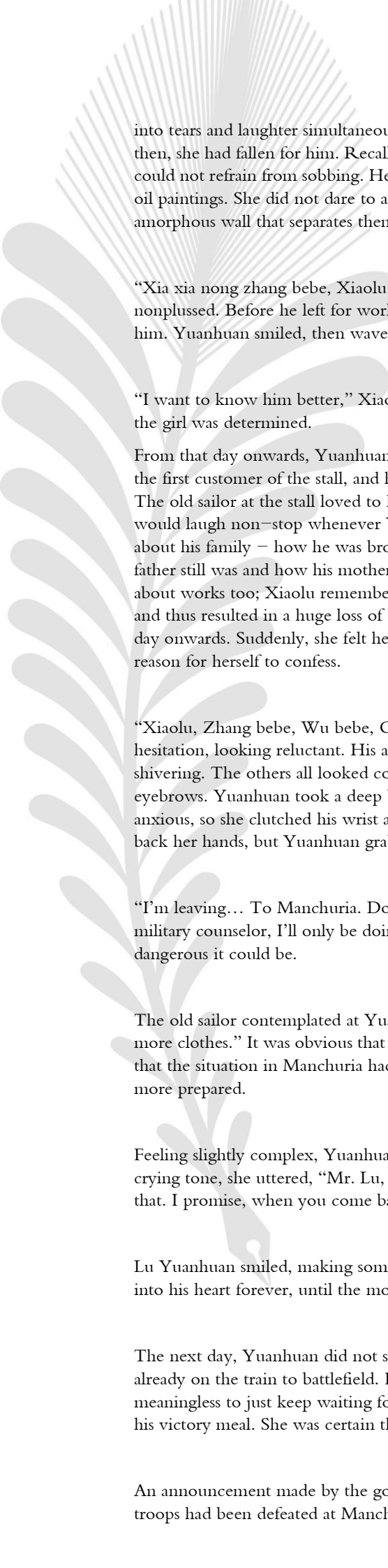
"Xiao xiao nong. I haven't seen you before, are you helping out for Zhang bebe?" Yuanhuan asked due to his own curiosity, but the words were full of respects.

The girl paused all her actions abruptly. She had never expected someone like him to ask about her matters so politely. She stared into Yuanhuan's amber eyes, and then slowly shifted her vision to his military uniform. This man was truly a gentleman; nothing like those nouveau riches.

"I... I'm his daughter. My name is Xiaolu." Xiaolu said it in an unbelievable soft volume. She knew her cheeks turned super rosy, as she could feel that obvious sense of burning on her face.

"Xiaolu," whispered Yuanhuan to himself, "what a lovely name!"

Xiaolu's blush spread to the nape of her ears after hearing those words. She briskly escaped from Yuanhuan, leaving the young sergeant behind confused, then scuttled back to her room upstairs in the old flat. Xiaolu burst



into tears and laughter simultaneously. She had noticed Yuanhuan since both of them were fifteen, ever since then, she had fallen for him. Recalling the first time she met him, a bright winter morning just like today, Xiaolu could not refrain from sobbing. He stood besides his father straightly, looking like an angel from those exorbitant oil paintings. She did not dare to approach him, as she felt like the difference between their hierarchies was amorphous wall that separates them.

“Xia xia nong zhang bebe, Xiaolu seems to be in a bad mood.” After Xiaolu’s sudden leave, Yuanhuan felt nonplussed. Before he left for work, he elevated his head and saw Xiaolu leaning by the window, glancing at him. Yuanhuan smiled, then waved at her.

“I want to know him better,” Xiaolu muttered with happy tears streaming down her face, “and I believe I will,” the girl was determined.

From that day onwards, Yuanhuan went to Mr. Zhang’s stall for breakfast everyday. Surprisingly, he was always the first customer of the stall, and he often told tales about his life at West Point to other customers and Xiaolu. The old sailor at the stall loved to hear about Yuanhuan’s navy training experiences, and the young seamstress would laugh non-stop whenever Yuanhuan talked about the cadets’ clumsy patchworks. Often he told them about his family – how he was brought up in an occidental culture influenced family, yet how conservative his father still was and how his mother played the role of peacemaker. There were times when Yuanhuan narrated about works too; Xiaolu remembered once he went outraged when the commander neglected his suggestion, and thus resulted in a huge loss of elite forces. Xiaolu had sensed all his excitement, fury, and sorrow, from that day onwards. Suddenly, she felt he was more tangible than she thought; this simply meant, she had found the reason for herself to confess.

“Xiaolu, Zhang bebe, Wu bebe, Chiang ayi, I have a big announcement to make.” Yuanhuan said this in deep hesitation, looking reluctant. His amber eyes were slightly moist, and his bamboo-like fingers were mildly shivering. The others all looked confused, frowning as if they were trying to keep something in between their eyebrows. Yuanhuan took a deep breath, and then closed his eyes for a moment. This made Xiaolu even more anxious, so she clutched his wrist and shook it; when she realized that was a physical contact, she silently took back her hands, but Yuanhuan grabbed it swiftly.

“I’m leaving... To Manchuria. Don’t worry though, I won’t be fighting at the battlefield, they treat me as a military counselor, I’ll only be doing the brain works.” Yuanhuan consoled them; despite he knew how dangerous it could be.

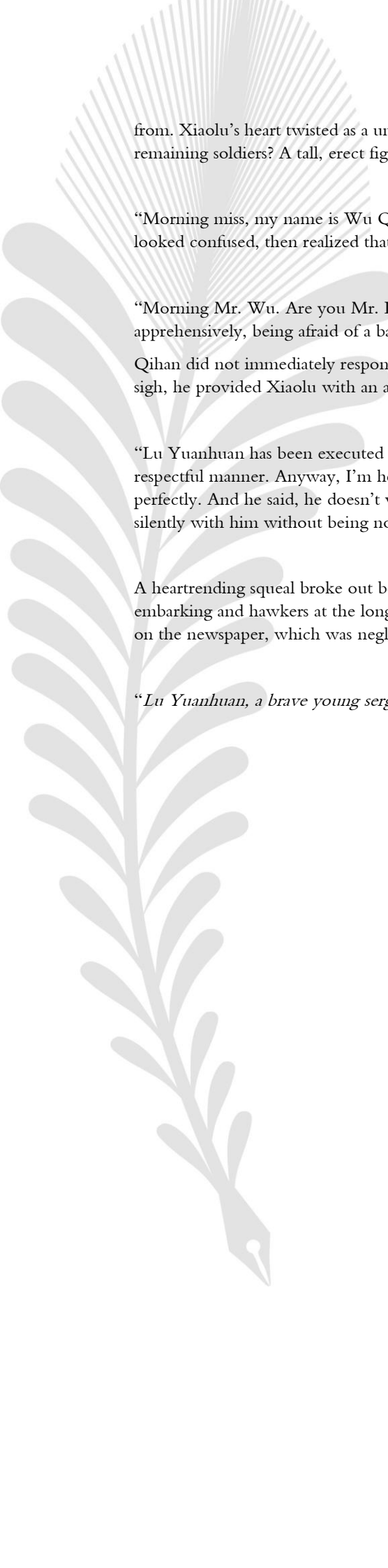
The old sailor contemplated at Yuanhuan intensely, then he said, “have a safe trip. It’s cold in Manchuria, bring more clothes.” It was obvious that he knew Yuanhuan was telling the easier version of the story. Everyone knew that the situation in Manchuria had been a purgatory since Japan’s first invasion, and this time, they were far more prepared.

Feeling slightly complex, Yuanhuan shifted his vision to Xiaolu, who was also staring into his direction. In a crying tone, she uttered, “Mr. Lu, I don’t know what to say. But, please take care of yourself. Please promise me that. I promise, when you come back, I’ll make the finest xiolong meitou to welcome you.”

Lu Yuanhuan smiled, making some wrinkles on his pallor pale face. The young sergeant engraved this sentence into his heart forever, until the moment his transient life ended.

The next day, Yuanhuan did not show up as usual. Xiaolu stunned for a moment, then realized that he was already on the train to battlefield. In frustration, she waited, as she did in the past four years. It seemed meaningless to just keep waiting for him, so Xiaolu used this time to improve her cooking skills – to prepare for his victory meal. She was certain that he would not break their promise.

An announcement made by the government three months later informed all citizens of the country that their troops had been defeated at Manchuria. The remaining soldiers were distributed to where they originally came



from. Xiaolu's heart twisted as a university student at the stall read out the news. Would Yuanhuan be part of the remaining soldiers? A tall, erect figure gradually walked close to her as she speculated.

"Morning miss, my name is Wu Qihan. I serve in the 304 force." Qihan briefly introduced himself. Xiaolu first looked confused, then realized that this man was Yuanhuan's colleague.

"Morning Mr. Wu. Are you Mr. Lu's friend? How is he? Is he back in Shanghai yet?" Xiaolu asked apprehensively, being afraid of a baneful news.

Qihan did not immediately respond, instead he sat down and held his silence for a while. After a long, reluctant sigh, he provided Xiaolu with an answer that she had never expected.

"Lu Yuanhuan has been executed due to treason. He's just a dead renegade now; you needn't address him in a respectful manner. Anyway, I'm here because he begged me to pass this wristwatch to you. He said it suits you perfectly. And he said, he doesn't worth your remembrance. " Qihan left, took the newspaper on the table silently with him without being noticed by Xiaolu.

A heartrending squeal broke out behind Qihan, emitted by Xiaolu. While the people at The Bund kept embarking and hawkers at the longtang continued to sell their goods, Xiaolu would never see that one tiny line on the newspaper, which was neglected by the university student just now.

"Lu Yuanhuan, a brave young sergeant who sacrificed his life to win more time for his fellows."

Mendacity

Singapore International School, Upadhyay, Aradhana – 14

Mendacity: untruthfulness; lies, deception

Earth is at its breaking point. When exactly the world reached its tipping point, we may never know. It may have been when the seven billionth baby was born, or even earlier. Governments around the world have hidden from us, the very people whom they were to serve and protect, the early signs that Earth was slowly beginning to fracture. We were led to believe that industrialization, urbanization and modernization were a good thing. As a result, humans have continually damaged Earth, but the extent of damage wasn't fully understood until the early 2000s. I sometimes wonder what my life would be like if Earth was undamaged, but that is just a wish based on fantasy. This story is reality.

My name is Nicole. My father and mother moved back to Shanghai when I was very young to be closer to my mother's family. Shanghai is my home, I remember no other place. I loved Shanghai, a beautiful city where tall modern skyscrapers line the banks of the river on one side creating a sharp contrast to the old colonial era buildings that flank the edge of the river on the other side. The old co-existing in harmony with the new, that is what Shanghai has become known for, a city where you can find the latest trends as well as the traditional.

Everything was perfect for sixteen years of my life. I had many friends and was doing great in school. I was in eleventh grade, looking at colleges to pursue my dreams of becoming a pediatrician. I had my whole life planned out. But it all went wrong in the summer of tenth grade.

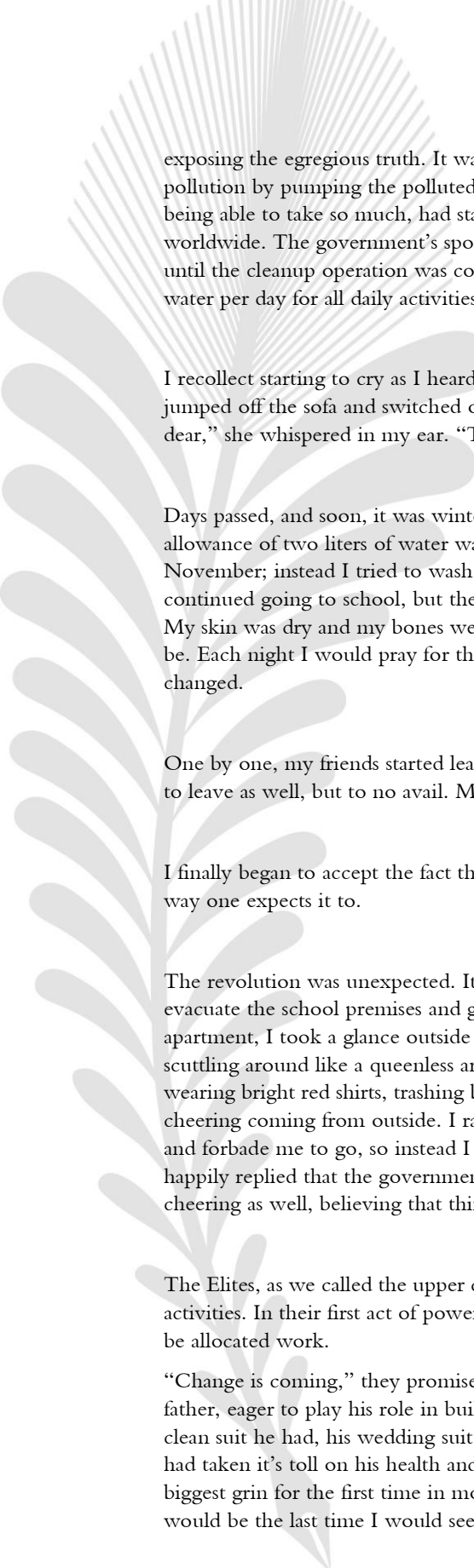
The first signs appeared soon after the world governments returned back from the bi-annual Prioritize Earth (PE) Summit in Geneva. The creation of PE in 2018 was necessitated by the worsening air quality around the world. It provided a platform where world leaders, scientists and industrialists could come together to discuss and implement policies to reduce pollution and save Earth. It succeeded where other forums that preceded it failed, due to its iron fist policy of allowing no concessions to any nation and cutting the water supply of any nation that did not comply by diverting the rivers that feed its land. Cutting the water supply of a nation was not an empty threat. The River Ganges had once flowed through Bangladesh nourishing its land, but the government's refusal to comply with PE saw the River Ganges diverted. Millions of poor Bangladeshis perished in the subsequent famine but the PE was unapologetic and its message clear; comply or die.

Unlike the previous year's gatherings, which were all concluded by a flurry of policy signings and hand-shaking, this year there was markedly none. Slowly the prices of the most basic of necessities started to rise, but I was too preoccupied with back-to-school preparations to take notice of my mother's complaints about the price of rice.

In the three months that ensued, my days were filled with school work and making plans for my future. I was determined to pursue my dreams of becoming a pediatrician and was already seriously contemplating which colleges to apply to.

Toward the end of November, reports of small clusters of dead fish floating in rivers and lakes in different parts of the world started to make the news. Alarmed, people began to avoid eating fish, and rumors began circulating that all the fresh water bodies on Earth were poisoned. Through all this turmoil, the world governments remained silent, neither confirming nor denying the rumors. However, only when the TV screens started flashing pictures of hundreds of thousands of dead fish washing down the River Nile, until they reached the delta just outside Cairo where their silvery bodies started to pile up, a giant dam built from rotting flesh, the stench of which was said to carry for miles inland; did the world's Government break their silence.

I remember sitting on the living room couch, sandwiched in between my parents, staring at the TV screen with fear evident on our faces. That was when the government's carefully fabricated web of lies began to unravel,



exposing the egregious truth. It was discovered that the governments around the globe had been managing air pollution by pumping the polluted gas into the Earth's core, by drilling deep holes into it for years. Earth, only being able to take so much, had started to spew back up this venom with vengeance, poisoning water bodies worldwide. The government's spokesman went to announce that all water was deemed unfit for human use, and until the cleanup operation was completed, each registered resident of Shanghai would be given two liters of water per day for all daily activities.

I recollect starting to cry as I heard this, my sniffles must have snapped my mother out of her trance, as she jumped off the sofa and switched off the TV and beckoned me and my father into a family hug. "Don't worry dear," she whispered in my ear. "The government will have this water pollution cleaned up soon."

Days passed, and soon, it was winter. With each passing week the laws got stricter and life got harsher. The daily allowance of two liters of water was cut to one and a half instead. I hadn't had a shower since that fateful day in November; instead I tried to wash myself as best I could with a tiny bowl of water my mother gave me. I continued going to school, but the lack of food and water caused me to become thinner and thinner each day. My skin was dry and my bones were sticking out at every angle. This was not the way I had imagined my life to be. Each night I would pray for this nightmare to end only to wake up in the morning and find nothing had changed.

One by one, my friends started leaving Shanghai, going far away to other places. I tried to convince my parents to leave as well, but to no avail. My mother said it was safer here and I knew that was the end of that discussion.

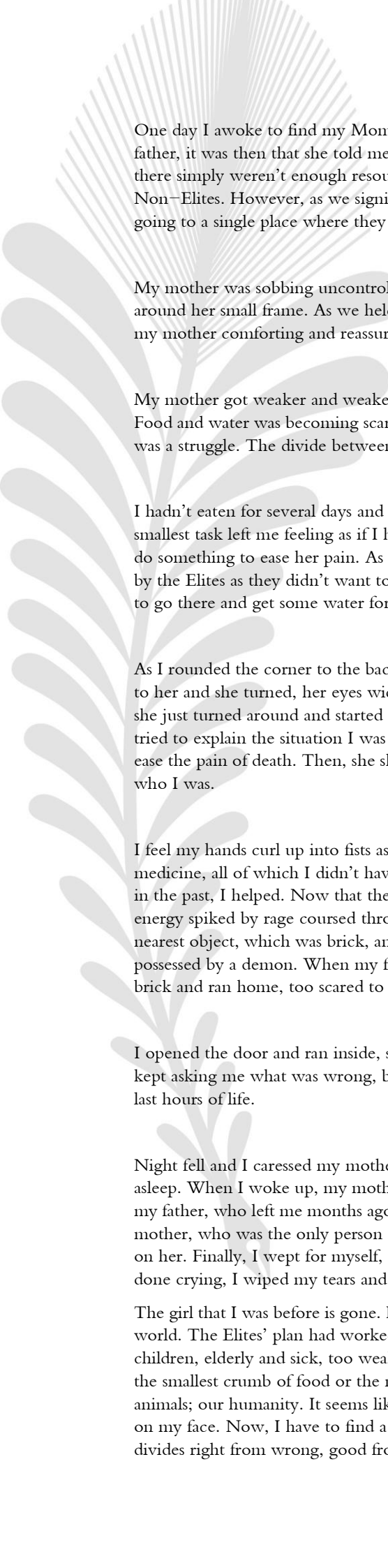
I finally began to accept the fact that this was my life and began to make do, however, things never turn out the way one expects it to.

The revolution was unexpected. It took place a few weeks ago. I was in Math class when we were told to evacuate the school premises and go home quickly. Since I live fairly close, I ran home. As I made it into our apartment, I took a glance outside the window and saw a sea of people amassing outside, on the streets, scuttling around like a queenless army of ants. In the midst of it all, I managed to make out a group of people wearing bright red shirts, trashing buildings and shops. The next day, school was cancelled. Around noon, I heard cheering coming from outside. I ran out of the apartment ready to make my way outside but my Mom stopped and forbade me to go, so instead I waited till our neighbour came home and asked him what was going on. He happily replied that the government had been overthrown by a group of influential rich Chinese. I started cheering as well, believing that things were finally going to get better. That was the last normal day of my life.

The Elites, as we called the upper class Chinese, took control of the water distributions and all other government activities. In their first act of power a few days later, they called all adult males to the Central Bureau so they can be allocated work.

"Change is coming," they promised. "But it will require everyone to work together for the better good." My father, eager to play his role in building a better future for me and Mom, excitedly got ready, donning the only clean suit he had, his wedding suit. Though he had gained weight since his marriage to Mom, the last 6 months had taken its toll on his health and the suit that had fitted him like a glove now hung loose. Dad wore the biggest grin for the first time in months as he kissed mom and I goodbye. I didn't realize it then, but that would be the last time I would see him.

That night and for the next week my mother would leave me at home in the morning and roam the streets until sunset desperately looking for my father or any news of him. Prohibited by Mom to put even a toe outside the threshold of our apartment, I would try to pre-occupy myself by reading a book but inevitably I would find myself praying that Mom would come back with Dad. My mind would even play cruel tricks on me and several times a day I would think that I could hear my Mom and Dad chatting outside the apartment. Excited I would rush to open the door only to find the hallway empty except for the wails permeating from our neighbour's apartment, the heart wrenching sound jolting me back to reality.



One day I awoke to find my Mom sitting and looking over me, instead of getting ready to go search for my father, it was then that she told me of what was being said. People were saying that the Elites had realised that there simply weren't enough resources to support the population, and their solution was to kill us, the Non-Elites. However, as we significantly outnumbered them, they devised a plan to deceive the adult men into going to a single place where they could be easily rounded up and disposed of, like an unwanted rat infestation.

My mother was sobbing uncontrollably when she finished telling me. I snuggled close to her, wrapping my arms around her small frame. As we held each other, I became aware of a subtle shift, where in the past it would be my mother comforting and reassuring me, it was now the opposite.

My mother got weaker and weaker with each passing day, and I was on the borderline of becoming like her. Food and water was becoming scarcer; I was surviving on a few mouth fulls of food and of water a day. Everyday was a struggle. The divide between the Elites and us was larger than before; it was as if we were immiscible.

I hadn't eaten for several days and I had just given my mother the last drop of water we had. I felt fatigued, the smallest task left me feeling as if I had run a marathon. My mother was near death, and I knew that, but I had to do something to ease her pain. As soon as I heard that at the Jing'An temple the monks, who were treated well by the Elites as they didn't want to anger the gods, were discreetly handing out food to those in need, I decided to go there and get some water for my mother, as the Elites stopped handing out supplies to us.

As I rounded the corner to the back of the temple, I saw no one there except my old friend, Angela. I called out to her and she turned, her eyes widening as she saw me. I had a tiny glimmer of hope that she would help, but she just turned around and started walking away. I ran to catch up with her. Placing a hand on her shoulder, I tried to explain the situation I was in. I kept mentioning that I just needed something to soothe my mother, to ease the pain of death. Then, she shoved my hand off her shoulder and told me to go away, that she didn't know who I was.

I feel my hands curl up into fists as anger started to engulf my thoughts. She had everything; food, clothes, medicine, all of which I didn't have. All because she was an Elite. It wasn't fair. Whenever she had needed help in the past, I helped. Now that the tables had turned, she wouldn't lift a finger to help me. A sudden wave of energy spiked by rage coursed through me. I chased after her and pinned her to the ground. I grabbed the nearest object, which was brick, and started pounding her with it. I didn't stop despite her pleas, it was as if I was possessed by a demon. When my fury had dissipated enough for me to realize what I was doing, I dropped the brick and ran home, too scared to look back.

I opened the door and ran inside, straight to my mother's room, where I sat down, panting heavily. My mother kept asking me what was wrong, but I thought it was better not to tell her, not to cause her extra worry in her last hours of life.

Night fell and I caressed my mother's hair, soothing her with the lullaby that Grandma used to sing. Soon, I fell asleep. When I woke up, my mother lay there on the bed, unmoving. Unable to bear the loss, I wept. I wept for my father, who left me months ago, who promised that he would be there for me no matter what. I wept for my mother, who was the only person I had left in this world. I cried for Angela and the senseless pain I had inflicted on her. Finally, I wept for myself, for the innocence I had lost in those few minutes of insanity. When I was done crying, I wiped my tears and picked up my pen.

The girl that I was before is gone. I can't even recognise myself anymore. I'm scared, no, horrified by the outside world. The Elites' plan had worked, getting rid of the adult male population had left the rest of us, the women, children, elderly and sick, too weak and broken to fight. We have become savages, turning on one another for the smallest crumb of food or the minutest drop of water. We have lost the only thing that separated us from animals; our humanity. It seems like yesterday when I was going to school, my biggest problem being a pimple on my face. Now, I have to find a way to contend with the knowledge that I have crossed the thin line that divides right from wrong, good from evil, man from animal.



My death is close, I can feel my energy slipping away with each word but I am determined to write my story, so it not only serves as a record of what has transpired for any life that comes hereafter, because the end for us humans has begun. But also as voice to all those that have been silenced by the Government's and Elite's mendacity.

~Epilogue~

A blue creature exits a spaceship, followed by its companions. They all carried shovels, presumably for excavation purposes. They began to dig, deep into the ground. Suddenly, one creature started jumping up and down, small clicking noises escaping its lips. All the other creatures crowd around, staring at a small, curled up skeleton, trapped beneath a pile of books. The creatures pry the book away and began to read. *'Earth is at its breaking point...'*

Chaos in Turbulent Times

SKH Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School, Mak, Michael Chi Chiu – 15

Prologue

“So...how’s my fortune going? What does it say?”

The old man seemed quite troubled as he looked into the inky eyes of his customer --- a lad with a mole on his head. Clearing his throat, he quoted:

Beware of the Bund in the midst of evening

Where there starts the time of suffering,

Unless there stands a long-haired mortal

As well as one that is rather bestial.

“Hm...Okay then. That is one weird statement.”

“*To believe or not to believe.* That is the question.” The man replied in a discerning manner.

“...Well then...um...”

Chapter 1

Feng, sitting in a rickshaw, was looking around. Everything in the Bund seemed pleasant in the pavement surrounding him. There were men in suits who just got out from a casino, shuffling their cash like poker cards, while queuing up to board English-style trams for a journey back to civilization. We had civilians having their butts on the benches, spontaneously gossiping either on how much they’ve just earned from their sweatshops or who the most eye-catching disco-lady was. And lastly, there was a young man just staring blankly towards the gloomy sky clouded in shades of grey, stroking his brown mole with absolutely no reason at all besides making him all the more like an imbecile.

Apparently, that dimwit’s name was called Feng.

Feng, while daydreaming on the rickshaw, suddenly noticed something abnormal --- his left hand was shivering abnormally. He tried to clutch his trembling hand tightly, but to no avail.

When was the last time that his hand shook like a maniac?

Being paralyzed for a while, he shook his head. “No, this has never happened before,” he thought.

For Feng, everything around him seems to be recognizable to those seven years ago --- people in the Bund were continuing their monotonous routine of hustling and bustling. At the pier, workers were lifting boxes of goods, pulling them along the streets while dodging incoming cars at the same time. Merchants were desperate to sell all their fruits and vegetables with their roaring and yelling, in the hope of getting a “silver dollar” or two.

For an ordinary person, there is nothing to be concerned about when seeing his homeland being the same as before, so logically speaking, nothing could possibly go wrong, right?

“Right,” said Feng, muttering to himself, “j—just keep calm and stop being p—p—paranoid. The shaking is nothing t—to me and uh... of course I will be absolutely fine! Yes. Right. H—Hopefully.”

Or would he?

Meanwhile, a sudden, deaf—defying roar has blasted into sound waves, beating and tearing through Feng’s ear as drummers on steroids. It was only a matter of time before his eardrum started to rupture.

“HEY!”

Letting out a short gasp, Feng was frozen in place. His face, just turning pale, exposed his pink—red gums and gritted teeth. As he was struggling to come to his senses, his hand raised involuntarily to cover his buzzing, yet aching ear. Pain slowly grew in his ear as he moaned with his agonizing visage.

“Ouch ... what was that?”

“Are you boarding or not, airhead?!”

When Feng turned his head he could clearly see a muscular boor almost in his 40s, snarling and growling at him like a wild dog. With flashing eyes, flaring nostrils, and a quivering mouth, any man would break into a run after spotting some guy with a humanoid, canine—like appearance.

And of course, if any man would scamper away then what would happen if any woman saw that naked fiend with his torso covered with grease and sweat? In fact, this would be the worst—case scenario for Feng, not with an almost—fractured ear bothering him.

“Hope there won’t be anyone, or actually, NO ONE, is going to give me another hundred decibels as a mere surprise gift...” he grinned, reluctantly.

“Hey, answer me!!!” barked the puller, this time not as blaring as before. However, Feng felt that the pain in his ear got worse.

“Oh, um, yeah... I’m boarding. Ah! My ear hurts...”

“Just get on quickly! I’m in a hurry!”

“Uh, fine...”

Sigh... What a great day to begin with after returning to Shanghai.

Like seriously, why would someone blow a gasket because of a passenger just sitting right there doing absolutely nothing? Was everyone here a psycho or something?

“Probably yes,” Feng groaned, “If not, why on earth would he blast me like I’m his arch—nemesis?”

“Well, at least everything seems alright after all, aside from that stupid interlude and the fact that everyone is a psycho...” Feng murmured to himself, still trying to stay optimistic.

“AH! RUN AWAY!”

NO!”

Huh? What was that?

Without turning his head around he could see people glancing past his arms, not without a couple of huffs and pants as they went.

“GET OUT OF MY WAY!”

“HELP! THEY’RE COMING!”

“RUN!”

As the clouds in the sky were slowly becoming more overcast, so did the minds of the fleeing citizens that could not care less about bumping into others. The squawks of crows and innumerable cries and screams were tearing through the air. Knowing that his ear couldn’t bear any longer, Feng knew that the odds were stacked against him. With his last bit of courage, he turned around and saw what was happening.

Alright...this was NOT going to smell good...

Chapter 2

When Feng was busy rubbing his ear, what he saw in front of him was a sight that may or may not spell the beginning of a crisis ----- it was a mob, each wearing a long face, stumping their way like wild cattle.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

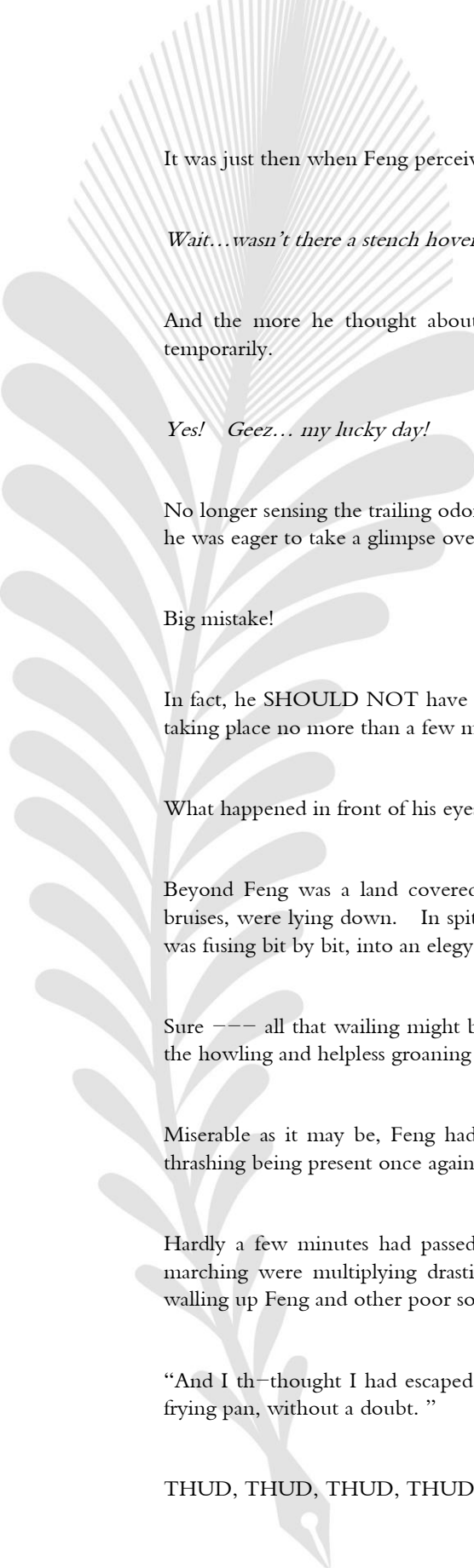
It was unquestionable that the only non-black entities were nothing more than their skin and their “tools” in their hands, ranging from planks, steel tubes, and of course, the metallic grey arms which any living thing would recoil in fear when the infamous bang went off ----- the dreaded handguns. What’s worse, you could tell from their nasty sneers that they were ready and willing to give them a shot.

Acknowledging that running was the only way to save himself, Feng took to his heels and blasted off hastily. Through hurrying bikes, the swirling dust and dirt erupted relentlessly beneath his shoes as he picked up speed. Ruthless blasts of gusts kept whipping on his face relentlessly. Notwithstanding it was rather unpleasant, at least it was better than getting bludgeoned by something else.

“Just go fast...must go fast...got to go fast...need to go fast...” he chanted spontaneously, “I don’t need to be a fortune teller to see what’s going to happen if I ...uh, forget it. Just **don’t, look, back.**”

Did Feng actually know where he should be going? **Probably not.**

Faster and faster as his legs went, Feng was sprinting with all his might. At this moment, his mind had gone practically blank. He only knew he had to keep on running. The one thought of making a getaway permeated deep into his nerves.



It was just then when Feng perceived something unusual.

Wait...wasn't there a stench hovering around somewhere? So... if it's gone, then...

And the more he thought about it, the more he was sure that he had been free from the triad's grasp, temporarily.

Yes! Geez... my lucky day!

No longer sensing the trailing odor, he had a sense that he had outrun them in some sort. Much to his delight, he was eager to take a glimpse over his shoulder.

Big mistake!

In fact, he SHOULD NOT have looked backwards when someone was in hot pursuit, not with all the yelling taking place no more than a few meters away.

What happened in front of his eyes was nothing worse than just some grim-looking scene.

Beyond Feng was a land covered with stains of red where unthinkable many bodies, entirely riddled with bruises, were lying down. In spite of being apparently alive, every, single moan let out by each innocent soul was fusing bit by bit, into an elegy sung by some kind of banshee.

Sure --- all that wailing might be hurtful enough to his ear, but they were certainly nothing compared with the howling and helpless groaning of those frozen in place or lying on the ground.

Miserable as it may be, Feng had to shake himself from misery with all efforts. With the dreadful noises of thrashing being present once again, he had to quickly distance himself from the gang fight.

Hardly a few minutes had passed than his ear began aching the second time --- this time the sounds of marching were multiplying drastically. The dark stampede proceeded farther like a mobile massive block, walling up Feng and other poor souls into a dead end, in which there was clearly no way out.

“And I th—thought I had escaped, but...” grumbled Feng, clenching his jaw hard, “grr...I jumped out of the frying pan, without a doubt. ”

THUD, THUD, THUD, THUD... The gangs were closing in.

Chapter 3

Finding himself in a predicament he had never come across before, he recognized that in a critical situation like this one, hiding was his only weapon to save himself.

“Hide, hide, I need to hide...” he whispered, pulling his hair frantically, “where should I go hiding...”

He hurriedly looked around to find a good hiding place, swinging his head as swiftly as a snake. While some might say that one could remain unseen with ease in any spot in such a far-reaching street, Feng would attest to the untruthfulness of this statement. Right now, the only obstacle was whether it was actually feasible because **they, were, everywhere.**

“Well that was stupid, haha...” said Feng, laughing at himself for even considering such a case, “how and when, did I become such a fool to even think about.... Wait!”

Much to his relief, he spotted an empty car to his far right. With a leap of faith, Feng immediately flashed into the only option for hiding. All of a sudden, he discerned that something, cold and chilly, was gripping his torso tightly, although the car was shielding him completely. Through the amber windows, the scurrying ones, the collapsing people, footsteps, even the shouting...just anything in his vicinity was speeding up abruptly. On the other hand, he wanted to duck, but to no avail --- whatever inside the car was fixing his back in place. It was so suppressive that he couldn't even lift his finger.

Oh no... bad timing! This is totally not a good time to have ca---...nope, not in THIS particular position...

At this moment, Feng was in an equivalent of a covered-up wok. Little did he know that a being was accompanying him seconds after the door was shut, in which this being, most likely wearing a large heap of grey, seemed to be holing up for a purpose.

The being, in a merciless demeanor, pinned him down further like a jumble of rubble. Feng slowly acknowledged that right now, he was merely a small pork bun broiled by the whole wok. In a split second he felt powerless, being trampled on by someone unseen, breathing out roasting air to cook him alive. What's more was that under the immense, sweltering heat appeared to be specks of dust orbiting around him, waiting to strike his nose when the iron is hot. Still, he was tough enough to make a grim reminder of not to let the dust tickle his throat, or else all his running and hiding would be in vain.

For some reason, the bloodshed outside never ceased and it was comparable to legions of militaristic poltergeists wrecking havoc around a small section of the Bund. Debris was everywhere in flames and thrashing of souls was as constant as the beating of waves at the shore nearby. The mood out there was turbulent enough but the situation inside the car was no better.

“Arrrrg... whatever's inside this... this car is... making me sick...” moaned Feng, struggling with the fever which was cramming his brain like a sponge, “Wait, what's... what is th-that thing... o-over there... wha-what are those...”

Albeit all attempts he just could not clear his head from the flickering vision. With his spare energy, Feng slowly covered his eyelids along his frame of mind, blacking out calmly as the Shanghai sky changed its clothing, pouring darkness over the souls, drop by drop.

Noise kept on banging throughout the night, where each bang enacted drove Feng further away from the deep trance.

The dashing... the hiding... the escape... um... gasp! The gangsters! They... they... why am I here? And why am I so wet?

Remembering his mission he squeezed his hazy eyes open. Right before him were the gangsters, whose expression pictured ravenous ogres craving for their prey. Showing their palms, the people hurriedly grabbed a handful of coins from their torn pouches. It looked like that they were executing a convention of some sort,

something that little Feng had never witnessed before, something that the suffering souls were fearful about not handing out their silver dollars fast enough.

“GIVE US THE MONEY IF YOU’RE NOT BRAIN DEAD!”

“If not...**you know the drill, folks.**”

Guess I'll have to find out what's going on just now, given the fact that I have completely no idea about my surroundings...

“Hey, uh... can you tell me what in the world is happening right now?”

The guy stared straight into his round eyes with a jaw-dropped mouth. From his point of view, he looked more like having a conversation with a silly-looking aberrant.

“You’re a foreigner?” “Look in front of you --- it... it is the **protection racket!!**”

“Pro-protection racket?” asked Feng, tipping his head to his side, “What’s that?”

“You dumb or something? They are... they are...”

And before he could finish the sentence, he fainted.

“We could somehow guarantee your safety!!! Hahaha...” scoffed one of the gangsters, “...only if you pay the protection fees of course! Hahaha...”

‘Guarantee OUR safety?? I thought YOU guys were the ones beating us up to a pulp,’ Feng thought.

Chapter 4

Amid the rigid land of gangsters, there stood a child crouching down near the unlucky souls. Going weak at the knees, his first tear was set free, followed by a ceaseless stream. The toddler inclined forward where he had previously crouched down, pressing his palms against the concrete, he let out a cry of sorrow.

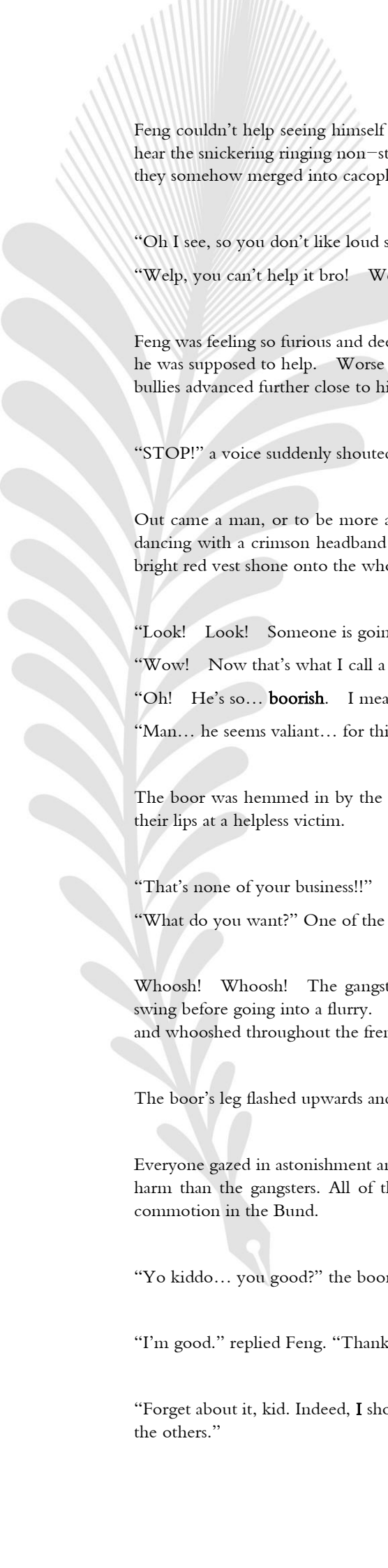
“You little...” a brute growled, grabbing his plank over his head at the same time.

Unbeknownst to this wretched little soul, in the next couple of seconds he would be at the mercy of the brutes’ own hands.

“Stop it!” Feng mustered his courage and shouted. “Uh... g-guys...” “Ca-Can we talk about this? I mean...”

The gangsters looked at each other.

“What a funny kid!!!” the gangsters sneered. “Of course we can... but you need to pay first!”



Feng couldn't help seeing himself as a bare toy, getting sneered and jeered at by a bunch of bullies. He could hear the snickering ringing non-stop inside his ears again and again. He covered his ears, but it was useless --- they somehow merged into cacophony, which would drive him crazy yet again.

"Oh I see, so you don't like loud stuff, DO YOU?"

"Welp, you can't help it bro! We're just speaking loudly, not being rude to you. LITTLE, KID!"

Feng was feeling so furious and deeply humiliated at the same time he started to back away from the child whom he was supposed to help. Worse still, he had to admit his own defeat. For each step he edged backwards, the bullies advanced further close to his shaking legs.

"STOP!" a voice suddenly shouted.

Out came a man, or to be more accurate, a beast accompanied with a chest shaped like a barrel and his mane dancing with a crimson headband by the wind on his head. Standing under the moonlight, the colour of his bright red vest shone onto the whole crossroad, like a star glittering in the gloom.

"Look! Look! Someone is going to rebel against them!"

"Wow! Now that's what I call a fit one."

"Oh! He's so... **boorish**. I mean, look at what he's wearing! His outfit!"

"Man... he seems valiant... for this, I mean his hair."

The boor was hemmed in by the gangsters in a split second, which resembled a pack of hungry wolves licking their lips at a helpless victim.

"That's none of your business!!"

"What do you want?" One of the gangsters got ahold of an iron bar, "You want to fight?"

Whoosh! Whoosh! The gangster charged at the boor with the iron bar upheld, bringing it down with a swing before going into a flurry. He was fierce, but the boor was quicker. As light as a feather, he whooshed and whooshed throughout the frenzy.

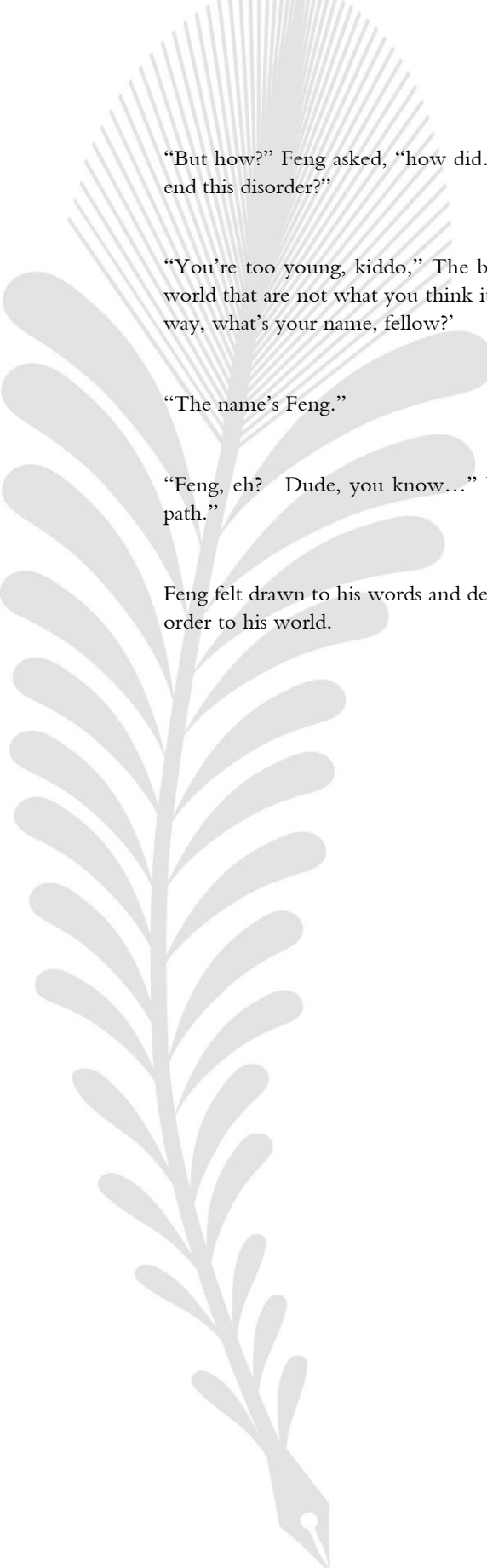
The boor's leg flashed upwards and struck with full force. The blow landed on the gangster's Achilles tendon.

Everyone gazed in astonishment and decided to run away from this mighty figure who seemed to do even more harm than the gangsters. All of them elapsed, leaving Feng and the boor behind, amidst the ruins of a past commotion in the Bund.

"Yo kiddo... you good?" the boor asked.

"I'm good." replied Feng. "Thanks for saving me."

"Forget about it, kid. Indeed, I should be the one thanking you --- after all, you gave up scampering away like the others."



“But how?” Feng asked, “how did... how did all of this happen? Like, wouldn’t the police do something to end this disorder?”

“You’re too young, kiddo,” The boor’s tone had gone all formal in a sudden, “there are many things in this world that are not what you think it should be. From the officials, the policemen you have heard of... By the way, what’s your name, fellow?”

“The name’s Feng.”

“Feng, eh? Dude, you know...” his voice deepened, “...the road to resistance against this tyranny is a long path.”

Feng felt drawn to his words and decided to embark on a journey with this new stranger on a mission to restore order to his world.

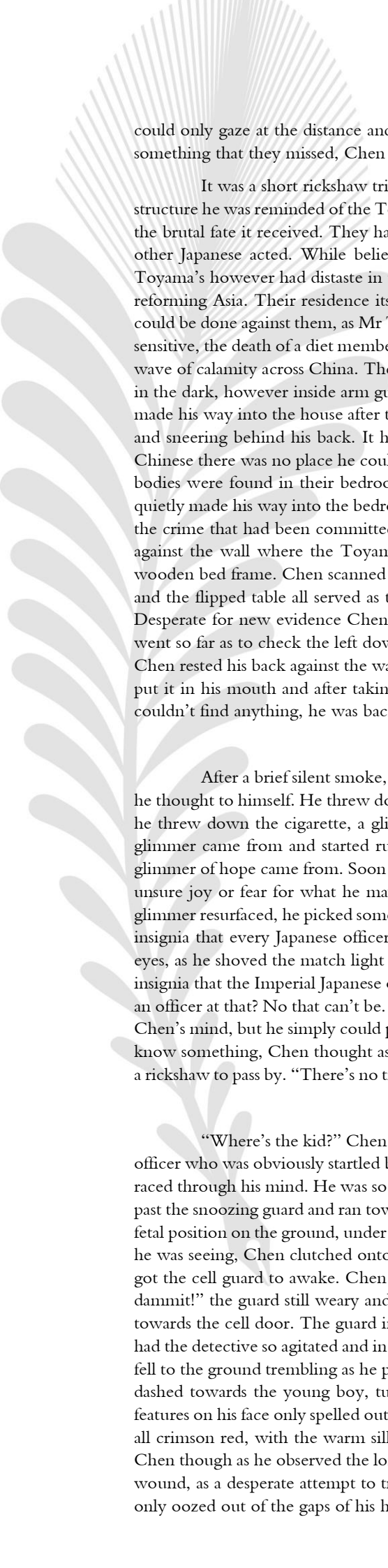
The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St Paul's Co-educational College, Wai, Man Hei Christopher – 16

“Tell me god damn it! Who did it!” yelled detective Chen as he stared into the frantic and fearful eyes of the suspect he was interrogating. “I can’t tell you, please. I can’t. He’ll kill me please.” pleaded the man on the opposite side of the interrogation table. Frustrated, the detective slammed his hand onto the metal table, and stormed out the interrogation room, leaving the poor suspect in shock as he sat idly in the room.

The detective made his way to the precinct roof, brushing pass all his colleagues on the way up. Resting his arms on the railing of the roof, he took out his pack of cigarettes and match box, pushing the paper box with the white sun of the *GuoMinDang* vaguely visible through all the wear and tear the box had been through. Chen then struck one match, lit a cigarette and put it in his mouth. Then taking a deep breath, he then exhaled a long sigh of smoke and disappointment. “You know the more you sigh, the more happiness escapes from you right?” said a familiar voice behind Chen immediately shoving the match box back into his pocket, he spun around to see his captain, Sousuke Yamato, “Hey captain, something happen down there?” Chen asked with a weary smile, as he noticed his captain's uniform was not the usual neat and tidy but in fact was crumpled and somehow seemed to be missing something. Simply nodding back with a smile, Sousuke swiftly answered “no it’s nothing, just a brawl that got out of hand with a suspect.” he then asked with a stern face “How’s the case going, detective?” “Not good, not good at all.” replied Chen as he shook his head while taking another deep breathe from his cigarette. “I see” Sousuke said, sounding somewhat more relaxed “well do you at least have an idea who may have been behind it?” he continued asking with great interest. “Yes sir, as a matter of fact we may have a vague idea on who was behind this, it may have been the *Qing Bang* again.” Said Chen with hatred clear as day all over his face. “Damn those Chinese dogs again.” Sousuke commented with mockery and disgust, then almost a split second later he noticed the awkward atmosphere that would follow his comment and immediately said “of course not all Chinese are the same.” understanding what the captain was implying Chen could only respond with a forced smile. “I’ll get going now sir.” Chen then said, trying to back away from the already awkward conversation.

Making his way back to the interrogation room, the detective glanced up at the Japanese imperial flag and tried desperately to forget the bombing and screaming of that fateful day, that day when the Japanese began their invasion of shanghai. In the swift time of three months, this great city of shanghai had succumb to the imperial Japanese rule. What followed was only tension between the Chinese and Japanese, the hatred only grew deeper with each day, the local gangs and triads going up against the imperial rule of japan. This however only made Chen’s position even more awkward, he was an officer, a police officer of imperial japan, the insignia resembling a flower on his shoulder was proof enough. Despite being an officer, he did not walk around with pride, he was without honour in the eyes of his people, being branded with “traitor”, “dog” and “shameless” he was an outcast amongst the Chinese. The triads had especially targeted him, intruding his residence and causing a nuisance, with the notorious *Qing Bang* leading the assaults, he eventually displayed a hatred and distance towards his own people. “Sir we brought in a new suspect, he claims he knows who was there during the attack.” yelled an officer from the police reporting room. Hearing this, he dashed towards the room, and saw a young Chinese boy wearing the clothes of an attendant. “Who’s this?” Chen asked in disbelief as he observed the young boy, clearly not believing that he was capable of helping him solve the case. “He’s an attendant for the victims household, I’m surprised he made it out alive.” replied the officer as he left the room “he’s all your sir.” A whole family of Japanese were slaughtered and this kid got away, he’s hiding something, Chen thought to himself. “Look kid, I don’t know where you got that uniform but lying isn’t going to get you a place to stay.” Chen said with disapproval “I’m not lying! I’m from the Toyama Household, they’re all dead! Please please please you’ve got to protect me!” shocked Chen grabbed the kid by his collar and yelled “how do you know this! We haven’t revealed anything to the public or press yet!” Chen’s face clearly twisted with ire. “I was there! They hid me under the bed! I saw Mr and Mrs Toyama get shot... the blood... oh god...” the young boy barely managed as he covered his mouth and forced his vomit back down his throat. He even knows they died from gunshot wounds, he might have seen who did it. “Hey, tell me did you see who it was killing them, I might be able to help you if you did.” Chen said hoping to fish something out of the traumatized kid. “I don’t know... I don’t know... I don’t know ...” muttered the boy as wrapped his arms around his head as tears trickled down his cheeks. Realizing that the young boy was no longer capable of answering his questions, Chen could only silently walk out of the room, instructing the officers in the precinct to give the boy a cell since they had nowhere else to put him. Heading back to his desk, frustrated Chen

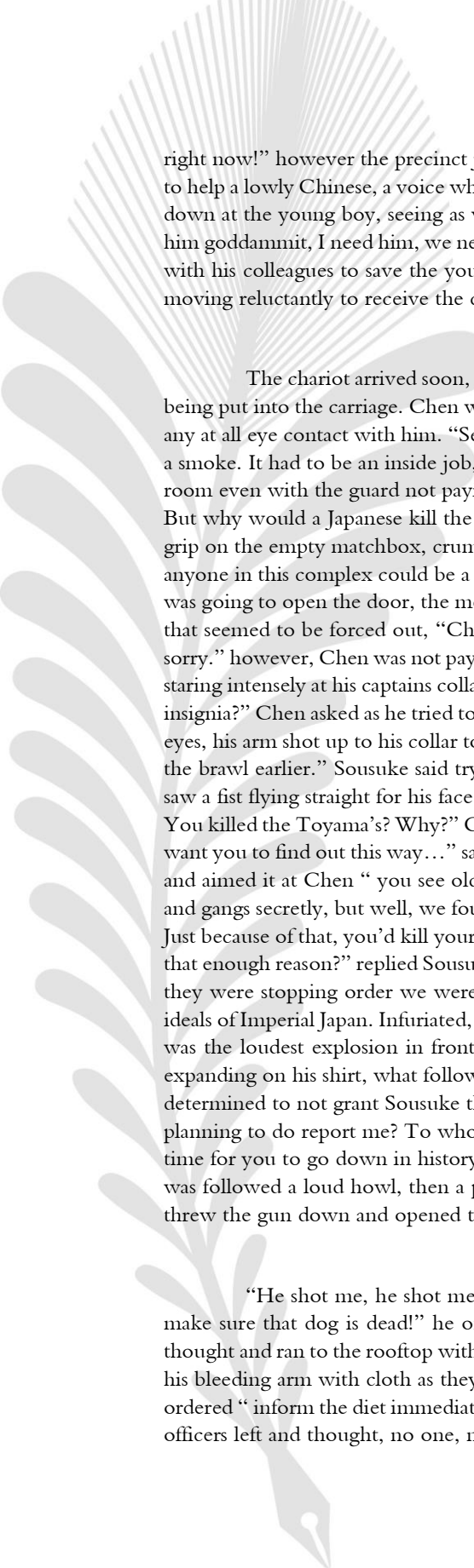


could only gaze at the distance and ponder his next move. I should head back to the crime scene, there may be something that they missed, Chen thought to himself as he realized there may be very little options left for him.

It was a short rickshaw trip from the precinct to the crime scene, as he arrived at the traditional Chinese structure he was reminded of the Toyama's legacy just by its mere sight. The Toyama's, a family that didn't deserve the brutal fate it received. They had always been kind and sympathetic towards the Chinese, despite how all the other Japanese acted. While believing that Imperial Japan were out to bring peace and stability to Asia, the Toyama's however had distaste in the brutal methods Imperial Japan had chosen to adopt during their crusade of reforming Asia. Their residence itself was a protest towards the Japanese's superior attitude, however not much could be done against them, as Mr Toyama had held a position in the Japanese Diet. This only made this case more sensitive, the death of a diet member in China was without doubt a case that could be the beginning of yet another wave of calamity across China. The Toyama residence was kept the same as it had been before to keep the public in the dark, however inside arm guards were kept hidden, standing by as guards to the empty crime scene. Chen made his way into the house after the guards had checked his papers, however not without the customary chatter and sneering behind his back. It had always been so, no matter his position, he belong to neither Japanese nor Chinese there was no place he could truly feel at home. The boy said he was hid under the bed and the Toyama's bodies were found in their bedrooms, thought Chen to himself as he reconstructed the crime in his mind. He quietly made his way into the bedroom, as if to convince himself he was not part of the room and was a witness to the crime that had been committed. Standing in front of the bedroom, Chen saw the dried blood still splattered against the wall where the Toyama's were shot, the bronze flakes peeling themselves off the elegantly carved wooden bed frame. Chen scanned the messy room, which had clear signs of a fight, the broken wooden cabinets and the flipped table all served as testament that the Toyama's were not willing to go down without a struggle. Desperate for new evidence Chen then proceeded to flip over all the fallen cabinets and flipped tables, he even went so far as to check the left down pieces of wooden debris. However he couldn't find anything, disappointed Chen rested his back against the wall and slid to the ground, taking out his matchbox and cigarettes he lit one and put it in his mouth and after taking a deep breath, he let out a long sigh of disappointment and frustration. He couldn't find anything, he was back at square one, nothing had changed.

After a brief silent smoke, Chen decided it was time to leave, after all sitting here won't get me anywhere he thought to himself. He threw down his still cigarette and prepared to put it out. However, at the same moment he threw down the cigarette, a glimmer on the ground caught his eye. He immediately followed to where the glimmer came from and started running his hand over the concrete floor, desperately trying to find where his glimmer of hope came from. Soon he felt an unnatural pinch in his hand, took out his matchbox and trembling in unsure joy or fear for what he may find, lit a match and put it towards where he felt the pinch. As the golden glimmer resurfaced, he picked something up. Then upon closer inspection, he found it to be the exact same flower insignia that every Japanese officer had pinned onto their collars and shoulders. Chen couldn't believe his own eyes, as he shoved the match light closer to what he had just found. It was without doubt, the exact same flower insignia that the Imperial Japanese officers wore so proudly on their uniforms. They were killed by Japanese? And an officer at that? No that can't be. But why, it doesn't make any sense. Wave after wave of thoughts shot through Chen's mind, but he simply could place this new piece of the puzzle to make out the big picture. The kid may still know something, Chen thought as he ran back outside. He stood in the street, looking left and right, hoping for a rickshaw to pass by. "There's no time to lose," he muttered to himself, as he started to sprint towards the precinct.

"Where's the kid?" Chen yelled out the moment he entered the precinct, "uh... cell six sir." reported an officer who was obviously startled by Chen's sudden outburst. Chen dashed towards the holding cells, as questions raced through his mind. He was so close to the truth he could almost taste it. He burst into the cell room, brushed past the snoozing guard and ran towards cell six. He look through the bars and to his shock he found the boy in the fetal position on the ground, under him a puddle of red liquid flowing further with every second. Horrified at what he was seeing, Chen clutched onto the bars of the cell and started yelling "Get up kid! Hey Kid!" his loud howls got the cell guard to awake. Chen glared at the guard and screamed "get me the keys and open this bloody cell, dammit!" the guard still weary and half awake, was clumsy at carrying out the detective's orders, as he stumbled towards the cell door. The guard inserted the cell key to unlock the door, however as he glanced up to see what had the detective so agitated and in shock, the cell guard couldn't help but let out a yelp as he jolted backwards and fell to the ground trembling as he pointed to the motionless body on the floor. Chen flung open the cell door and dashed towards the young boy, turned him over only to see the face of pure shock and fear, the boys twisted features on his face only spelled out how horrifying the assault was. Chen looked down at the open wound, stained all crimson red, with the warm silky red liquid gushing out and gliding through his fingers. It's a blade wound, Chen though as he observed the long sleek gap located at the attendant boys gut. Chen pressed down on the open wound, as a desperate attempt to try and make the blood stop, however was proven to be futile as the red liquid only oozed out of the gaps of his hand. He carried the boy out to the hall and yelled "someone get this boy help



right now!” however the precinct just stared idly at him, as if they did not hear him. They would not lift a finger to help a lowly Chinese, a voice whispered to Chen. That’s right, this boy he’s Chinese Chen thought as he glanced down at the young boy, seeing as with each fleeting second, the boy seemed to be losing more of his life. “Help him goddammit, I need him, we need him! He could be our only lead!” Chen yelled hopefully, trying to negotiate with his colleagues to save the young boy’s life. Finally, someone was willing to call for help as Chen saw them moving reluctantly to receive the chariot to send the boy to the hospital.

The chariot arrived soon, and the young boy could only show a tired smile of gratitude to Chen as he was being put into the carriage. Chen walked back into the precinct, he looked around only to find everyone avoiding any at all eye contact with him. “Selfish scum...” Chen muttered to himself as he made his way to the rooftop for a smoke. It had to be an inside job, no one who was not an officer would have been able to make it into that cell room even with the guard not paying any attention, Chen thought to himself as he lit the cigarette in his mouth. But why would a Japanese kill the Toyama’s? Aren’t they the same people? Chen questioned as he tightened his grip on the empty matchbox, crumpling by doing so. I’ll have to ask for permission to question our officers then, anyone in this complex could be a suspect thought Chen as he began to make his way to the exit. Then just as he was going to open the door, the metal hatch flung open, it was the captain. He had a sympathetic look on his face that seemed to be forced out, “Chen, I’m sorry, the hospital just called and... the boy didn’t make it. I truly am sorry.” however, Chen was not paying attention to a single word his captain was saying. At this moment, Chen was staring intensely at his captain’s collar, he finally found out what had been off with his uniform. “Sir where is your insignia?” Chen asked as he tried to keep his tone as calm as possible. Then as a glimpse of fear formed in Sousuke’s eyes, his arm shot up to his collar to check, “huh well there’s only one, good catch Chen it must’ve fell off during the brawl earlier.” Sousuke said trying every so desperately to hide his trembling voice. The next thing Sousuke saw a fist flying straight for his face, the impact slammed him straight onto the door he closed. “You killed them? You killed the Toyama’s? Why?” Chen yelled as he watched his captain try to regain his standing. “Damn, I didn’t want you to find out this way...” said Sousuke as he reached into his jacket pocket and swiftly whipped out a pistol and aimed it at Chen “you see old friend, the Toyama’s, they were Chinese sympathizers, they supported triads and gangs secretly, but well, we found out.” said Sousuke as a mocking laugh followed. “So you murdered them? Just because of that, you’d kill your own people?” questioned Chen, his tone filled with shock and disbelief. “Isn’t that enough reason?” replied Sousuke genuinely confused by Chen’s question “they were hindering our cleansing, they were stopping order we were going to restore!” yelled Sousuke all while expressing his admiration for the ideals of Imperial Japan. Infuriated, Chen sprinted towards Sousuke in attempt to disarm him. Only all Chen heard was the loudest explosion in front of him, he stopped dead in his tracks and looked down as he saw a redness expanding on his shirt, what followed was the pain. Chen dropped to his knees and let out a low groan as he was determined to not grant Sousuke the satisfaction of knowing he was hurt. “You poor fool Chen, what were you planning to do report me? To who?” Sousuke asked all while sneering as he looked down at Chen “and now it’s time for you to go down in history as a criminal” Sousuke said as aimed the gun at his arm and took shot, which was followed a loud howl, then a psychotic laughter, “I’ve got to make it look real after all” he said finally as he threw the gun down and opened the rooftop door.

“He shot me, he shot me!” Sousuke screamed as he limped down the stairs “someone go up there and make sure that dog is dead!” he ordered. All the officers in the precinct got up faster than anyone would have thought and ran to the rooftop with their weapons drawn. A few officers also raced to their captain’s side, wrapping his bleeding arm with cloth as they offered to do anything to help. Sousuke however just waved them away and ordered “inform the diet immediately, tell them we found the killer for the Toyama case.” Sousuke watched as the officers left and thought, no one, no one can stand up to Imperial Japan.

A Father's Gift

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Albano, Lauren – 16

Did you know that in 1559 during the Ming Dynasty, Pan Yunduan built Yu Gardens as a comfort to his father, the minister Pan En? Unfortunately, the expense helped ruin the Pans.

Idiot.

My father and I don't have the best relationship, if we're going to be quite frank about it. Honestly, it's not much of a relationship, we keep out of each other's hair usually and we do what mom tells us to do. This way, everybody wins— no expectations, which means no disappointment, meaning no conflict. See? Everybody wins.

There had been a time when it was just my dad and I against the world. We were, I thought in my little four-year-old mind, invincible and no one else mattered— not even my mom or Cora. He'd hoist me up on his shoulders and we would walk through the city and I towered over everyone while he laughed introducing me to everyone who cooed at me as his little man. Some days we would sit at the breakfast table and he'd talk to me "mano a mano" like an adult although I'd have to admit that sometimes I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about. And then I think he decided that being a father meant raking in money for us and he switched his job and I barely got to talk to him.

"Oh for God's sake Oliver!" He pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation, "Can't you see that I'm busy?" my mom ushered me out of the room quickly and told me in a hushed voice. "Your father needs time to adjust to his new work, you can't bother him right now give it time." That was the last time I ever asked to play. I was five.

Cora had made it very clear that when we were young that mom was hers, which I see now was a very smart move on her part because mom usually did all the cooking and her favourite was very clearly Cora. Dad had no favourites, he didn't have time for that.

This changed a couple of years ago when mom got into an accident, now neither Cora or I had a parent who favoured either of us.

"Mr Chan says that he wants to talk to dad about something." I said to Cora one morning over breakfast, she was chewing toast lazily, looking at one of my paintings on the wall. The kitchen's walls— actually, the whole apartment's walls were filled with my paintings. Grandma said that one day I held a pen with my right hand and just began drawing on the walls and then when I got tired I switched to my left hand because I didn't want to stop.

Cora continued to chew her toast not even bothering to glance my way. She had been gone a few months on a study tour maybe a year after mom died and when she came back there was something about her that had changed. She wasn't my annoying older sister, she took care of me— she did the best she could anyway, she was graduating from high school soon and she wanted to do law, she had to work really hard to get in on a scholarship and even then I know that it's crazy expensive.

I tried to snap her out of her blank stupor "Where's dad?"

"He had to get to work early." She looked at the clock "You better get to school."

I want to be an artist when I grow up. I'm not good in school like Cora. I go to school because it made my mom happy, like I said before I tried my best to not cause as much conflict as possible but I'm wasting my time. I've tried reasoning with her in the past but she says that before I become an artist I need to finish school for my dad. I've never seen him pull me out of bed to go to school as he's never here so really I did it for my mom and that means while I'm in school I still have to deal with double history today.

“So will you tell him to come later?” I asked Cora again, “make sure he doesn’t forget.”

Cora just waved me away with her hand with an exasperated sigh.

I bounced out of my apartment on my way to school, sometimes in my head I make paintings, right now we’re learning about Old Shanghai in History class. Old Shanghai was famous for its city wall to protect the town from Japanese pirates, 10 meters tall with a moat and a lot of guards. In my painting I have the whole wall up, guards galore with me and Cora right outside the walls and right in the middle of the walled city is dad.

I try my best not to complain about dad never being there, especially after mom but I always feel like even before she died he had this wall around him and no-one could ever break down.

“The wall was demolished in 1912 not 1910 and it’s the Opium War that happened in 1842 not World War II!” Wren slapped shoved Peter out of the way. “I gave you all of the information, how hard is it to copy it down?”

I stayed after school to help with our project on Old Shanghai, Wren had been constantly nagging at us to get it done for weeks.

I didn’t have to do anything but design the poster but Peter had an old trick that he used every time to get out of doing any work and that was playing dumb. I caught his eye behind Wren’s shoulder as he said, “I got some of the stuff you wrote down wet so I just made some stuff up.” It was clear Wren thought him a moron as she roughly grabbed the poster and began writing it herself while Peter’s eyes filled with mirth.

By 6:00 pm I made my way towards Mr. Chan’s classroom where he told me the meeting with my father would be held but as I walked in I immediately noticed that my dad was not present.

In his seat was instead Cora.

“Where is he?” I questioned her wordlessly with my eyebrows.

“Work.” She mouthed. I could tell she knew that I was not happy, she nodded at me to sit down next to her while I realized I was still at the door way.

I hadn’t heard a word of what Mr. Chan said, by the way Cora was gushing I think I did something good, I don’t know. I just wished it was dad who was saying it instead.

“I’m sorry dad couldn’t make it.” Cora said again once the meeting was over, “I know you’re really bummed out over it.”

“No,” I was still looking at the ground as I said this. “No of course I’m not bummed out.”

I remembered when I was young, every time I wanted to do something with my dad and he’d say he was too busy my mom would never implore him to change his mind, she never pulled that whole “bond with your son” thing, it had always been “give your dad some space” I had learned never to complain, especially because mom always said that he’s doing it for us. Whatever that means.

I’m in my room drawing the Small Swords Society, the rebel group that captured Old Shanghai City in 1853. in this drawing Cora and I have joined the Small Swords Society and we’ve broken into the city and I’ve taken dad hostage.

I’m having dinner in my room again, the smell of microwaved popcorn fills the room. Usually I never wait up for dad because he gets home really late so we eat separately in our own place. I hear the door open around 11 and I know dad is home.

Cora’s always awake to greet dad when he gets home, I stopped doing that after he took up an extra project at work and tonight I was still a little resentful that he couldn’t turn up at the meeting.

I’m drawing a jail cell to throw dad into when there’s a knock at my door.

“Olly, we should talk to dad about the meeting.”

I don't want Cora to think I'm mad at dad because I told her I wasn't but I really don't want to talk to him. “I'm tired,” I pout. “I want to go to sleep, you can talk to him.”

Later I'm sitting at the table with a scowl on my face. I don't know how Cora manages to do it but she always seems to be able to make me do things that I don't want to do.

“Mr Chan says that Olly won the sixth grade Avant-garde competition— he says that he thinks that Olly has real potential and that he could get into art school.”

I whip my head so fast my neck cracks. Art school? That's all I've wanted to do but mom used to say that we would never be able to afford it. I turn to face my dad but see that his mind seemed to be wandering.

“Art school?” he said slowly. “What about you?” He looked at Cora, “Didn't we just pay for you to get into law school?”

Cora's animated face stopped and her mouth was agape.

“I've been paying for Oliver to go to art classes as a hobby, but being an artist won't get him anywhere. You know that.” My dad continued, “He's going to be a doctor or an engineer, something professional.”

Woah what? Where did this come from? I always thought my dad had no expectations for me, I thought he thought that it was pretty clear I was going to be an artist when I grew up.

I was about to retaliate when Cora kicked me under the table.

Later I was lying in bed thinking about how the conversation had turned, I couldn't sleep I was drawing another drawing about the walled city, dad had gotten out and I was betrayed by the Small Sword Society, I was the one in jail now and Cora was nowhere to be seen.

I began avoiding my dad from then on. This continued for a few weeks and I slowly began to realize how little I saw of my dad. I began to resent him for his absence but it was the final straw when one day I saw Cora crying. This was a shock, Cora never cried about anything ever.

“Cora?”

She had her head bent over the table, you could hear her sniffles every few seconds. I began shaking her arms to make her look at me. I flinched when I saw her bloodshot eyes and running nose.

She looked at me and smiled sadly, there in her hand was a letter.

“I didn't get it.” A tear ran down her face. I was scared, I didn't know what it was that she didn't get but I didn't want to ask her.

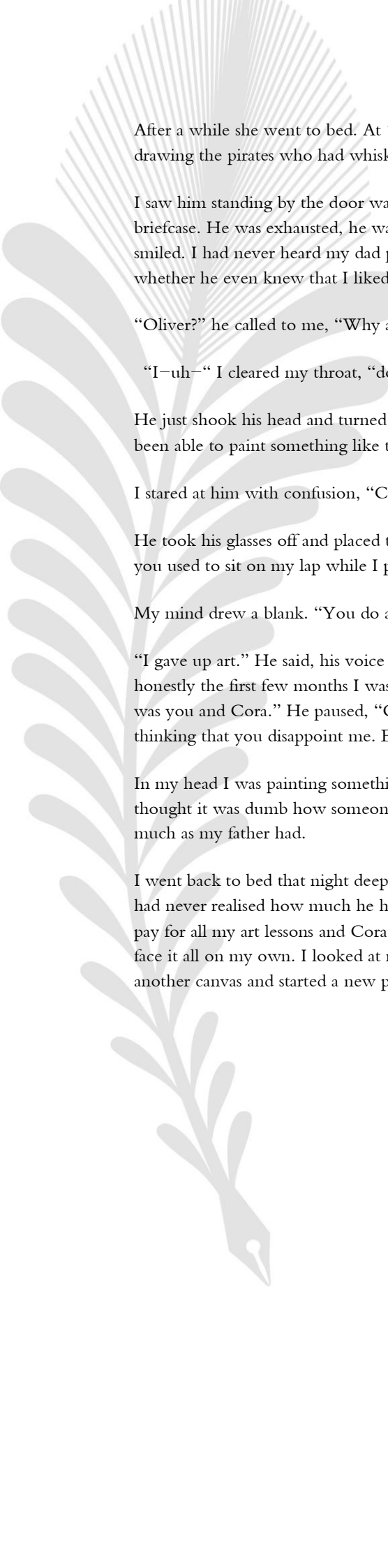
She answered it anyway, “I didn't get into law school.”

I didn't have anything to say to her, I never wanted her to go to law school, then she would have to leave me but I knew this was a selfish thought. I let her speak.

“Dad's going to be so disappointed.”

“Who cares what dad thinks.” I said.

She looked at me with her swollen eyes, “you shouldn't say that, he's done a lot of things for us. He only wants what's best for us.” She sniffed.



After a while she went to bed. At 11:00 pm I heard dad come through the door, I was still sitting at the table drawing the pirates who had whisked Cora away from the walled city.

I saw him standing by the door way with a blank stare, he hadn't even taken off his shoes and put down his briefcase. He was exhausted, he was gazing at the painting I had done for an art competition last year and he smiled. I had never heard my dad praise my work, he had never even mentioned it and sometimes I wondered whether he even knew that I liked art.

"Oliver?" he called to me, "Why are you still up?"

"I-uh-" I cleared my throat, "do you want a glass of water?"

He just shook his head and turned back to my painting, "You know, when I was your age I never would have been able to paint something like this."

I stared at him with confusion, "Can you paint something like that now?"

He took his glasses off and placed them on the table next to me and took a seat, "Don't you remember when you used to sit on my lap while I painted when you were a toddler?"

My mind drew a blank. "You do art?"

"I gave up art." He said, his voice sounded airy like he was lost in thought. "When I switched jobs, I hated it honestly the first few months I was up to my eyeballs in paper work and the only thing that made me stick to it was you and Cora." He paused, "Cora called me and told me what happened. I don't want either of you thinking that you disappoint me. Ever. I want you guys to be happy."

In my head I was painting something else, I was painting Pan Yunduan and Pan En in their garden together. I thought it was dumb how someone could love their father that much but maybe Pan En had sacrificed just as much as my father had.

I went back to bed that night deep in thought, I had never asked what my dad was before he switched jobs and I had never realised how much he had sacrificed to be able to pay for us to live where we were and to be able to pay for all my art lessons and Cora's education. I knew that my dad was preparing me for the day when I had to face it all on my own. I looked at my computer, the tab of Pan Yunduan still opened. I got up and started another canvas and started a new painting of my father and I.

Struck by Lightning

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Boragay, Laura – 15

BANG BANG BANG! My dad banged on my bedroom door and forcefully opened it. In sudden shock I closed my laptop and stared at him. The anger I saw in his eyes frightened me.

“Why didn't you finish your food??” he yelled. “And why are you on your laptop again?? You're supposed to be doing your homework!! Do I have to keep on reminding you??”

“I was doing my homework on my laptop, dad!” I said, trying to come up with a good excuse.

Then he yelled back, “Show me then!”

I opened my laptop and he saw that I was on Facebook.

“You liar!!!” he screamed even louder. “You're grounded!!!”

He grabbed my laptop from me and slammed the door behind him as he left. I was filled with so much anger and hatred. I couldn't stop myself from crying. *Dad has always treated me like this and it's not fair at all*, I thought to myself. I got so mad and couldn't take it anymore so I grabbed my jacket and ran out of the house. I kept running and running until I was several blocks away. As I was walking through Hollywood Boulevard, it suddenly started to rain heavily and all I had was my jacket. The Chinese Theatre was right around the corner so I quickly ran up to it to find a way in. There was a side door that had been jammed shut with some boxes, but I was able to squeeze inside. It was dark, but dry and warm, and I could hear thunder and lightning from inside. I moved into a room with large, fake pillars and a golden statue, but I couldn't see very clearly. As I tried to find my way around in the dark, all of a sudden, lightning struck the theatre and I screamed in shock. I was so scared that I fainted.

After a few hours, I woke up and the rain had stopped. I must have slept inside the theatre the whole night. When I opened the door, I felt a cool, light breeze. It was surprisingly snowing and everything looked completely different. A wave of confusion hit me as I walked through the streets. The people, the houses and the whole atmosphere were different. There seemed to be a lot of people wearing the traditional Chinese clothes like the ones from my parent's photo album. It felt so weird. The houses looked so old and ancient like the ones from the old Chinese movies I'd seen. I tried asking people where I was but no one seemed to understand me. I looked around and saw some signs and boards that all had words in Chinese. I couldn't understand what they meant. Then I finally came to the realization that I was in China.

Frightened, confused, hungry and cold, I was so desperate to find out where exactly I was and why I was here. Looking around and feeling lost, I suddenly bumped into someone who fortunately apologized in English. I felt so relieved.

“Can you help me?” I asked.

He looked at me in amazement. “Wow! I no hear somebody speak English in long time. Are you lost?” he said.

“Yes I am. Where am I? What day is it? Why am I here?” I asked in confusion.

“Shanghai!” He blurted out. “You in Shanghai!”

“Shanghai??” I said in astonishment. “How did I get here?” I blurted out a series of other questions, but he just smiled. He was so eager to help out.

He was kind enough to take me to a restaurant where we ate and had hot tea. I told him that I was from America and that my father also grew up here. Then I explained to him about what happened the previous night. He was stunned and surprised. He then told me that he used to work in a military camp for the Americans and that's how he learned to speak English. His father was a soldier but was killed during the war. So since he was ten years old, he was taking care of his mother and sister. After we had our meal, we walked out of the restaurant and he told me that he would help me get to the embassy so they could help me get back home.

As we were walking along the street, we passed by a shoe store and he told me that he works as a shoe shine boy to earn some money. Sometimes, he said, he would also sell products in the market and serve as a waiter in a restaurant in order for him to make a living. He also dreamed of travelling to America to live there someday. On the far end of the street was a worn out building that he said used to be a school. As I was about to ask him what

school he went to, he mentioned that he wanted to attend school there but they couldn't afford it. They were struggling and I felt sorry for him.

It was getting really cold and my jacket wasn't enough to warm me up so I asked if we could walk a little faster to get to the embassy. As soon as I sped up, I slipped and fell down on the snowy ground. He bent down and reached out his hand to help me get back up. I noticed he was wearing this necklace that looked like a medallion. I got curious and asked him where it was from. He replied that his father gave it to him before he went to war and told him to keep it safe. He had been wearing it since to remind him of his father. His father told him before that the medallion has magical characteristics. It protected the wearer from any harm and danger.

He laughed and said, "I don't believe these things you know." And we both laughed.

Then it occurred to me that the medallion looked quite familiar but I just couldn't recall where I had seen it before.

Upon our approach to the embassy, as our conversation was getting interesting and we were too focused on our topic, we weren't paying so much attention to the road when a speeding car almost hit us, but crashed into a post instead. We got startled and quickly ran away from the scene to avoid getting into any trouble. Coincidentally along the side of the road, a flowerpot fell just a few inches behind us causing us to walk even faster. We wanted to ride a rickshaw to get to the embassy in the quickest way possible but he didn't have any more money to spend and all I had was a ten dollar note. We just kept on walking, chatting and laughing along the way. He was very entertaining and helpful. Although he wasn't the best at speaking English, I understood him clearly. I seemed to have forgotten where I was. I was wondering how a place like this could even exist which was so different from where I came from. Even if the place was weird for me, my new friend made it so much better and pleasing. I've never thought that a stranger could be so helpful and sincere.

We were almost near the embassy, when the sky suddenly turned grey. A heavy rainfall poured making us run towards the nearest shelter. I noticed that there were golden statues and sculptures inside. The place looked so peaceful that even if the raindrops outside sounded like heavy traffic on the highway, you could feel a certain calmness inside. Thunder and lightning again broke the silence. He closed the door and lit up some candles inside. Then I realized, we were inside a temple. I recalled something in there that looked familiar. It was a sculpture of Buddha that was similar to one I had seen the night before in the Chinese Theatre.

Heavy rain continued to fall. He told me that he had to leave as it was raining too hard and he was worried about his mother and sister. He gave me the directions to the embassy since we were already almost there before it started pouring. He said he felt sorry, but I thanked him and told him that he had already done more than enough for me.

As he was about to step out, I shouted "What's your name by the way?"

"I'm Jiao!" he shouted back.

We smiled at each other and waved goodbye. As soon as he stepped out of the door, a loud boom of thunder echoed from above. A flash of lightning lit up the dark space and hit the temple's door. It was scary and that made me faint all over again.

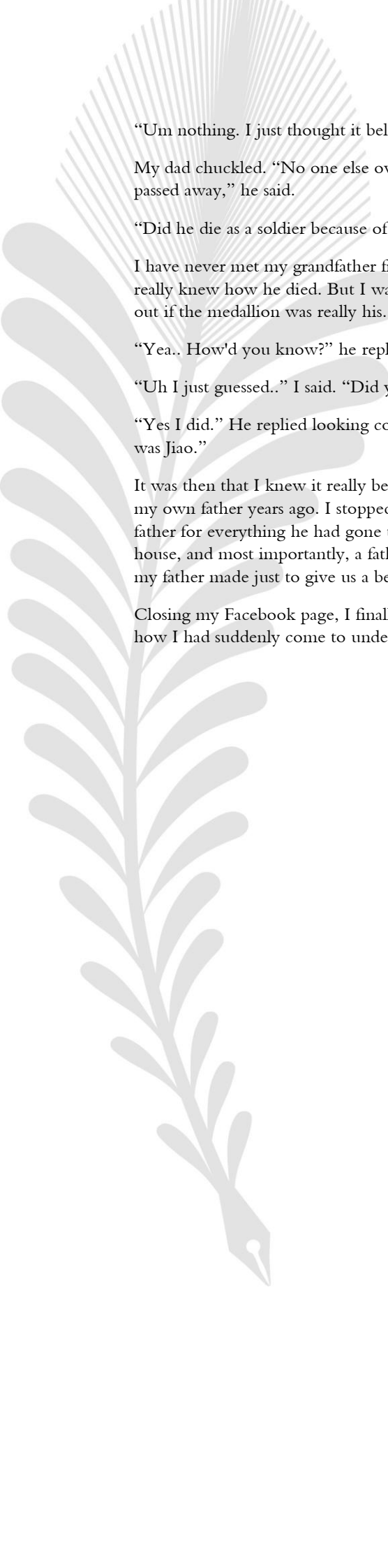
I woke up on smooth carpet, and above me I saw the words 'Box Office.' I was back in the Chinese theatre. I was utterly confused about what had happened. This time when I opened the doors, it wasn't raining and it was still dark out, like right before I entered the Chinese theatre. It was like as if the storm never came in the first place. I shouted Jiao's name but nobody was there. Still puzzled, I walked my way home. But when I entered my house, everybody was asleep. I didn't bother to wake anyone up and I just went into my room. I was tired and sleepy but it was hard for me to fall asleep because I couldn't stop thinking about everything that had just happened. I kept wondering how I was able to remember everything in so much detail and I was curious if it was all just a dream. I then convinced myself that everything did actually happen but I just had no idea how. After an hour or so, I finally fell asleep.

I was awoken by my dad who was still mad at me. He forced me to do the chores and clean the whole house as a punishment for lying to him. The weird thing is that he didn't even question me about where I had been the evening before. Nobody even noticed that I left.

While I was cleaning my parents' bedroom, I caught a glimpse of a familiar looking object. It was a medallion and it looked exactly like Jiao's. I quickly went up to my dad, holding the medallion inside the palm of my hand.

"Is this yours?" I asked him with extreme curiosity, showing him the medallion.

"Yes of course it's mine," he answered. "Why?"



“Um nothing. I just thought it belonged to someone else,” I said.

My dad chuckled. “No one else owns this medallion. It’s a special one. Your grandfather gave it to me before he passed away,” he said.

“Did he die as a soldier because of war?” I asked.

I have never met my grandfather from my dad's side because he passed away before I was born but I also never really knew how he died. But I was so full of curiosity so I was testing my dad with a series of questions to find out if the medallion was really his.

“Yea.. How'd you know?” he replied looking very surprised at my newfound curiosity.

“Uh I just guessed..” I said. “Did you have a Chinese name when you lived in China before?”

“Yes I did.” He replied looking confused again, wondering where all of my questions were coming from. “It was Jiao.”

It was then that I knew it really belonged to him. Everything made sense now. The friend I made last night was my own father years ago. I stopped asking questions and in complete shock, I ran up to my room. I pitied my father for everything he had gone through in the past. I realised how grateful I was to have an education, a nice house, and most importantly, a father. I learned how to appreciate what I had, thinking about all the sacrifices my father made just to give us a better life.

Closing my Facebook page, I finally began my homework assignment. I decided to write about my dad, about how I had suddenly come to understand how great he was. It was like I was struck by lightning.

Old Shanghai

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Chan, Kayley – 15

‘Faster... faster...’ I breathed out as I pushed myself to run even faster. I lift my head up trying to find a way to escape the two buff men with tattooed arms and scared face that were hot on my heels, but all I could see were walls. ‘Walls... walls... WALLS...’ Walls, they were everywhere, surrounding me, there was no escaping. ‘How am I going to find a way out of this?’ I thought, running deeper into the alleyway.

“Come back here you little rascal!”

I mentally cursed, hearing a rough voice call out. Turning my head to see the two men huffing and puffing, face as red as an overripe tomato and eyes filled with rage. ‘Keep going Wren, just keep going...Keep running and don’t look back. Don’t look back.’ I chanted in my head, making a quick turn as I see the two men gradually coming closer.

“Stop running will ya? You can’t run from us forever! Why don’t you just come with us like a good little girl.” The men with a long jagged scar running from his cheekbone to the side of his lips yelled out.

‘No. I refuse to.’ I thought as I pushed the boxes over hoping to create an obstacle between me and them. Dozens and dozens of oranges came rolling out of the boxes, scattering all over. I guess I successfully bought myself a few more seconds to find a way out when I saw the troubled and irritated looks of the two men and so I started running again just to come to a sudden halt when I discovered I’ve reached a dead end. I frantically tried to look for a way out. ‘There has to be another way out. There has to be.’ I looked right and a small neon sign caught my eyes from far away. ‘This is the only way.’ I thought to myself.

I immediately broke into a quick sprint towards the small neon sign hung above. As I neared it, I found that it was actually a small shop called ‘Ginny’s Antique’. Suddenly, a cold and menacing laugh pierced my ears.

“You’ve got nowhere to go now. Why don’t we make it easier, just come with us and no harm will be done to you.” They started walking towards me slowly with heavy footsteps.

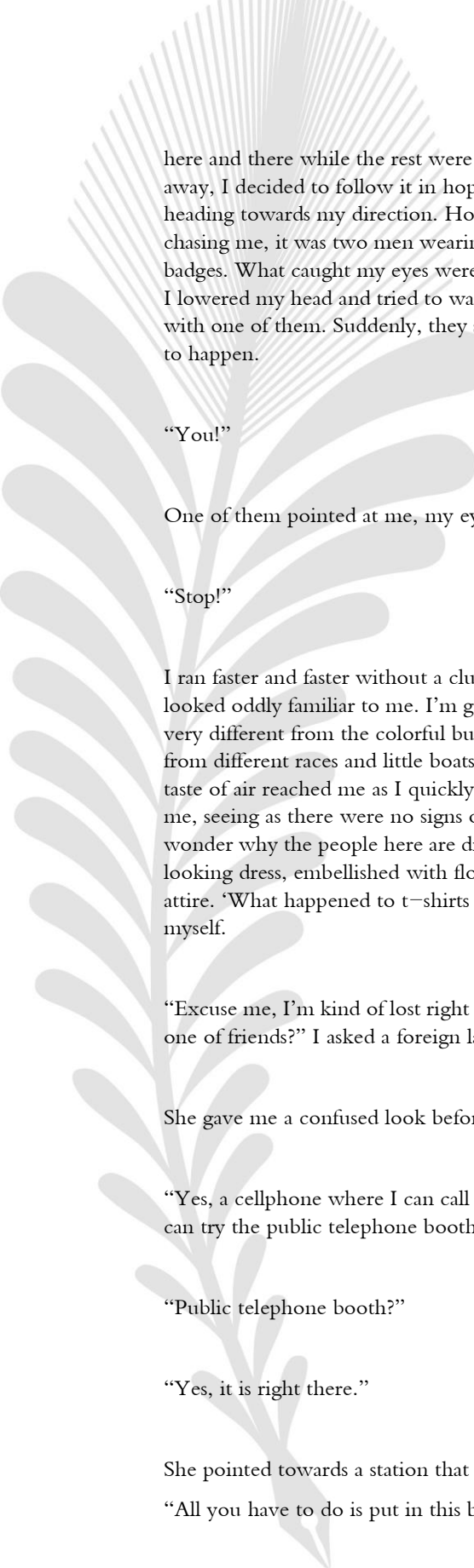
I tried my best to move as far away from them as possible, but I knew this was the end when they were only a few meters away from me and as I felt my back hitting the glass door of ‘Ginny’s Antique’.

“This is it little girl, it’s time to pay up your father’s debt.”

I closed my eyes, ready to face the impact, but it never came. Suddenly, I was falling. I felt my body being pulled into the glass doors and the next thing I know, I was falling. I struggled for a while, flailing my arms around, grabbing at thin air. A while after useless struggling, I gave up. I let my body fall.

‘Hopeless. I feel hopeless.’ And then, there was a surge of lifelessness passing through me as the world surrounding me became pitch black.

I slowly opened my eyes as I regained conscious. Visions blurred and limbs aching, I tried to sit up and take a look around me. I was facing walls again, only this time I was surrounded by ancient and rough looking wall, with different gradients of grey standing over 10 meters tall. ‘Where was I? What happened to the two men that were after me?’ Questions begin popping up in my mind as I tried to comprehend what was happening. Slowly, trying to stand up, I took in my surroundings once more, I was standing on wet grass, with only a few bushes



here and there while the rest were walls. From where I stood, I could hear faint sounds coming from far, far away, I decided to follow it in hopes of finding the answers to my questions. To my luck, two men were heading towards my direction. However this time, it wasn't the two buff and scary looking men that were chasing me, it was two men wearing a black peaked cap with old-fashioned looking uniform pinned with shiny badges. What caught my eyes were the small gun that were in their hands. Deciding to avoid any sort of trouble, I lowered my head and tried to walk past them as quietly as possible, but it was too late when I made eye contact with one of them. Suddenly, they stopped and started talking in a hushed tone. I knew something bad was about to happen.

“You!”

One of them pointed at me, my eyes widened as I turned around sprinting away.

“Stop!”

I ran faster and faster without a clue where to go. After a while of mindless running, I came to a place which looked oddly familiar to me. I'm guessing this is small city as there were highly-structured buildings which were very different from the colorful buildings full of windows, might I add, with a busy street full stores and people from different races and little boats parked on the side of a port. The breeze blew against my face and the salty taste of air reached me as I quickly slipped into the large crowd trying to lose the two policemen that were after me, seeing as there were no signs of them, I sighed out in relief. Walking around this strange place, I start to wonder why the people here are dressed so differently. Women were wearing a long and form-fitting traditional looking dress, embellished with floral embroideries. Men were wearing black fedora hats, dressed in a formal attire. ‘What happened to t-shirts and jeans? Just how outdated and old fashioned are they?’ I snickered to myself.

“Excuse me, I'm kind of lost right now, I'm hoping that you would lend me your cellphone so that I can contact one of friends?” I asked a foreign lady dressed in a gold and red dress.

She gave me a confused look before replying with a thick Russian accent, “cellphone?”

“Yes, a cellphone where I can call my friend.” “Sorry, I've never heard of a thing called cellphone... maybe you can try the public telephone booth.” Now it was my turn to give her a confused look.

“Public telephone booth?”

“Yes, it is right there.”

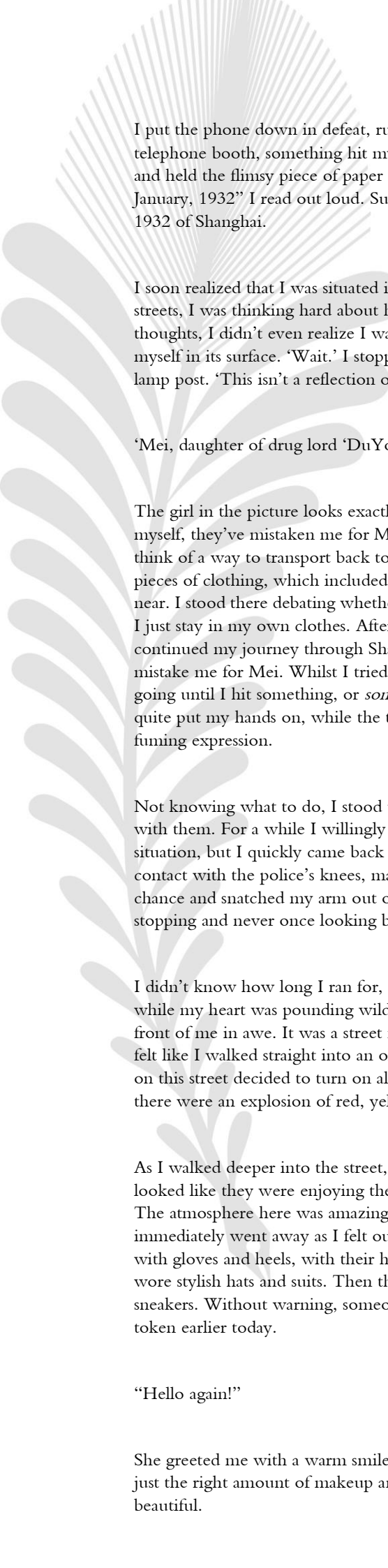
She pointed towards a station that said ‘Telephone’ in capital letters.

“All you have to do is put in this bronze-token and dial.” She said handing me a small coin with a warm smile.

I returned a small smile before I thanked her and made my way towards the telephone booth. I entered the booth, closing the door behind me.

“I really hope she picks up.” I muttered to myself softly as I put in the small token and turned the rotary dial.

“The number you dialed is not a working number...”



I put the phone down in defeat, running my fingers through my hair in frustration. Stepping out of the telephone booth, something hit my face out of blue blocking my sight. I immediately removed it from my face and held the flimsy piece of paper in my hand. ‘Today’s news’ it wrote, this piqued my attention. “4th of January, 1932” I read out loud. Suddenly, I realized what was happening. I’ve been transported back to year 1932 of Shanghai.

I soon realized that I was situated in The Bund, a waterfront area in central Shanghai. Wandering around the streets, I was thinking hard about how to get back to my world—the modern world. I was so deep into my thoughts, I didn’t even realize I walked straight into a lamp post. I rubbed my head as I stared at a reflection of myself in its surface. ‘Wait.’ I stopped rubbing my head and quickly snatched the paper that was stuck on the lamp post. ‘This isn’t a reflection of me... This is a picture of me.’ I thought.

‘Mei, daughter of drug lord ‘DuYong’ WANTED.’

The girl in the picture looks exactly like me, ‘so that was why the two policemen were after me...’ I thought to myself, they’ve mistaken me for Mei. I need to find a way to leave this place. And quick. While trying hard to think of a way to transport back to the modern world, I walked past a small alley, and on the floor were a few pieces of clothing, which included a small shirt and a pair of pants made of black silk with a conical hat lying near. I stood there debating whether I should change into those set of clothes so I could blend in better or should I just stay in my own clothes. After a few seconds, I decided to throw on the few pieces of clothing and continued my journey through Shanghai, trying to keep a low profile, avoiding looking at anyone in case they mistake me for Mei. Whilst I tried hard to keep my head down, I wasn’t really paying attention to where I was going until I hit something, or *someone* to be exact. My eyes widened, not of fear, but an emotion that I can’t quite put my hands on, while the two police that were chasing me not long ago was right in front of me with a fuming expression.

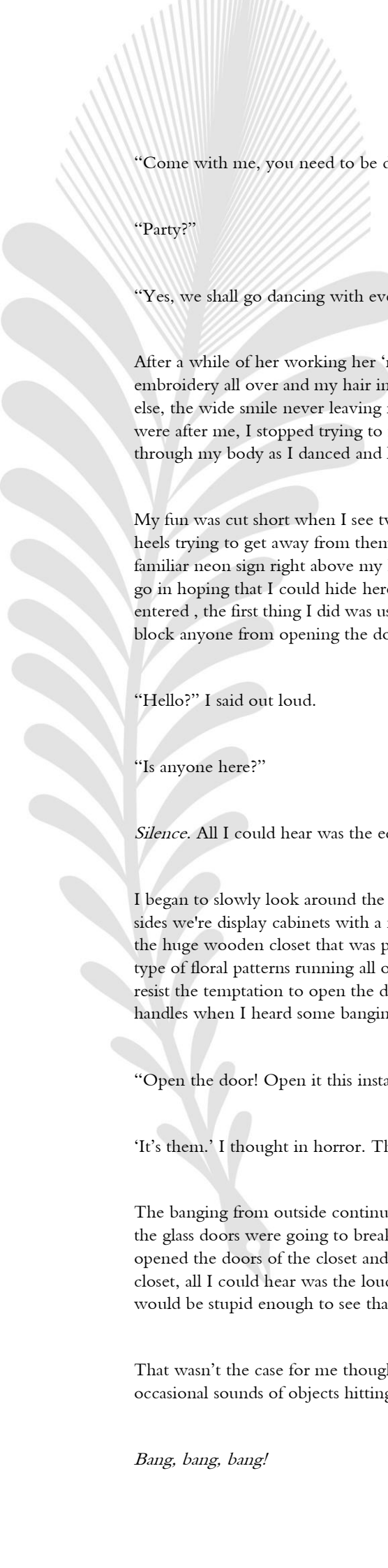
Not knowing what to do, I stood there frozen when one of the police grabbed my arm and began dragging me with them. For a while I willingly followed them as my mind was spinning still trying to understand the situation, but I quickly came back to reality, struggling against their grip. In a swift second my feet came in contact with the police’s knees, making him stumble a little and his grip on my arm loosen a little. I took this chance and snatched my arm out of his hold and ran the opposite way away from them. I ran and ran without stopping and never once looking back.

I didn’t know how long I ran for, but by the time I stopped, it was already night time. My lungs were on fire, while my heart was pounding wildly against my chest, but those didn’t matter to me as I stared at the scene in front of me in awe. It was a street full of neon lights and chatters and laughs. I slowly entered the street and I felt like I walked straight into an old school Chinese film. A myriad of colors greeted my eyes, every single store on this street decided to turn on all their signs hung high above, with a string of lanterns across the whole street, there were an explosion of red, yellow, green, blue everywhere, it was simply magnificent.

As I walked deeper into the street, jazz music filled my ears as I swayed a little to the lively beat. Everyone here looked like they were enjoying themselves while they chatted with one another and some dancing to the music. The atmosphere here was amazing, full of joy and dynamic. My body was lit with excitement, but it immediately went away as I felt out of place. Women here were dressed elegantly with colorful and silky dresses with gloves and heels, with their hair pinned in a fancy updo and face caked with makeup, while the men here wore stylish hats and suits. Then there was me, dressed in a grey hoodie and black jeans with a pair of beat-up sneakers. Without warning, someone spun me around and I was faced with the lady that lent me a bronze—token earlier today.

“Hello again!”

She greeted me with a warm smile, this time she was wearing a pink dress with floral patterns all over, face with just the right amount of makeup and her hair was clipped to the side with a few loose strands, she looked beautiful.



“Come with me, you need to be dressed up for the party!” She said to me dragging me along with her.

“Party?”

“Yes, we shall go dancing with everyone later.” she said with an eager tone.

After a while of her working her ‘magic’ on me, I came back out wearing a delicate black dress with white embroidery all over and my hair in small curls. I began to blend in with the crowd, dancing along with everyone else, the wide smile never leaving my face. For a moment, I forgot about why I’m here and the two men that were after me, I stopped trying to figure out how to go back. I felt alive here, I felt happiness and thrill going through my body as I danced and laughed with everyone. I was having the time of my life here.

My fun was cut short when I see two familiar faces maneuvering through the crowd towards me. I turned on my heels trying to get away from them. I quickly took off, heading towards the end of the street. Soon, I saw a familiar neon sign right above my head, ‘Ginny’s Antique’. I immediately opened the glass doors proceeding to go in hoping that I could hide here for a while until the two policemen is no where near me. As soon as I entered, the first thing I did was use all my energy to push a small cupboard forward towards the door, hoping to block anyone from opening the door outside.

“Hello?” I said out loud.

“Is anyone here?”

Silence. All I could hear was the echo of my own voice.

I began to slowly look around the small shop, the walls were posted with pieces and pieces of paintings. On the sides we're display cabinets with a few ancient looking pieces. However, the thing that stood out the most was the huge wooden closet that was placed right at the centre of the shop. It had gold and silver paintings of some type of floral patterns running all over the doors of the closet, the art of this was simply breathtaking. I couldn't resist the temptation to open the doors of this beautifully made closet. My hands barely made it to the shiny handles when I heard some banging against the doors of the shop.

“Open the door! Open it this instant!” Someone from the outside shouted.

‘It’s them.’ I thought in horror. They’ve found me.

The banging from outside continued and the slow cracking of the glass doors was heard. I knew within seconds the glass doors were going to break and the two policemen would find me. Not knowing what to do, I swiftly opened the doors of the closet and clambered in, shutting the doors tightly behind me. Inside this tight spaced closet, all I could hear was the loud and erratic pounding of my heart. I was hoping, *no*, I was praying, that they would be stupid enough to see that no one was in the store and leave.

That wasn’t the case for me though, loud shattering sounds of glass pierced my ears, shouts of anger and occasional sounds of objects hitting the ground was heard.

Bang, bang, bang!

Gun shots were fired. 16 gunshots right at the closet I was hiding in to be exact. I knew this was it. This would be the end of my journey. I got away once, I won't be able to get away twice.

Bang!

One more deafening sound of a gunshot was heard. I slumped lifeless at the bottom of the closet as my vision start to blur. The last thing i saw was a woman hovering over me before my world turned black again.

I couldn't move. I couldn't hear. I couldn't open my eyes. My body, it felt so heavy and there were pain shooting through. Then, I start to hear a distant gentle voice . I lie still, trying to figure out what was happening as I struggled to open my heavy eyelids. With my eyes open now, I look around to see myself in a small shop with a familiar wooden closet staring back at me.

Suddenly, a woman with a small frame and with growing grey hair came right next to me. I wanted to talk, I wanted to ask questions, I wanted to shout. But all that comes out was a hoarse whisper, "where am I?"

"Oh darling, don't you remember? You came running into my shop asking for help and right after you explained what was happening, you fainted."

The nurse handed me a cup of water and left. 'Hospital?' I furrowed my brows in confusion, then I remembered. 'Shanghai', it all came back to me within seconds. 'The two policemen, the bund, the lady dressed in a gold and red dress, the night street, the flashing neon signs, the jazz music and the gun that shot me.'

"Good morning Wren, I am Doctor Watson. So you went through a little bit of an ordeal which gave you a small concussion and a few fractured ribs, but don't worry, you will heal in no time if you have enough rest. We will give you a check up very soon, so for now just lie down for a bit" A man dressed in a lab coat told me.

Right when he was about to leave, "Doctor Watson?" I spoke up softly.

"Yes?" He turned and looked at me.

"Do you know what happened to me?"

"Well, a police officer was on duty when he heard noises coming from an alley and he found you unconscious on the floor while two men were next to you. Don't worry Wren, the two men have already been captured and the police will probably be here later with some questions for you."

With that, he closed the door gently and left. As I was left alone in the room again, I smiled a little to myself as I thought back to the moments I had in Shanghai and I have to admit, although I was on a runaway from two police, I still felt vibrant and so full of life. *I am alive.*

From Shanghai to Hong Kong

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Chun, Jasper – 15

It was dark, cold and windy when she finally arrived back home. Her clothes, ruffled and creased now lay upon her simple wooden table, the sweet scent still coming out of the wood after 12 years. She set about preparing dinner for herself and her father, when the door suddenly opened and shut quickly, and there stood a man in a soaked through shirt and pants, as if he came directly off a boat. She rushed towards him, shouting “Father! You’re home!” and grasped him tight, but the man, once a very happy man, just grunted and walked in, and sat on the lacquered wooden chair.

The man was called Victor, and his daughter was the one thing he cared for, more so than his work, that he slaved off many hours arguing with his sponsors just to get a new position in the company, the East India Trading Company, the largest trading company between the seas separating the two continents. He had been forced to take up a position in Shanghai, for one, because he wanted a new life away from the cold, dreary weather commonly associated with Britain, and two, to let his daughter explore more places, just like how she wished, long ago, together with her mother. His daughter has since gotten over it, but she still had the lost look in her eyes as she saw her mother get washed off the deck, back when she was 4, a young toddler.

It was a hard decision, but it was either to leave their friends and family behind, but keep working in the company in which he had helped build, or to leave the company and find a new opportunity. He was sorry that her daughter had to say goodbye to her long time childhood friend, who has stood by her for many an accident. The child had promised to marry her when she came back, and she would wait for him, but Victor knew that would never happen.

Victor and Maria were now situated in a fairly wealthy position, due to his position as one of the few operators in Shanghai overlooking the transportation of goods sold by the company, He would have been content with the job, if not for the terrible conditions the ports were kept and built, and the working hours that came with the title. Every morning, he would wake up at 5 in the morning, and come back at 9 at night, so he was forced to lose a lot of time with her daughter, which, as she grew up, made much more friends of the Chinese variety than of her own kind. But of course, she also made many enemies, due to her blood not being Chinese. Because of this, she got beaten by many older kids, each throwing rocks at her. She often came back slightly bruised.

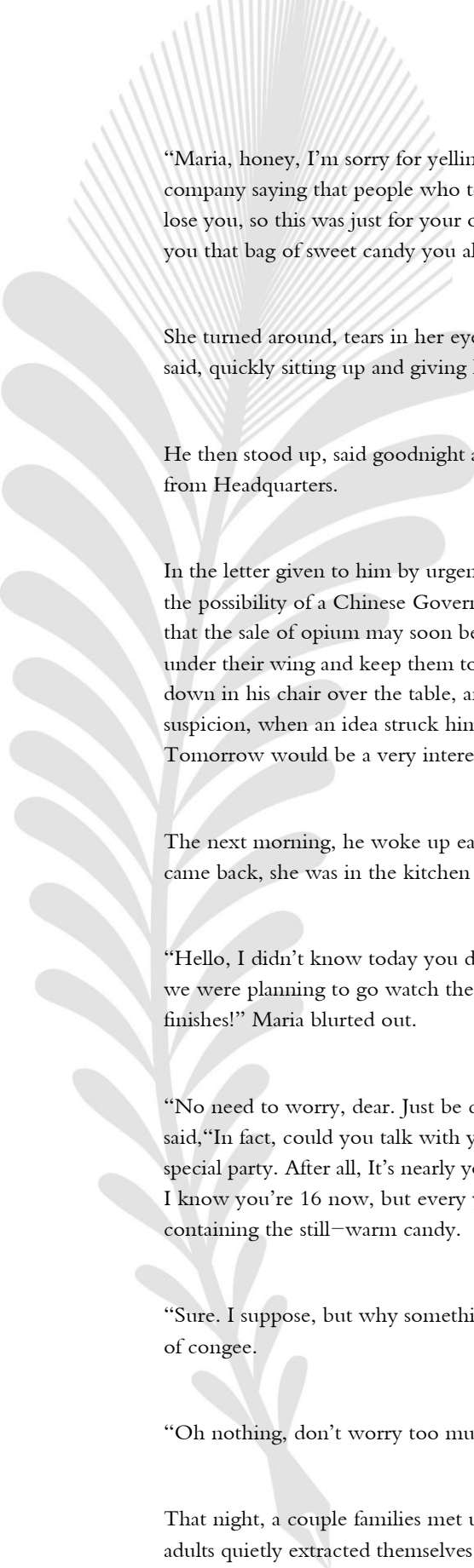
“Father, dinner’s ready, are you eating tonight?” said Maria, breaking into his train of thought.

“Hm... Oh yes, don’t mind my earlier temper, work was just terrible today,” he replied.

“Are they asking you about the sales of the powder again? Because my friends say that their parents have bought a lot of pouches! Some of them even snuck some from behind their parents’ back and sniffed some themselves, they also offer—” “NO!” he immediately roared out, “You cannot take any of the powder, you hear?” he then said, calming down, seeing his daughter cringe in shock and pain.

“Y...yes, Father...” she replied in a quiet voice, slowly sitting down to her dinner.

Their dinner was quiet all throughout, and when she said nothing even after her washing up, he felt like he had crossed the line. He walked up to her room and sat next to her bed, where she laid down.



“Maria, honey, I’m sorry for yelling at you, it’s just that there were some reports that I had received from the company saying that people who took the powder in large quantities eventually lost themselves...I don’t want to lose you, so this was just for your own good...” he mumbled out to her, hoping she would forgive him, “I’ll buy you that bag of sweet candy you always want, if you forgive me?”

She turned around, tears in her eyes and a smile on her face, “Fine, but I want the ones with lots of syrup!” she said, quickly sitting up and giving him a hug.

He then stood up, said goodnight and walked outside, back into his office to clear the mess he had received back from Headquarters.

In the letter given to him by urgent call from the crew abroad one of the company’s many trading ships, it stated the possibility of a Chinese Government intervention, as they were getting suspicious of their silver count, and that the sale of opium may soon be sold under secrecy. His task was to get as much merchants and customers under their wing and keep them to a secrecy binding, so they don’t go off selling their providers off. He sat, bent down in his chair over the table, and tried to think on how to best distribute the powder without arising suspicion, when an idea struck him, “What if....” he mused to himself, as he slowly sat back, yawning. Tomorrow would be a very interesting day.

The next morning, he woke up early to go down to the shop and bought the candy for his daughter. When he came back, she was in the kitchen making traditional Chinese breakfast for herself.

“Hello, I didn’t know today you didn’t have to go to work... I was planning to go out with my Chinese friends, we were planning to go watch the Chinese opera. I promise it won’t be very long, I’ll come back as soon as it finishes!” Maria blurted out.

“No need to worry, dear. Just be careful, and if you see those mean Chinese kids, run the other way,” he said, “In fact, could you talk with your friends today and see if they can get their parents over. I’d like to hold a special party. After all, It’s nearly your birthday, and I’d like to see what suggestions they have on hosting a party. I know you’re 16 now, but every year, just us two and a small cake seems boring,” setting down the box containing the still-warm candy.

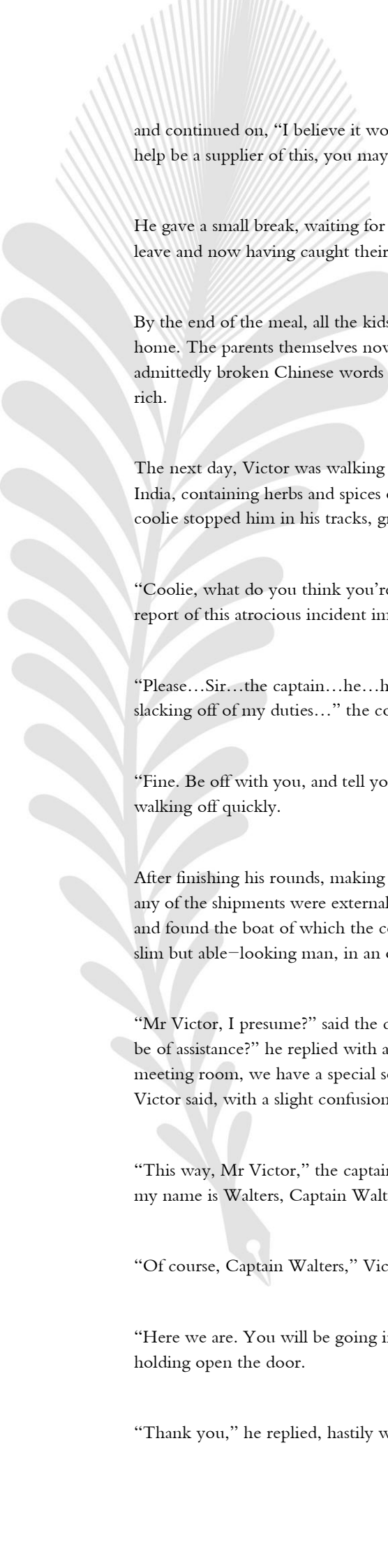
“Sure. I suppose, but why something like this all of a sudden?” she said, slowly sitting down and eating her bowl of congee.

“Oh nothing, don’t worry too much about it,” he mumbled, half to himself.

That night, a couple families met up together to have a discussion and the teens were left to themselves. The adults quietly extracted themselves from the room at the request of their host, and made their way to a sideroom.

“Tonight, I have asked my daughter to ask you all to come under the false pretense of having a meal together to plan for a future banquet. The real reason for this meetup is to discuss a small problem I’m facing. I believe we all here can benefit from this arrangement. I work for the East India Trading Company, and it has come to their attention that our highest source of income may soon be threatened.

Of course, I’m talking about opium, the drug you all here have purchased some time in the past. No doubt you all have tried it and are now hooked, according to your children’s report to my daughter.” He then took a breath



and continued on, “I believe it would be in the best interest if we can sell this off the books, if you would like to help be a supplier of this, you may stay. Else, please leave, and forget everything spoken here tonight.”

He gave a small break, waiting for any potential loose lipped persons to reveal themselves now. Seeing that none leave and now having caught their attention, he went on and described how he planned to make this all work.

By the end of the meal, all the kids were chatting among themselves, and waiting for their parents to bring them home. The parents themselves now had practically become loyal workers to Victor, hanging on to his very admittedly broken Chinese words like it was pure gold. They all left, knowing that they would one day become rich.

The next day, Victor was walking back to the shipyard to oversee the arrival of a new shipment of goods from India, containing herbs and spices of an assortment, fabrics made of silk, and many other jade ornaments, when a coolie stopped him in his tracks, grabbing his shoulder, panting for air, and collapsing beneath his feet.

“Coolie, what do you think you’re doing? It’s not yet break time, tell me, who is your commander, I must report of this atrocious incident immediately,” Victor roared, picking up the scrawny man by the collar.

“Please...Sir...the captain...he...he is requesting a meeting with you... I don’t know why...please forgive my slacking off of my duties...” the coolie replied in a quiet whimpering voice.

“Fine. Be off with you, and tell your captain I will meet him on his ship shortly,” he replied, turning around and walking off quickly.

After finishing his rounds, making sure no loiterers were around to try to steal the cargo and checking to see if any of the shipments were externally damaged, he looked around the port where the previous incident occurred, and found the boat of which the coolie came from. He just walked up the gangboard when the captain, a rather slim but able-looking man, in an oversized suit, walked up to him, and shook him by the hand firmly.

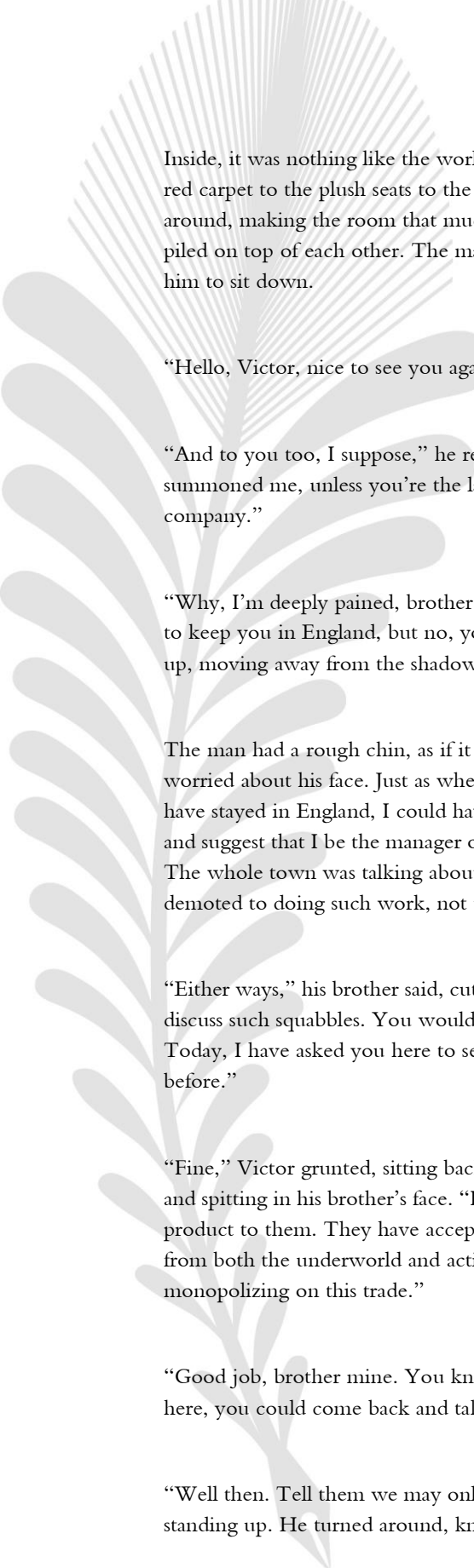
“Mr Victor, I presume?” said the captain, in a strangely high pitched voice. “Yes, that would be me, how may I be of assistance?” he replied with a prompt response. “Well, you could start by coming below deck, to the meeting room, we have a special someone who wishes to speak with you urgently.” “In that case, let us be off,” Victor said, with a slight confusion surrounding him.

“This way, Mr Victor,” the captain said, as he suddenly stopped and turned around. “How terribly rude of me, my name is Walters, Captain Walters, but you may call me Walt,” Walters said.

“Of course, Captain Walters,” Victor replied, his mind still thinking, deep in thought.

“Here we are. You will be going in yourself, I have been instructed to stand guard outside,” he said, saluting and holding open the door.

“Thank you,” he replied, hastily walking in, to prevent the man inside from waiting much longer.



Inside, it was nothing like the world outside, all classic wood and brick. Here, it was lavishly decorated, from the red carpet to the plush seats to the crystals hanging down from the ceiling, reflecting what light there was from around, making the room that much brighter. In the middle of the room was a table, and on the table was food, piled on top of each other. The man sitting behind the table looked up. He saw Victor, and promptly invited him to sit down.

“Hello, Victor, nice to see you again,” said the man.

“And to you too, I suppose,” he replied. “Why are you here then? Don’t tell me you are the one who summoned me, unless you’re the last surviving person from headquarters to tell me of the downfall of our company.”

“Why, I’m deeply pained, brother dear, to have you view me as such a monster. If you recall correctly, I did try to keep you in England, but no, you had to argue with our sponsors,” the man replied quickly, as he now stood up, moving away from the shadows, where the crystals failed to illuminate.

The man had a rough chin, as if it had not been shaved for a few months. Typical, Victor thought. He is still worried about his face. Just as when he was a child then. “Don’t call me brother. You got me sent here, I could have stayed in England, I could have just quit the company and took my money. But no. You had to come in and suggest that I be the manager of this port. I even had to lie to my wife and daughter on why we moved here! The whole town was talking about how one of the top members of the East India Trading Company was demoted to doing such work, not to mention that during the passage, my wife...my wife fell overboard and—”

“Either ways,” his brother said, cutting his speech and pushing him back towards his seat, “I’ve come here not to discuss such squabbles. You would be compensated by the company for your loss, but not as of this moment. Today, I have asked you here to see what you have done about the message that should have arrived the day before.”

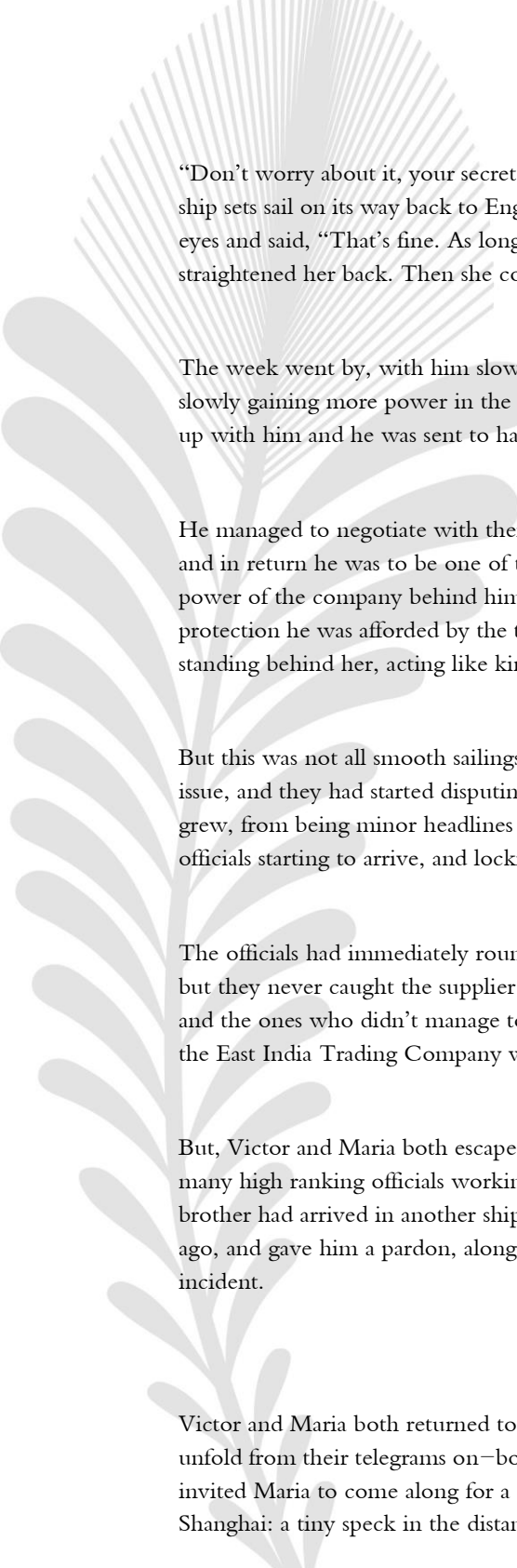
“Fine,” Victor grunted, sitting back down, previously unaware that he had stood up and was practically yelling and spitting in his brother’s face. “I have asked a couple of local merchants about how we will exclusively sell the product to them. They have accepted the roles they will play in this scheme, and with the company backing us from both the underworld and actively going against the Chinese Government rule, we may soon succeed on monopolizing on this trade.”

“Good job, brother mine. You know, the sponsors have reconsidered, and they said, based on how well you do here, you could come back and take back your previous position...” his brother started.

“Well then. Tell them we may only have a couple months to know how well this scheme will end,” Victor said, standing up. He turned around, knocked on the door, and was escorted out by Captain Walters.

“Say, Captain Walters... I do not mean to offend you but... are you by any chance a female?” Victor asked, in an inquiring tone.

***Gasp *** “How... did you know? No one on this ship knows... Please sir—” she suddenly fell to the ground, losing her composure “— don’t tell anyone about this, they must not know, I must keep this job, sir!” she said, looking up with teary eyes.



“Don’t worry about it, your secret’s safe with me, but you must come and find me to explain yourself before this ship sets sail on its way back to England,” Victor said, crouching down and picking her up. She stood, wiped her eyes and said, “That’s fine. As long as you keep that secret, I’ll oblige to your request.” She smiled, and straightened her back. Then she continued to guide him back to the port.

The week went by, with him slowly receiving more information on when and how to distribute the opium, slowly gaining more power in the underworld as the only conduit to obtain the powder. Soon, the triads caught up with him and he was sent to have a meeting with the leaders of the triads.

He managed to negotiate with them, so that he would keep supplying them with more opium for them to sell, and in return he was to be one of the main leaders in the Shanghai triads. The triad leaders feared him and the power of the company behind him, and let him have complete control. His daughter also got the same protection he was afforded by the triads. Now the mean kids started running away at the mere glance of the men standing behind her, acting like kind passersby.

But this was not all smooth sailings. Over the next few months the government had started to sense a potential issue, and they had started disputing with the company and England over the trading rights. This had slowly grew, from being minor headlines in the newspaper with whispers stating that it was all just a lie, to military officials starting to arrive, and locking the place down in preparation of war.

The officials had immediately rounded up all workers of the East India Trading Company that they could find, but they never caught the supplier of opium. The triad had scattered, with most of them hiding in nearby cities, and the ones who didn’t manage to run away before the military arrived were sent to the guillotine along with the East India Trading Company workers.

But, Victor and Maria both escaped just in time. There was an executive order straight from India to evacuate as many high ranking officials working there as possible. This included them both, as two days before, Victor’s brother had arrived in another ship, this time with a signed letter, vetoing the decision they made all those years ago, and gave him a pardon, along with a compensation fee for the death of his wife during a work related incident.

Victor and Maria both returned to England, where they watched the war between the Chinese and English unfold from their telegrams on-board the very same ship in which Captain Walters commandeered. The captain invited Maria to come along for a tour of the ship. While this happened, Victor sat in his room, looking back at Shanghai: a tiny speck in the distant horizon.

A few years after the war had ended, Maria, now newly wedded with her long time friend in England, came back to China, in a new city which England annexed as part of the peace treaty. This land was called Hong Kong, and it was, in it’s own way, just as beautiful as it was like in Shanghai. Victor also came along, in the poor health that he now had from working in England, helping with the ship constructions. As Victor walked down, Walters by his side, as she promptly retired as soon as she docked back at England, and married to Victor to fill in the void left by his deceased wife, he took in a deep breath, and smiled.

Rooftop Fireworks

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Fung, Yana – 15

I used to spend my days daydreaming, just sitting somewhere and disappearing into my own world. I would have liked to spend hours sitting on the roof of my house, watching everyone and imagining a different life for myself.

Of course, I didn't have a lot of time for that. My mother was always there to chase the daydreams out of my head. According to her, men didn't like girls with too much imagination. She always said that the only time girls needed their imagination was when they were thinking of names for their children. By the time I was old enough to get married, I knew all about what men liked and didn't like.

My future had been set into stone by my parents from the moment I was born. Eldest in my family and a girl, I was to be my family's ticket to a better life, out of poverty. My siblings learnt the practical skills of life, while I became well-versed in dancing and singing. My parents relied on the fact that I would marry one of the rich men of Shanghai and after that, I would never have to even lift a finger again. To them, I was equipped with the most essential information, how to entertain my husband and how to bear beautiful, healthy children.

Thinking back to it, I resent them for never asking me what I wanted. It doesn't seem very fair to me that I was never given any say, although I don't think they would have particularly cared for my opinion. But, back then, I was an entirely different person with different values and not much experience of anything.

Now that I am married and grown, I think a lot about the time before I was married. Sometimes when it's quiet and I'm all alone, I think about the moment I first saw him. It doesn't matter how many years have passed, I can still remember it as if it happened yesterday and I can see him before me as clear as day. I remember thinking how he looked like he was up to no good. The mischievous glint in his eyes, he looked around him as if he was looking for something. Then, at lightning speed, he stretched out a hand and grabbed a pristine white bun of the stall next to him. No one had seen him do it, none of the many people wandering in the street. I stared at him, mouth agape, as he continued to look around him, probably looking for the next stall to rob. Suddenly, his eyes landed on me and he realised that I had seen the entire thing. He easily wove through the throng of people between us and came to a stop in front of me.

"Aren't you going to tell on me?" He cocked an eyebrow at me, almost teasingly.

"Are you going to give the bun back?" I crossed my arms over my chest defiantly.

"No, of course not! I'm not an idiot." He laughed slightly and looked at me like I was stupid.

"Why not? You can still apologize."

"Because, you silly naive girl, then the owner will know I stole it." He smiled down at me, he seemed much more interested in me now, "You've never stolen anything before have you?"

"No, of course not! I'm not an idiot." I echoed his words back to him and he smiled even wider. From somewhere behind me I could hear my mother's voice, shrill and impatient, shouting at me to stop idling and wasting time.

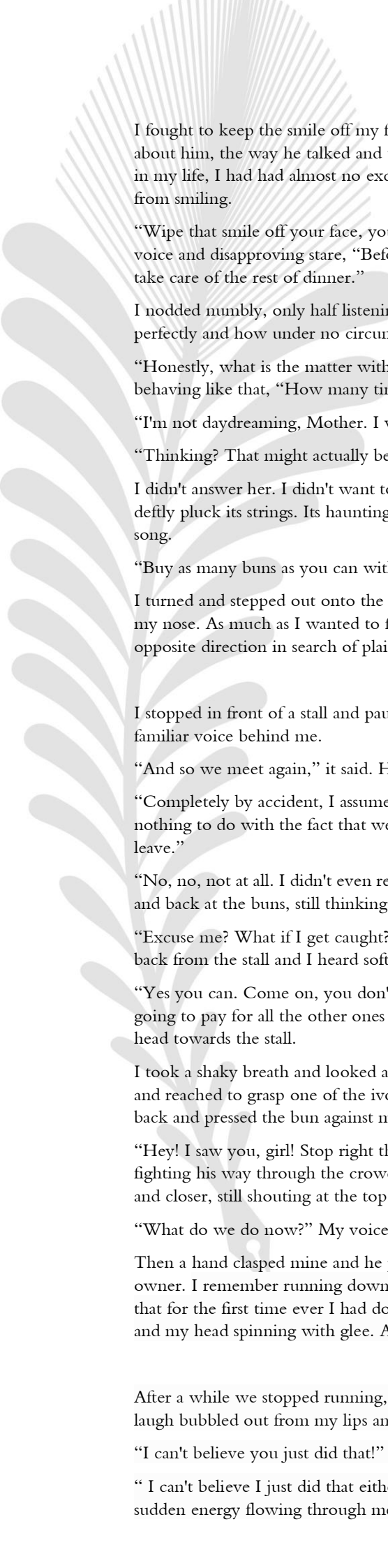
"What is that noise?"

"That would be my mom", I looked at the floor, feeling the embarrassment creep through me, "Well, I have to go. She clearly needs me."

"You're right. See you around", he looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to respond but I just shook my head.

"I'm not going to tell a stranger my name!"

"Alright, as you like. See you around, stranger", he said. "Although, I don't think we actually are strangers anymore. Seeing as I practically already know your mother from all the shouting she's been doing."



I fought to keep the smile off my face as I shook my head again and watched him go. There was something about him, the way he talked and the way he had looked at me, it was so different and new. Up until that point in my life, I had had almost no excitement at all and suddenly, I couldn't get my heart to stop racing or my lips from smiling.

"Wipe that smile off your face, you look like a fool", my mother was quick to reprimand me with her harsh voice and disapproving stare, "Before dinner, I want you to go out and get some plain buns. Your sisters will take care of the rest of dinner."

I nodded numbly, only half listening to her drone on about how imperative it was that I could play the Zheng perfectly and how under no circumstances was I allowed to misread a word of poetry.

"Honestly, what is the matter with you today?" She frowned and stared at me, trying to figure out why I was behaving like that, "How many times you I told you to stop daydreaming so much? But you never listen!"

"I'm not daydreaming, Mother. I was just thinking."

"Thinking? That might actually be worse!" she gasped, an expression of pure and utter shock on her face.

I didn't answer her. I didn't want to tell her about the boy I had met. Smiling down at my Zheng, I continued to deftly pluck its strings. Its haunting tune floating around the room and pleasing my mother with its beautiful song.

"Buy as many buns as you can with this money", she pressed a small coin into my hand.

I turned and stepped out onto the ever busy streets of Shanghai. I breathed deeply, letting the smells of food fill my nose. As much as I wanted to follow the sweet scent of the barbecue pork, I reluctantly headed into the opposite direction in search of plain buns.

I stopped in front of a stall and paused to think how many buns I could buy with my money, when I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"And so we meet again," it said. He stood beside me and smiled brightly at me.

"Completely by accident, I assume?", I raised my eyebrows at him and he shook his head vigorously. "It has nothing to do with the fact that we met here earlier and that I live on this street or that you probably didn't even leave."

"No, no, not at all. I didn't even realize that this was the same street." He shrugged innocently. I glanced at him and back at the buns, still thinking about the money, "I dare you to steal one."

"Excuse me? What if I get caught? Stealing isn't good, it's very bad. I don't think I could do it", I took a step back from the stall and I heard soft laughter next to me.

"Yes you can. Come on, you don't have to feel guilty about it. You're only stealing one bun and you're even going to pay for all the other ones you're going to buy", he nudged me lightly with his elbow and inclined his head towards the stall.

I took a shaky breath and looked around me, checking for the stall owner. Tentatively I stretched out my arm and reached to grasp one of the ivory buns on the table. As soon as my fingers closed around it, I jerked my arm back and pressed the bun against my frantically beating heart.

"Hey! I saw you, girl! Stop right there, don't you dare move!" The stall owner had seen me and was now fighting his way through the crowd towards us. I felt a slight panic rise within me as I watched him move closer and closer, still shouting at the top of his lungs.

"What do we do now?" My voice was oddly calm, despite the feeling of impending boom.

Then a hand clasped mine and he pulled me with him, through the busy street and away from the furious stall owner. I remember running down that street so vividly, feet pounding and hearts racing. It didn't matter to me that for the first time ever I had done a bad thing. There was this breathtaking exhilaration to it, my hand in his and my head spinning with glee. And for moment, I felt, like for the first time, alive.

After a while we stopped running, no one said anything and only the sound of heavy breathing filled the air. A laugh bubbled out from my lips and suddenly I couldn't stop laughing.

"I can't believe you just did that!" The shock was evident on his face.

"I can't believe I just did that either!" I was still breathless, but not only from running away. I was buzzing, sudden energy flowing through me.

"I didn't think you had that in you, to actually do something like that."

"Does it always feel like that?" I asked curiously, "That exhilaration, the rise of adrenaline."

"Sometimes it does, especially the first time. But I don't think you should do that again," he said.

"Why not?" I frowned slightly, "We didn't get caught."

"We almost got and caught", he pointed out, "Also, please don't just ask me why not, you're making me feel like I've corrupted the innocent."

I shot him a small smile. I knew he was right and I wouldn't ever steal again. What I had just done was reckless and I clearly hadn't thought about it before I did it.

"I won't steal again, but you shouldn't either," I turned to walk back home and he fell into step beside me.

"I don't have a choice, I don't have any money to pay for any food."

"What about your parents?" I glanced at him from the side. He walked with confidence as if he hadn't a care in the world. It wasn't unusual that he didn't have a lot of meat on his bones; no one could even afford enough food to eat in this neighborhood, let alone gain weight.

"Dead", he didn't offer up any explanation. Staring straight ahead, he continued down the road with me. "Why didn't you tell anyone that you saw me steal the bread?"

I racked my brain for an answer. In truth, I didn't know why I kept it to myself, so I told him, "I really don't know actually. I've never seen someone steal anything."

"And here you are, having stolen something yourself."

"You are a horrible influence on me! In the span of a few hours, you've managed to pull me to the dark side", I gasped, realizing how much he had changed me in such a short time.

"The dark side? Yes, that is bad, very bad. There is no coming back from the dark side", sarcasm lacing his voice until he couldn't keep himself from laughing any longer.

"Go ahead, laugh at me! But I'm blaming you for the start of my descent into crime."

"Don't be so dramatic! Just because you do one bad thing doesn't mean it will stay with you forever."

At the time I just huffed at him and crossed my arms over my chest. This time he was wrong, it has stayed with me forever, but not in a bad way. It's become a fond memory now and I haven't had the urge to steal anything.

"But you steal all the time."

"That's only because I have to, how else would I survive?", he squeezed my hand in reassurance, "You're not able to become a criminal mastermind, alright? Stop worrying." He smiled so warmly, it felt like the sun was out, even though it was just setting.

We continued to walk in silence and I continued to mull over the things he had said. I realized that he had not let go of my hand and that I don't mind that he was still holding it. I smiled at the ground shyly, not knowing how that simple action was making my heart beat so quickly.

Soon we had reached my home, too soon. I found myself not wanting to let go of his hand. All of a sudden, I remembered why I had actually left the house in the first place.

"Oh no, my mother is going to kill me."

"Why?"

"Because while we were caught up with robbing someone, I completely forgot to actually buy buns for dinner!" I looked up and down the now abandoned street. There wasn't a stall in sight anymore; they had all closed down for the evening. The street was almost dark now, only the faint beams from the dying sun lighting up an occasional cobblestone. All the stalls were closed and doors shut, the street was empty of its usual aromas and noise. "My mother is going to be furious when I come home."

"Then don't go home yet", he said it like it was the simplest thing in the world, "Come with me, I want to show you something."

He slipped into a narrow alleyway away from the main road and walked towards a ladder that was leaning against the wall. He swiftly repositioned it and began to climb up.

I gulped.

"That is a very tall ladder." He paused and looked down at me.

"It has to be, if it's going to get us on the roof."

"On the roof, are we even—", I stopped mid-sentence, "Actually don't answer that, I don't want to know."

He laughed so loudly that I could hear him all the way at the bottom of the ladder. I sighed and began to follow him up the ladder. Finally I reached the top of it and I carefully balanced myself on the roof.

"Wow", I breathed softly. The sun was setting over the city of Shanghai, and everything on the roof was bathed in soft golden light. The sky was ablaze with more colours than I had ever seen in my life and I felt the warmth spread from my head all the while to my toes. It was breathtaking. I couldn't look away, the colours, the clouds and the sun, they were painted the sky like a masterpiece. Words seemed to fail me as I said, "This is..."

"Beautiful?"

"No, more than that, this is magnificent!" Even that word didn't come close to describing the beauty of the sun going to sleep. All too soon, night closed in over us and the star began to awaken above us.

"Now turn around and look in that direction", he grabbed my shoulders and spun me around to face the other side of the city where the rich lived. In the distance, I noticed a small whistling sound, but before I could pinpoint what it was, there was a thunderous boom and a shower of red sparkles erupted.

"Fireworks?" Once again I was spellbound.

"They do fireworks a lot, every time there's something to celebrate, I suppose", another one went off, rocketing into the sky and bursting open in the sky. It almost looked like it was raining stars. "I come here every day and I just watch the sun set and the day end."

"Well, I could come and watch with you from now on, if you'll let me." I smiled at him, excited at the prospect of watching that glorious sight every day.

He hesitated, as if he was arguing with himself, then he turned to face me, "I'm not going to be here tomorrow."

"What?"

"There's a ship in the harbor that's leaving tomorrow and I'm going to be on it," he said slowly. I opened and closed my mouth. For the third time tonight, I was speechless. "There's nothing for me here. Maybe if I go somewhere else, I can make a life for myself."

"Oh", I wasn't sure what to say. I wanted to convince him to stay, but for what? A girl he only met today?

"You could come with me. Well, don't look so shocked. This isn't the life you want, we both know that. You don't have to stay here and become some rich man's wife, you could come with me." There was so much hope in his eyes and it hurt to have to disappoint him.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I can't leave my family. They need me", I explained, hoping he would understand.

"But you don't seem very happy here, it seems like a boring life."

I stopped and felt the hurt rushing to my eyes, threatening to spill. "This isn't as easy for me as it is for you!" I saw it in his eyes that he was hurt. I couldn't help but lash out at him. He couldn't see how much I wanted to go with him, he couldn't see how it was impossible for me leave without chaining my family to poverty forever. "I have prepared my entire life to grow up and marry rich, to be a good wife to my husband. My family needs me."

"So you're putting your family's wishes above your own dreams?" he asked in disbelief.

"I don't have my own dreams, not until today! I'm not allowed to have dreams!", I turned back to watch the fireworks, trying to swallow the hot tears in my eyes. "Well, now you don't look so shocked. I want, with everything that I am and every fiber of my being, to go with you. But I really can't."

I felt our fingers interlace and we stood in silence once more as the sky came alive with fireworks. The fireworks stopped and we made our way back the ladder, deep in thought.

"I'm not going to pretend like I understand why you're staying and to be honest, I think it's a little.." he paused to think before he continued. "It's very selfless and I don't think I could do it."

"Thank you." He narrowed his eyes in confusion, "for today." He smiled at me one last time before turning to walk away.

"Goodbye, Stranger!" he waved, "I hope you have a good life, Stranger."



I laughed in surprise and shouted my name after him. I shouted so loud, I was sure the whole neighbourhood had heard me. With this boy, it seemed like I didn't care about what people thought of me anymore. I never saw him again and I hope he had a good life wherever he had sailed to. He deserved it.

I used to spend my days daydreaming and I still do actually. Although I no longer imagine a different life for myself, because I don't yearn for any other life. I did use my imagination to think of my children's names and I don't chase the daydreams of their heads, I let it run wild. Because you shouldn't need someone to come along and open your eyes to the world, they should already be open.

A Forbidden Romance

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Ho, Kyrá – 15

Elliot Thompson. It's been almost 8 months since I've last seen him. I was starting to think he wasn't coming back, but the long awaited day is finally here. Today is the day he said he is to return. I waited 6 long months for his promised letter to be mailed to me. I was starting to lose faith in it ever making it here. I often wondered if he had forgotten about his word to me, or if he had simply forgotten about me. But there in his letter in his very own writing, it read he would be arriving here in Shanghai on the 20th of August, 1838. And after months and months of waiting, here he comes, exiting the ship along with his colleagues. I limp up to him as he steps foot on the harbor. He chuckles at my struggle to run around in my lotus shoes. He would always call them silly and say they looked like shoes that belonged to elves. Whatever those were.

"I've missed you Liang Qiujin," Elliot says just as I come up to him.

"I've missed you." I reply. He leans in for a hug but I take a step back. "Not here." I shyly break a smile and look into his blue grey eyes that I adore. He smiles back in acknowledgment. Elliot and his three friends all follow me into town from a distance. He and his friends bought a big house near the port the last time they were here, as they were told they would be starting to come more and more often in the months to come. This part of town isn't necessarily the friendliest, or the safest. And although I told him not to buy the house here many times, he did anyway. He told me they liked this location because it was near the coast, but I knew he was lying.

I try my best to go through alleys instead of open streets, and take some long routes instead of shortcuts just in case any of my Baba's officers are patrolling those areas. Once we're at the street their house is on, I duck my head so my Nainai's friends working in the food stalls won't see me. Elliot and his friends followed about 10 steps behind me. I open the door with the key he gifted me the last time he was here and enter their house. They follow several seconds after and begin to settle in. The house looks a lot less homely than I remember. There used to be a nicely carved wooden table in the middle of their dining room, it's now replaced with a cheap wooden table struggling to stand on its own. The walls used to hold bright white wallpaper and now it's ripped down in random places and there's even a slight dent in the wall. I can still see the little red spots on the floor that I tried to clean up. At least the beautiful hand crafted sofa is still intact.

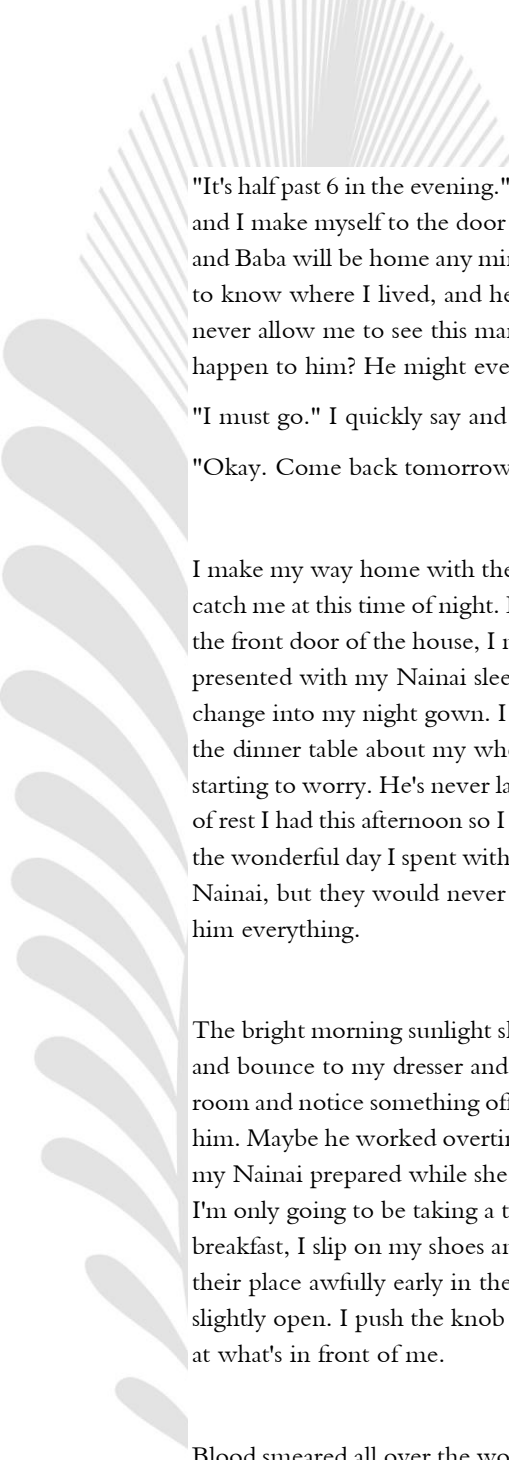
"What are you thinking about?" Elliot startles me with his hands on my shoulders and his head rested on top of mine, interrupting my thoughts.

"Nothing. You're going to mess up my hair." I laugh and break away from his grip. My Nainai just fixed it into a sleek bun. She is going to question why my hair would've gotten messy. I turn around and these boys are already starting to heat up the opium on the carpet in front of their sofa.

"Will you be joining us Liang?" Harry asked, one of Elliot's friends. His wound I sewed up for him on his right arm is starting to look better; it's healing well.

"Yes I will." I straighten out my dress as I sit on the floor, joining Elliot. Scott is rolling the opium while Eli heats and softens them for him, the other two friends of Elliot's. Harry's lying down, holding their pipe as Elliot helps heat the opium for him. Soon there's enough for everyone and the pipe gets passed around. We're all lying down on the carpet and helping one another heat the bowl. Inhale. Exhale. The opium hisses and fizzes; until we've all had a chance. There's five of us in the room but I feel as if I'm alone, relaxed and warm, lost in my own thoughts.

THUD. I'm awakened by a loud noise. "Sshhh." I hear someone shush. I flicker my eyes open and see a mess across the floor near the table. I turn my head and see the dark night through the windows. Oh no. "What time is it?" I panic and quickly stand up.



"It's half past 6 in the evening." Elliot says as he approaches me from fixing up the mess on the floor. My eyes widen and I make myself to the door while tidying dress. Why didn't anyone wake me? My Nainai must be worried sick and Baba will be home any minute. "What's wrong? Can I take you home?" Elliot questioned. He's always wanted to know where I lived, and he's always wanted to meet my family. But I never allow him to. My family would never allow me to see this man. And for Elliot's sake, he should never meet my Baba. Who knows what might happen to him? He might even receive the death penalty.

"I must go." I quickly say and open the door

"Okay. Come back tomorrow." He instructs. I nod, smile and rush out.

I make my way home with the limited amount of light being illuminated through the houses. At least no one will catch me at this time of night. Luckily I know these streets inside out and hurry home as fast as I can. When I reach the front door of the house, I notice the lights are off. I quietly unlock the door and attempt to sneak in, when I'm presented with my Nainai sleeping on the sofa and no sign of Baba. I sigh in relief and walk over to my room to change into my night gown. I prepare dinner and wake up my Nainai to eat. She bombards me with questions at the dinner table about my whereabouts today. The night gets darker and Baba still hasn't returned home. I'm starting to worry. He's never late. The clock strikes eight and I make my way to bed. I can't sleep with the amount of rest I had this afternoon so I lie here with my eyes closed, and I can't help break into a huge smile thinking about the wonderful day I spent with Elliot Thompson. I wish I could take him home and introduce him to my Baba and Nainai, but they would never accept us. I wish I could tell him about my family, about my Mama. I want to tell him everything.

The bright morning sunlight shining through my curtains awakens me. Elliot; I think and smile to myself. I get up and bounce to my dresser and put on one of my favorite dresses, one that belonged to Mama. I go to the living room and notice something off. Where's Baba? I ask my Nainai and she says he never returned home. That's unlike him. Maybe he worked overtime and fell asleep at the precinct. I sit at the dining table and eat the delicious congee my Nainai prepared while she combs my hair into a ponytail. She questions why I'm wearing my Mama's dress if I'm only going to be taking a trip to the market today. I respond to her by saying I missed my Mama dearly. After breakfast, I slip on my shoes and head out the door. I happily walk through town and go to Elliot's house. I reach their place awfully early in the morning; I bet they're still asleep. As I'm about to unlock their door, I notice it's slightly open. I push the knob and feel something sticky on my hands. And as I step into their house, I'm shocked at what's in front of me.

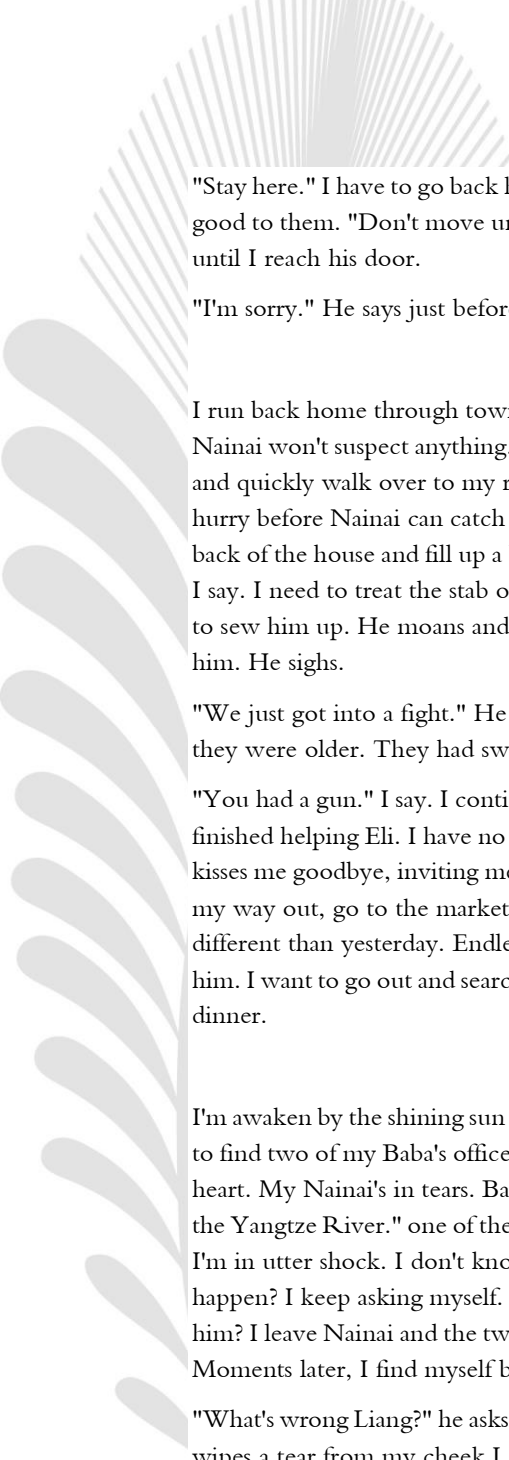
Blood smeared all over the wooden floor. Bloody handprints on the wall. The table knocked down. A rifle on the ground. And three English men all beat up in the living room. Eli and Scott are sitting on stools. They have bruises all over their body and several scratches on their arms and chests. And Harry looks the worst; he's lying down in agony on the sofa. He has a black eye, blood running down his face, a huge scratch on his other arm and a lot of smaller cuts all over him. But where's Elliot? I run over to Harry and question him. He says he's fine and to just go check on Elliot.

"Where is he?" I ask.

"He's outside, back of the house." His voice languishes in pain. I immediately stand up and run to the back door. "He's fixing himself up," I hear him faintly from a distance. I push open the back door and see Elliot on the ground, washing his wounds.

"Not again." I say to myself. He sees me and his eyes soften. He looks worse than Harry. He looks exactly as I found him the first time. "Come inside," I instruct. He obliges and follows me back into the house and into his room. "What happened?" I ask him as I sit him down on the bed. He closes his eyes, nods and sighs in shame. "You promised." I pout.

"I know." He says softly while I examine his body. He has a huge scratch along his cheek, so very close to his eyes full of shame. Deeper scratches on his chest than his friends, a more severe head injury seeping down his neck from behind his ear, and a cut resulting in a gory mess on his back I spotted when he sat down.



"Stay here." I have to go back home and grab my supplies. These boys have nothing in this house that could do any good to them. "Don't move until I return. I'm going to get my things." I tell him. His eyes follow my movements until I reach his door.

"I'm sorry." He says just before I leave.

I run back home through town, passing the river and up the hill. I double check my attire before entering so that Nainai won't suspect anything. "Where are the ingredients?" She asks me. I forgot. "I left my wallet at home." I lie and quickly walk over to my room to fetch 'it'. I grab Mama's box of supplies I keep in my drawer and leave in a hurry before Nainai can catch me. I rush back to Elliot's and find him patiently waiting for my return. I go to the back of the house and fill up a bucket of water then enter his room and sit next to him on his bed. "Turn around." I say. I need to treat the stab on his back first, it looks the worst. I clean up his wounds with an old rag and begin to sew him up. He moans and groans in misery and pain. "You want to tell me what happened?" I ask to distract him. He sighs.

"We just got into a fight." He admits and continues by saying, "They beat us up. There were more of them, and they were older. They had swords and knives and daggers.",

"You had a gun." I say. I continue to fix him up, then his friends. Hours pass, it's now 3 in the afternoon and I just finished helping Eli. I have no time to stay and chat, I still have to go to the market. The boys thank me and Elliot kisses me goodbye, inviting me to come by again tomorrow, after promising he would never do this again. I make my way out, go to the market, buy the ingredients for Nainai and hurry home. Tonight at the dinner table is no different than yesterday. Endless questions about my whereabouts and still no sign of Baba. This is really unlike him. I want to go out and search for him but I'm absolutely drained from the events of today and doze off right after dinner.

I'm awoken by the shining sun again. Anxious to see Elliot. I ready myself in minutes and walk into the living room to find two of my Baba's officers with Nainai. The three of them turn their heads as I enter. Worry starts to fill my heart. My Nainai's in tears. Baba's officers are gloomy. Oh no. After a while of staring, "Your Baba was found in the Yangtze River." one of them says. He continues to explain the situation but I can't hear him over my thoughts. I'm in utter shock. I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to feel. How did this happen? I keep asking myself. Baba was a good man; he was respected by the whole town. Who could do that to him? I leave Nainai and the two men in the middle of their conversation. I can't stand to hear any more about this. Moments later, I find myself back at Elliot's house. I knock on their door and Elliot answers. His face drops.

"What's wrong Liang?" he asks. I walk inside and he sits me down on the sofa. "What happened?" He asks again and wipes a tear from my cheek I didn't realize was there.

"My father," I stutter. "He was found in the river." I cry with my hands over my face, covering my tears. Elliot puts his hand on my shoulder to comfort me. He rubs my back as I cry my eyes out then offers me his handkerchief from his pocket.

"How did you find out?" He asks and I look up at him. He's flushed.

"Police officers found him. They came by my house this morning." I sniff, struggling to breathe.

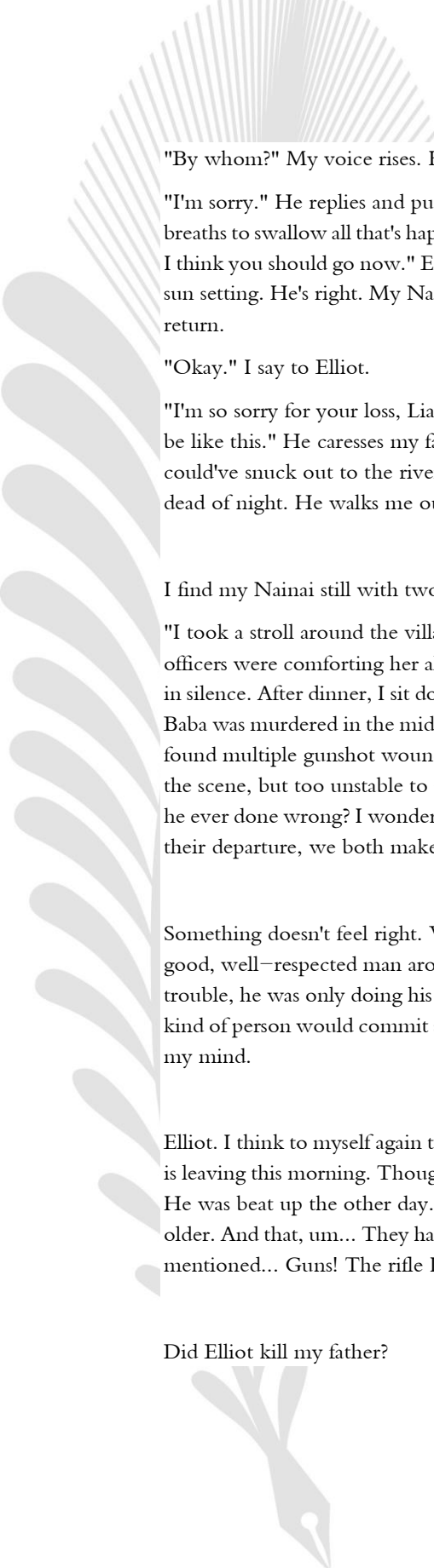
"Where? Do they know who did it?" His voice shakes.

"I couldn't bear to hear it. I don't know who would do that to him. He was a good man." I cry some more. He leaves me alone on the sofa after I've calmed down and goes over to his friends in the dining room. I hear them faintly but I can't manage to make up their conversation.

"Hey." I hear Elliot's voice waking me up. I didn't realize I fell asleep. My cries must've tired myself out. He sits down and joins me on the sofa as I sit up. "Liang, I have to tell you something," he admits and I look into his eyes, awaiting his news. He takes a deep breath and says, "Me and the guys – we must return to Britain tomorrow morning." What? They just got here.

"Why?" I ask in shock.

"We were instructed to." He answers.



"By whom?" My voice rises. He can't leave. I just lost my Baba, I can't lose him too.

"I'm sorry." He replies and puts his hand on my shoulder, leaving my question unanswered. I take a few deep breaths to swallow all that's happened today. First, my Baba. Now, him? What did I do to deserve this pain? "Liang, I think you should go now." Elliot says. Is he kicking me out? "It's getting late." I look out the window and see the sun setting. He's right. My Nainai must be so worried and heartbroken about the news. She's home alone, I must return.

"Okay." I say to Elliot.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Liang. And I'm sorry for leaving." He says to me at the door. "I wish it didn't have to be like this." He caresses my face. "I wish it could've been like the last time." He says. I wish that too. I wish we could've snuck out to the river again, and I wish we could've gone on spontaneous walks down the street in the dead of night. He walks me out the door, we say our last goodbyes and I walk back home in sorrow.

I find my Nainai still with two of Baba's officers. "Where were you?" Nainai asks.

"I took a stroll around the village. I needed some air, I needed to be alone." I lie to her face again. I assume the officers were comforting her all day since she would've been alone. I prepare dinner for all four of us and we dine in silence. After dinner, I sit down with them and the officers explain again what had happened. They said that my Baba was murdered in the middle of the night yesterday and dumped into the Yangtze River early morning. They found multiple gunshot wounds saying that was his probable cause of death. Five other officers were with him at the scene, but too unstable to say what had happened that night. Why would anyone want to kill him? What has he ever done wrong? I wonder. Before leaving, the officers say they would tell us more if they hear anything. After their departure, we both make our way to bed in silence.

Something doesn't feel right. Who would do such a thing is what I keep wondering to myself. My Baba was a good, well-respected man around town. He knew everyone and everyone knew him. If he ever got someone in trouble, he was only doing his job and doing well for society. And to dump his body in the river is so cruel. What kind of person would commit such crime? I have so many unanswered questions. I fall asleep before they take over my mind.

Elliot. I think to myself again the moment I wake up, just like every other morning. I lie in bed longer today as he is leaving this morning. Thoughts of my Baba's death and Elliot's sudden departure flood my mind. Elliot, I think. He was beat up the other day. And so were his friends. He said they had knives, and... he said, he said they were older. And that, um... They had daggers and swords too. What else did he say? Wait, what did the police say? They mentioned... Guns! The rifle I saw lying on the ground!

Did Elliot kill my father?

Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: A Story Retold

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Le, Nicole – 15

Part One

*With the final plunge
He pierced his sword
Through the monstrous monarch's heart.*

*Gone were the days of wrong and sin
Since the conqueror was made king.
Behold the uprising of
The Heavenly Kingdom of Taiping.*

Upon hearing the heroic ending to his favourite epic, the young boy managed to close his gaping mouth and blink his dumbfoundedness away. His father Jing Yang looked at him with obvious amusement.

"Xiu Quan, did you enjoy the story?"

"Papa, if you could read this to me all day every day, I'd enjoy it even more!" the young boy replied with much gusto.

"You know very well I cannot. I must work, and you have school," his father replied regretfully as the boy displayed a profound disappointment in his eyes.

He continued, as an attempt to lift his son's spirits, "Once you pass the Imperial Examination, we won't ever have to worry about money again, and then, I'll consider it," he explained as he closed the only book they owned.

"Speaking of work.....I, uh.....I must leave to run an errand at the government office now."

Unsettled, the child spoke up, "but Papa, it's nearly the midnight hour."

"I'll be back before you know it. You'll wake up to a feast of a breakfast tomorrow, I promise," his father assured him as he stepped outside the ramshackle wooden hut and into the cold.

Xiu Quan was not convinced, but lay down in his straw bed, closed his eyes, and listened to the crackling of the fire and the squeaking of the mice, until fatigue took over his senses and plunged him into a deep and blissful sleep.

That night, he dreamt of the shiny swords and triumphant battles.

Part Two

He had been doing this for 25 years. Why did this time feel different? It was too quiet for a hustling and bustling city like Shanghai. Usually, he was able to hear the drunken cackles of the assigned patrols from the bottom of the wall. However, when he scanned the perimeter of the giant defensive wall surrounding the city, not a single guard was in sight. How peculiar.

Shaking all suspicious thoughts from his head to not waste time any further, Jing Yang tucked his stray strands of ashen grey hair back behind his ear, and persuaded himself that this was a coincidental blessing, making it easier for him to sneak into the city undetected.

Despite his age, he was rather agile and managed to climb his way up the steep surface, and with a potato sack and rope in hand, he maneuvered his way through a narrow gap in the brick wall and into the town.

He had been so concentrated on the task at hand that he did not notice the dark figure trailing behind him.

Jing Yang shuffled anxiously towards his destination --- the city's storeroom. His wrinkly fingers reached for his keys hanging from his belt.

He had access to many of the city's government facilities as he was working as a civil servant. Loyalty and honour were qualities expected of him, but for 25 long years, he had failed to fulfil these expectations.

What other choice did he have but to resort to appropriation? He refused to take up the uncouth custom of taking bribes and exploiting the inhabitants of the City.

His father had taught him, *Follow Confucius' teachings and heed the will of Heaven. The gods would then await you with our reward in the afterlife.*

However, his father had failed to mention that being an honest man among a sea of corrupt officials resulted in their heated resentment and them bad-mouthing him in front of the members of the imperial clan. Jing Yang had to find out the hard way that the man who preserved his integrity was generally considered as incapable or a dreamer. It truly was not an easy task to swim against the stream, especially when he did not earn as much as the officials who do made a living immorally.

He had to. He *had* to do this. *He had a son to feed.*

Silently, he unlocked the doors to the cellar, hoping to find rice and medicinal herbs. Instead, he spotted a carton of vegetables in the corner of the room. He stretched his fingers open, grabbing handfuls of various greens to stuff them in his sack, when without warning, the shadow crept up from behind him and bashed Jing Yang on the head, causing him to fall unconscious, barely alive.

"Caught red-handed," the voice echoed sinisterly in the damp cellar.

Part Three

The 36-year-old Hong Xiuquan had never strived for less than the best. Although he was born into a small and poor Hakka family, his dreams had always been big.

It was a radiant and fragrant morning. Hong would receive his results of the Imperial Examinations that evening. Confident that he would receive excellent results, he commenced his venture into the Chinese City of Shanghai to purchase a piglet to slaughter and wine for the celebratory dinner that night. It would be his first time within the walls. On the way there, he might even bump into his father who had not come home last night. He probably had to work overtime, considering how dedicated he was to his work, working past midnight nearly every day.

Hong approached the towering brick walls, and could not help himself from dropping his jaw in astonishment. The structure stood majestically in front of him, the impressive grandeur and simplicity of it seemed to imply that it had been built by the hand of God. Behind the walls would surely be a city that deserved to be where Hong would pursue his dream. He would follow in his father's footsteps and become a civil servant, maybe a top-ranking official to enforce the law and bring peace to the city, the country, his home.

On the other side of town, a man bucked violently against the wooden frame that he was strapped to as his executioner sliced repeatedly into his left arm. The man rolled his head backwards to gaze up at the sky, hoping to see the gods reaching out to him to save him from this agony, but he saw nothing, for his vision had been blocked by the grey hairs that had fallen onto his aged visage.

He could only hear the faint-hearted gasps of witnesses surrounding him, his own tortured, gargled screams and a menacing voice that sneered, "*Where's your God now?*"

"Identification, please," the Qing soldier demanded coldly. Hong suavely slipped out his documents to show the other man, who gave him a fancy stamp and nod of approval to head through the southern gate.

The executioner moved over to yank the man's bloodied hair with his right hand, and brought up his free hand to slap him hard across the face with the palm, the crisp sound echoing incredibly loudly in the silence.

The man jerked awake from the impact. “Wake up, we’re not done here yet, not for what you have done……” What *had* he done? He could not recall. The only thought he had was that of his son, yes, he was doing this for him.

Carrying only a string of copper coins only to be used on special occasions, Hong’s impoverished appearance drew the attention of many well-to-do townsmen. He was taken aback by the suddenness of advances of two foreign-looking strangers, presumably European Christian missionaries, who presented Hong with a pamphlet about their religion.

Christianity: Jesus is the answer, it wrote.

Hong was so thrilled about his newfound popularity that he had not bothered to read the pamphlets he had just received, nor did he notice the crowd of people gathering curiously at the other end of the street. Born with an inquisitive mind, Hong decided to take a peek to find out what the fuss was all about.

“—This man, an ex-official who vowed to serve the Shanghai county government, and swore allegiance to the country and to protect the Chinese, has betrayed us shamelessly by stealing from us for decades. We do not tolerate such treachery.”

He jostled through the disturbed crowd. The closer he got, the more apparent the noises became. Instantly regretting his curiosity, Hong froze at the sight in front of his eyes.

“For his crimes of treason and disloyalty to the country……I hereby sentence this man to death.”

He delivered the final cut into the man’s chest.

An dry inaudible sound escaped from Hong’s quivering lips.

Papa.

Part Four

Hong spent several nights in the Shanghai Jade Dragon Tavern, where they sold cheap wine in large quantities and even cheaper comfort from well-dressed female companions. Even so, Hong wanted to be alone with his drinks, not wanting the realisation of his father’s death to sink in.

As a result, he had completely forgotten about his examination results until the morning he finally succeeded in dragging himself home and read his letter.

The raging flames devoured the unrolled parchment like a ravenous tiger, filling the fireplace with an intense anger. The paper burned, condemned to die as pitiful grey ash, as was Hong’s hopes and aspirations. He had failed the Imperial Examination.

Hong stared vacantly into the fire, his once self-assured gaze now devoid of all emotion. His eyes fixated onto the image of the dancing flames, and he wondered how they could crackle so passionately whereas he felt nothing at all.

The air in the hut thickened with smoke, causing Hong to feel sleepy and confused, and he fell asleep, exhausted and hungover.

A disoriented Hong stumbled around blindly in the empty void of his conscience, desperate for a way out. As if someone had heard his prayers, a glowing entity descended from the heavens, illuminating the space with a blinding white light.

He had a face like the rising sun and eyes like flaming torches, and spoke to him with a voice of a multitude, “Come, child. He has been awaiting your arrival.”

Expecting him was a seraph clothed in a black robe with an intricate pattern of an airborne dragon. He was stroking his long, golden beard, from which he miraculously pulled out a handsome-looking sword and a seal stone with the words ‘TaiPing TianGuo’ (The Heaven Kingdom of Eternal Peace) engraved into the chop, and bestowed them upon the dumb-stricken mortal.

The jade-encrusted sword glowed with a gentle brilliance upon Hong’s palms. It was much lighter than it looked to be.

“Hong, mankind has lost their faith in me and have turned to demon worship,” the bellowing voice spoke solemnly to Hong, who was gazing at Him in wonderment.

“I now entrust you with the great honour of purging China of the demons and sinners that infest this country.” Hong felt the augmenting weight of the seal stone in his hand as the responsibility magnified upon his shoulders.

He woke from his state of unconsciousness, breathless and heart racing.

The epiphany arrived suddenly and without warning. It was dark outside with a hint of daybreak, and within this timeless space, Hong’s head seemed to open up, allowing a brilliant white light to pour over him, and flooding into his entire body. He was now awake in utter amazement.

He knew now, that the gods above had sent him to Earth to carry out one task — to rid China of the devils that infest his beloved country.

His previously hollow mind was now filled to the brim with a strong determination and an indescribable contentment that extended beyond the bounds of human expression.

He was the brother of Christ and he had a Kingdom to build.

Part Five

It had been thirty years since the Hong’s experience of the mystical vision. He had not forgotten it, nor the message that was sent to him.

He looked upon the fruits of his rebellion from where he stood, which was 10 metres above ground level. He was standing on the very defensive wall that had fought off thousands of Japanese pirates, and protected his city from harm.

They look like pathetic scrambling ants, Hong thought to himself, as he watched his fellow rebels raid the homes of the noncomplying villagers who had refused to give in to change. This was the 30th village he had to burn down in ten years, but of course, this was all for the greater good.

He had a Heavenly Kingdom to build, and to instill moral values in the hearts of the people by promoting Christian values. To do that, he had to gain the trust of the locals, rid China of the disgusting teachings of Confucius and overthrow the dictating government of the Qing dynasty. Yes, he admitted, millions upon millions of men had been slaughtered in the process, but this did not stop him from seizing city upon city. Countless fields of crops had been burnt down, mere collateral damage that resulted in the starvation of many, yes, but the God would not allow innocents to die of famine. The deceased were anything but innocent and had to be condemned to a life in eternal hell. It was an effective process of weeding out the sinners and creating a new world of justice and righteousness.

Yet, many people had advised him, “Master Hong, perhaps you are bent on making your burlesque religious pretensions serve your political purpose and avenge the death of your father?”

Hong did not think so, and neither would those who did, as Hong would sentence them to their immediate decapitation as soon as someone said so. He could not risk an uprising against his kingdom, and sacrifices *had* to be made.

The day had come to a pleasant close. Hong was satisfied with the progress he had made that day. Three more cities had been taken by his elite force of loyal rebels, a necessity in his intricately thought-out and ambitious plan to expand the boundaries of his Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, but his sweet moment of victory was short-lived.

“Sorry to interrupt, but an urgent matter has arisen,” his advisor Lu Feng said as he entered Hong’s chamber.

“Master Hong, it appears that there was a disturbance in Nanjing. The townsmen there have made an assassination attempt on one of the Taiping Princes. Unsuccessful. Chaos everywhere and—”

“Worry not, my loyal advisor,” Hong interrupted with the utmost confidence,

“God will defend Nanjing.”

As if Lu Feng had told him nothing of the utmost importance, Hong casually requested for the time.

“Seven in the evening, Master.”

Hong’s lips curled up into a cheeky smile.

“Perfect, my favourite time of the day. Prepare my supper, and let us feast tonight,” he ordered with a gleeful grin.

Lu Feng hesitated, “My good lord, we are running short on food, I’m afraid. The last of the rice fields in the region had been destroyed. We do not have much left but a crate of wild vegetables.”

“Ah, brilliant!” Hong’s eyes brightened with sweet nostalgia. “My father used to love those, you see. He’d bring back a sack full of fresh greens every—” Hong’s voice trailed off as he was reminded of that day many years ago, when he witnessed the terrible occurrence.

His advisor sensed his discomfort and said, “I’ll bring you your supper, Master.”

Hong gulped down a spoonful of bizarre-looking vegetables. They tasted somewhat abnormal, like bitter lettuce leaves, but he was starving and ended up finishing every bit of food on his plate.

His throat was feeling dry and his tongue a little irritated after his meal, and Hong assumed that he must’ve been dehydrated. Building an empire required blood, sweat and tears and drinking enough liquids was essential to keep himself healthy. What was a Kingdom without a fit leader to rule it?

“Lu Feng,” he called, “fetch me the best bottle of rice wine. Let us welcome our impending victory with a celebratory clink of our glasses.”

When Lu Feng returned with the bottle in hand, he found his Master sprawled on the marble floor of his office, hands wrapped tightly around his neck, as if he was trying desperately to catch his breath.

Hong, who was barely conscious, moved his blue lips in an attempt to mutter out his final words, as he struggled to gasp for air.

And what monumental last words they were.

“Papa.....they got what they deserved.....”

For thirty years the kingdom thrived

Until the god-like man had died.

With him, crumbled down the mighty wall,

And marked the start of his Kingdom’s fall.

The Yu Yuan Garden

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Leung, Samantha – 15

Late in the summer, my mother decided I was too much of an indoorsy person, perhaps because I never left the house, or because she just wanted an excuse to have me leave the Internet. She started to take me to those Chinese restaurants with my grandparents, where people love to shout all their secrets, chanting food names at the waiters and spilling tea. Oh and also those little carts that will break your feet, no apologies included.

“Why aren’t you eating, Eva?” asked Grandpa.

“I don’t like it here,” I responded.

Mom gave me a death shot. I dodged it and concentrated on the yellow lights.

“Sorry Eva, it’s a bit too loud here. Can you say it once more?”

“Poor appetite.”

“You’ve been like this for a couple of days now, I think you should see a doctor. A Chinese doctor.”

No way, I thought.

“Yes, I know one in Shanghai, an old friend of mine actually. You should go Eva,” aid Grandpa.

“Will you be going, Gramps?”

“No, Eva. I’m too old to go that far,” sighed Gramps.

Just as I thought life couldn’t get any worse, mom convinced dad to go, for real.

“Darling, you have been a very stressed man lately. I think we should go to somewhere for a short vacation.”

She paused. “What about Shanghai?”

My father and I sighed. He then grinned and nodded his head to approve the idea unwillingly. “Brilliant! This would be spectacular for the both of you,” Mom said with full excitement. “So, we will be leaving next week, don’t worry about the air tickets and hotels, it’s all on me.” She continued to annoy my father about the details of the trip. And I, luckily, managed to exclude myself in the conversation.

I woke up in a room. Alone. Strange. Unfamiliar. I started to panic for a second, but then, I realised I was in this deafening city, Shanghai. I never liked the city; it was a bit too old, a bit too dirty, a bit too unlikable.

I went on to check my social medias. Signal blocked. Tried to Google why. Signal blocked. Asked Siri why.

Couldn’t get the connection to work. I had been poking my phone furiously for a solid 30 minutes, moaning about every single thing that annoys me, and I was about to go bonkers until my driver finally arrived.

My brainless driver dropped me off at some random, packed street, which I was certain, wasn’t where I was supposed to go. I tried to get my location on my phone but the signal was blocked. I looked around; cars, bags, phones, unfamiliar faces. I paused and stood where I was, trying to figure out what to do next.

And so I did.

I walked along the streets. All I saw was shiny things and fancy fabrics, which I would have bought if I had my money. My mood escalated quite quickly. I was pushed around by a crowd of tourist, who couldn’t take their eyes off those sparkly items. Plus those sharp paper bags, my body felt like being poked by thousands of needles. I figured this wasn’t the best idea. I went for the more natural-related kind of a place, and I stumbled across a wall. Not like any wall. An ancient China wall. I reckon it was for some kind of protection back in the days.

I walked into the area of old architecture, which was exactly how it was shown on television. I ambled around and took some photos. I started to wonder how life was back then, children running here and there, parents yelling them to come back, selling food along the streets... My thought vanished when I saw this garden ahead, it was simply beautiful. Venerable, in fact.

I walked into the garden and I woke up lying on the floor.

Why? I asked myself.

My mind was full of confusion. Full of unanswered questions. Echoing.

I was still on the floor. Unable to move. Headache.

“Lady! Lady! Are you alright? Oh no! What happened? Oh my! Someone call the doctor! Oh my Lady!” Cried the woman.

I was too weak to process what happened.

Minutes felt like hours. Days felt like months.

How was I blacked out? No idea at all.

The moment I woke up, the sunlight blinded my eyes. I covered my eyes with one hand, and pushed myself up with another. I felt weird, my head was heavy, my feet felt small, and my body just wasn’t mine. I was wearing Chinese styled clothing; a pink dress with damask-weave design of lotus, the sleeves were big and covered with

a dancing dragon. I lifted up my arms and touched my hair. It was well made, with lots of pins and dangling accessories. My foot though, was a true nightmare. I looked down and saw a child's foot, probably a size four. I glanced around. I was in an arbour. Surrounded by flowers, ponds, singing creatures. It was all so, so lovely. I took off those fetus shoes and began walking around what I heard someone call the Yu Yuan Garden. I didn't think much at that point – I wasn't even sure if I was asleep or awake. Well, I was still going to enjoy this enchanting garden anyway.

"Miss Eva," someone said gently.

I shivered and slowly turned my head around. No one was there.

"Miss Eva!" This time more loudly.

I wasn't sure if someone was calling me, or my hearing problem had become worse. I looked around in great detail and still, nobody.

Moments later, there was this elegant woman approaching me. Yelling, "Miss Eva! Miss Eva!"

"Who are you? And why that name? Stop it, I don't like it."

"Oh, Miss Eva. Are you playing with me again? I'm your maid, Ting," laughed the maid.

"What on earth are you talking about? What year is it?" I asked.

"What do you mean by what year? It's the Qing Dynasty. Please stop teasing with me, Miss Eva. We will be greeting the emperor soon," said Ting with a straight face.

What? It was the only thing echoing on my mind. All of these unsolved mysteries, and strange people. *Is this real life? Or is this just fantasy?*

We were walking in the corridor to the hall, when she suddenly screamed, "Miss Eva! Where are your shoes? You were walking bare feet this whole time? I'm so sorry, it's my fault. I'm going to get a new one for you. Wait here."

"I don't" I sighed, "need shoes." I paused. "Pray to God she will bring the right shoes."

Marching sounds. I heard loads of foot steps. I stared and saw an army of soldiers coming from ahead. Their footsteps were synchronized, which were oddly satisfying. "Morning, Miss Eva." said the leader.

"Good morning?" I mumbled.

"This is Soldier Wong, Miss Eva. You two have met before." Said Ting, panting.

"Oh, I don't reckon we did," I said, as the soldiers were marching away.

"Your shoes," she said, still panting.

She gestured me to sit down and put on my shoes. They were still too small. However, the back part of the shoe was soft, so I just stepped on it and continued walking.

The hall looked grand on the outside. Red walls and green ceilings, typical Chinese architectures I saw the hall reflected on the pond surface, with lotus and fishes dancing and swirling together.

I walked into the room. I felt tense. I saw a man sitting on the gold couch, who looked at me with a death stare, just like my mom. I stood there, shaking. Ting whispered "Greet him! What are you doing?"

"Good Morning, Emperor" I said, with a shaking voice.

Then suddenly, he showed a big smile on his face and said in excitement, "Have a seat Eva. The food is on its way!"

The servants brought out a massive amount of food, with dim sums like xiao mai and dumplings. I instantly thought of that Chinese restaurant, and how much I disliked it.

"Why aren't you eating? It's delicious!" Asked the emperor.

"I don't like it," I said, without doubt.

Horrified looks from everyone in the room, all eyes on me.

"I'm sorry, what? This is just too distracting! Look at it! I don't get why you're not eating?" Mumbled the emperor with a full mouth of food.

"Oh, nothing. I was just daydreaming." I responded.

I sighed, *well, I guess this day has come...* I gently lifted up the chopstick and took a dumpling from the plate. I put the dumpling into my mouth as slowly as possible, with my shaking hands. It was the first time in ten years since I ate Chinese food. It felt..... extraordinary. I took another one, another one, another one, and another one. A different one each time. The texture and taste, I couldn't put it into words, it was like, I was in a different dimension, a whole new experience.

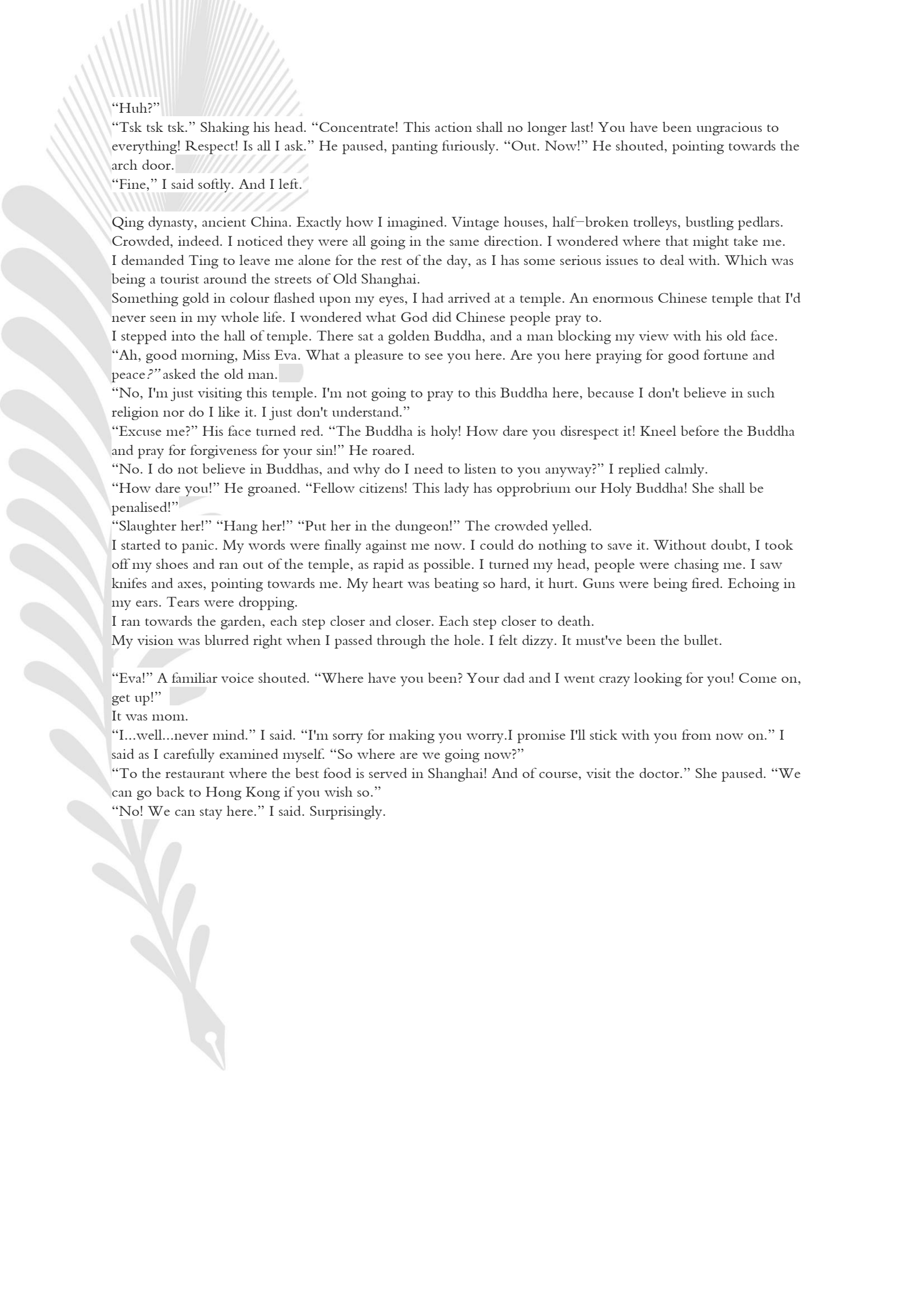
I was surprised that the whole table of food was finished, not a single thing was left. And I did that. Yes. I actually did, I liked it, no. I loved it. It's hard to admit but I indeed truly admire Chinese food.

"Did you like the meal, Eva?" asked the emperor.

"Sure I did! Thank you so much."

He then requested for a walk with me. He told me that the Yuyuan Garden was divided into 5 areas, Each area was separated from the others by dragon walls with undulating gray tiled ridges, and the mighty dragon head. He continued to ramble about how prideful he was of the garden, as I was lured into this stunning scenery. Cheerful blue skies with floating pure marshmallows, wait no, is that a shrimp? Cha Siu Bao? Or a Siu Mai?

"...isn't it? Eva?" I was interrupted by his voice.



“Huh?”

“Tsk tsk tsk.” Shaking his head. “Concentrate! This action shall no longer last! You have been ungracious to everything! Respect! Is all I ask.” He paused, panting furiously. “Out. Now!” He shouted, pointing towards the arch door.

“Fine,” I said softly. And I left.

Qing dynasty, ancient China. Exactly how I imagined. Vintage houses, half-broken trolleys, bustling pedlars. Crowded, indeed. I noticed they were all going in the same direction. I wondered where that might take me. I demanded Ting to leave me alone for the rest of the day, as I has some serious issues to deal with. Which was being a tourist around the streets of Old Shanghai.

Something gold in colour flashed upon my eyes, I had arrived at a temple. An enormous Chinese temple that I'd never seen in my whole life. I wondered what God did Chinese people pray to.

I stepped into the hall of temple. There sat a golden Buddha, and a man blocking my view with his old face.

“Ah, good morning, Miss Eva. What a pleasure to see you here. Are you here praying for good fortune and peace?” asked the old man.

“No, I'm just visiting this temple. I'm not going to pray to this Buddha here, because I don't believe in such religion nor do I like it. I just don't understand.”

“Excuse me?” His face turned red. “The Buddha is holy! How dare you disrespect it! Kneel before the Buddha and pray for forgiveness for your sin!” He roared.

“No. I do not believe in Buddhas, and why do I need to listen to you anyway?” I replied calmly.

“How dare you!” He groaned. “Fellow citizens! This lady has opprobrium our Holy Buddha! She shall be penalised!”

“Slaughter her!” “Hang her!” “Put her in the dungeon!” The crowd yelled.

I started to panic. My words were finally against me now. I could do nothing to save it. Without doubt, I took off my shoes and ran out of the temple, as rapid as possible. I turned my head, people were chasing me. I saw knives and axes, pointing towards me. My heart was beating so hard, it hurt. Guns were being fired. Echoing in my ears. Tears were dropping.

I ran towards the garden, each step closer and closer. Each step closer to death.

My vision was blurred right when I passed through the hole. I felt dizzy. It must've been the bullet.

“Eva!” A familiar voice shouted. “Where have you been? Your dad and I went crazy looking for you! Come on, get up!”

It was mom.

“I...well...never mind.” I said. “I'm sorry for making you worry. I promise I'll stick with you from now on.” I said as I carefully examined myself. “So where are we going now?”

“To the restaurant where the best food is served in Shanghai! And of course, visit the doctor.” She paused. “We can go back to Hong Kong if you wish so.”

“No! We can stay here.” I said. Surprisingly.

Lilies in the Chinese City

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Li, Rina – 15

Wheezing, Sum tried to control his breathing as he flattened himself against the wooden crate.

He was on another of those tasks assigned by Lin. Lin was always the one with the most dangerous missions, ones that usually involve high-ranking targets; government officials. True, those tasks could sometimes earn him enough for an entire week, with an extra for his bedridden mother. But they usually end with near-death encounters. Too bad that they were all that has been supporting him and his family since his father got killed.

Sum shivered. The cool sea breeze whipped through the thin fabric of his shirt at his sweat-soaked back, and the fading sunlight gave him no comfort.

Peering back over the box, he caught a glimpse of his trackers, and quickly ducked his head back down. They had been following him ever since they caught him eavesdropping on their conversation near the merchant ships down the waterfront. He should've left when he'd gotten all the information he needed. But curiosity made him stay for a few minutes more. He regretted it now.

Shrinking back into his hiding place, he is again thankful for his small size. If he was any bigger, he would not have been able to squeeze into that gap between a stack of unused crates that now served as his only line of defense.

Sum listened as the shuffling on the wooden port ceased, and the thumping footsteps grew fainter as his pursuers finally moved on.

He opened his eyes and stared intently at the clear sky above, listening for any more unfamiliar sounds aside the splashing of waves hitting the barnacle encrusted wooden supports, the high-and-low squeaking of stiff floorboards, the distant buzz of noisy traders with their porcelain and silver.....

He let out a deep breath.

They were finally gone.

His muscles protested as he climbed up the impossibly steep stairs to his home, a thick layer of dust stirring up with every step.

Light from the open doorways aligning the corridors on each floor flickered and shone upon the grimy, bare concrete floor as the sky outside slowly turned red.

Sum reached the top of the stairs, and walked past the entire line of doorways to reach the furthest door. "Lian? Mother?" He called as he entered the threshold, taking off his worn canvas shoes.

His mother smiled weakly from her usual place at the thin, dirty mattress next to the stained bottle-green windows, as his younger brother looked up from his place at the dinner table.

"Sum!" Lian rushed into his brother with an enthusiastic hug, "The teacher showed my homework to the class today!"

Sum laughed, "That's great, Lian. And what did she say?"

"She said it was very very good, and she would pin it up....."

His mother interjected, "Lian, let your brother have his dinner first." She turned to Sum. "Dear, Serene passed by with some salted fish this afternoon, before her performance. It's on the table."

"Guess who's back!!" A girl stepped into the small room, her hair falling off her shoulders in a thick curtain of curly jet-black locks. Her silver flower earrings glinted in the light of their oil lamp.

Lian turned around excitedly and ran to the newcomer. "Serene!"

Her usual sweet-scented perfume followed her into the room.

Sum knew Serene for as long as he could remember. Her family lived right next doors when they were just toddlers, and the two had been playmates since he learnt how to crawl. Something just clicked between them, and they quickly became fast friends, and their friendship remained strong even when Serene and the rest of her family moved away to live with her father, who had been slowly climbing up the ranks of the government, and

had managed to secure better living quarters for his family. But he had never met her father even after all these years, since he had been busy.

Sum grinned. "How was the performance today?"

Her eyes twinkled as her lips stretched into a smile. "Oh, just the usual..." She trailed off, "...except this time I've been invited to perform at the Richards' Hotel and Restaurant tomorrow night. You know, the one with a fancy ballroom?"

"Congratulations! And, the one outside the old city walls?" Sum raised an eyebrow.

Lian's eyes widened. "That's amazing! You can go outside the walls, and you get to perform for foreigners?"

Serene laughed, "Yes, and my father is going too! Oh, I wish I could bring you along. But I'll tell you everything afterwards, deal?"

"Deal." Lian replied cheerfully.

His bike rattled on the cobblestones as he sped past small brick houses with faded shutter—windows under the early morning sun.

Abandoning his bike outside the pub, he headed into the pub. A strong smell of smoke and alcohol slapped him in the face as he stepped into the entrance of the dingy pub. He sat down at one of the poker tables dotting the right side of the room, facing away from the dimly lit bar on the other side of the room.

"My boy! How was the mission, eh?" A large man strolled over to the table, clamping a firm hand on Sum's shoulder as he walked past to take a seat.

Sum sat up straighter. "From what I have heard, the Mr. He has arranged for papers to be signed tomorrow, at eight o'clock, and then his counterpart will be free to trade as they please, with no restrictions." He still doesn't have a clue as to the purpose of collecting this information, as Lin refused to disclose anything else about the issue.

Lin whistled. "Well, he's decided to move quickly. Good that I've reached out to some contacts..."

Sum looked at him curiously.

"Sea bandits are ruthless and sometimes unpredictable." He murmured, eyes focusing on the reddish chandelier above them. "But they can take a job. They would enjoy this task, especially."

"Sea bandits? But they....."

"I do not agree to their methods more than you do. But forget morals and principles now."

He turned back to Sum. "You will take this task, yes?"

"Yes, but....."

"Hush. They are here."

Lin straightened up. He looked at Sum, wary.

A scraggly gang of grimy figures entered the room, the thick soles of their feet scraping at the tiled floor.

Sum suddenly felt very small. The small band of sea bandits filled up the room with an acrid smell of stale fish and sea salt. It was suffocating.

The man in the lead strode up to Lin at a leisurely pace. Sum caught a glimpse of his face as the man turned his head to survey the room, and barely held back a gasp.

Bloodshot eyes and a large bumpy nose. Small nicks and scratches dotted his face. But the most monstrous feature, was this gigantic scar that ran across his face from his right eye to the corner of his mouth. The raw pink tissue glistened in the light, its crud dirty stitches crisscrossing the gaping wound.

He wasn't a large and bulky man like Lin. In fact, most of the pirates were thin, with gnarly looking fingers and their clothes hanging limply from their bodies. But their presence seemed to fill the air with menace and trickery.

Scarred Eye regarded Lin scrutinizingly as he took a seat opposite to Lin. He grinned, showing off his crooked, yellowed teeth. "Let's get on with it, Lin? Who's the man you'll be sending out with us?"

Lin gestured to Sum. Scarred Eye raised an eyebrow. When Scarred Eye raises his eyebrow, the skin around his scar tightens to a whiter shade, which made it quite frightening to see.

"That little runt? Pshew. How old can he be, nine?"

Sum stayed absolutely still, not trusting his mouth to speak.

Lin replied for him. "Twelve, actually. And I assure you, Sum is absolutely competent for this task."

"That's his name? Sum?" He turned to the boy. "Sum, is it? Ha, do people call you Little Sum? It suits you well, don't you think, Little Sum?"

Sum remained as silent as a rock.

Scarred Eye harrumphed. "Really isn't worth a sum, is he. Doesn't speak at all."

The gang of bandits jostled and guffawed.

The muscles of Lin's jaw tightened. "Shall we get to the mission, after all the.....pleasantries, have been exchanged, Wang?"

Ah. So Scarred Eye's name was Wang.

Scarred Eye, or Wang, raised his eyebrow again. "Whatever you say, Lin." He reclined against his seat at the poker table, arms folded, while Lin leaned forward, hands clasped together on top of the table.

"Sum has collected information just yesterday on the paper signings between Mr He and the merchants. The signing will be held tonight."

Wang stroked his chin. "And they would, of course, be meeting at the Richards' Hotel and Restaurant. That's where all the business deals of those pompous merchants are settled....."

He gave a crooked grin, "When this deal is broken, they'll lose their business in the Chinese city!" He sniggered. "Finally, I will have my revenge on those blasted merchants for taking half my crew!"

Sum stepped out of the pub, his brain swirling from the planning, and the very noticeable tension. Squinting in the mid afternoon sunlight, he fumbled with his bike clumsily.

He had promised to meet Serene at the park now, at midday, right before her rehearsal. And now he speeds through the Chinese city, past the City God Temple and the Jian'an Temple, past men lounging around, taking a rest from their hard labour for their midday opium break. Sum wrinkled his nose as he flew through a cloud of tobacco-opium smoke, past lolling heads of slouching smokers.

He finally arrived at the Public Garden, or the Huangpu Park. Navigating through the twists and turns of the garden like it was the back of his hand, he finally arrived at the courtyard in the most northern part of the park. The small pavilion was hidden in the corner of the garden, where you had to squeeze past two rosehip bushes and duck underneath a wide willow tree before you could reach it.

Serene was balancing on the railing when Sum darted through the willow.

"I'm here!" he panted, sprawling onto the grass.

She rolled her eyes and jumped down, rolling onto the grass next to him. "Late as always. How was your meeting?"

Serene was the only one who knew where Sum actually went during the day.

Sum mumbled, "Great. Going to this Richards' Hotel and Restaurant place to take someone out.....wait..." He sat up. "You're performing at that place tomorrow night....."

Something in his head clicked into place.

"My target would be in the audience."

Serene looked uncertain. "You'll be working at my performance?" Her features smoothed over. "That's not a problem. Like my father always says, everything happens for a reason. If he believes that, then I do too."

Sum let out a shaky sigh. "Alright."

The limestone columns rose six stories high above him, striking against the darkening sky.

Sum stood on the opposite side of the road from the hotel entrance.

He was early.

The plan was to go into the ballroom, where the dinner gathering was to be held, and take the target, Mr He, when he is distracted by the performance. The performance would be at seven o'clock, so that would be the only time they could make their move.

He was there earlier than he was supposed to, so he could stop by Serene's dressing room before her show. He had asked for her assistance on something that afternoon as well.....

Trying to act normal, he steeled his nerves and walked through the entrance casually, hands in his pockets.

Passing the mahogany reception desk lit by two floral hanging lamps, he heaved a silent sigh of relieve. The receptionist hardly paid any attention to him. Or his enraged guest, for that matter.

Finding the side door behind the public sitting area of the hotel, as described by Serene, he stepped into a carpeted corridor, counted three doors down to the left, and knocked.

Serene's golden lily hairpiece jingled as she poked her head out of the door. "Come in!" She said, pulling the door open.

Sum stepped into her dressing room. "Is that the lily hairpin your father gave you last week?"

"This thing?" She reached up to touch the dripping aureate flower that was keeping her hair up securely. "Yes, another lily accessory. Dad said it complements both our personalities. I personally think it's the contrary."

Sum noticed her fingers twisting the fabrics of her cheongsam, the heavily embroidered fabric of carmine twirling with its brilliant golden weavings like a gymnast doing her ribbon dance.

"What did your father advise you on being nervous before a performance?" He prompted her.

She blew a lock of hair from her face. "To always trust my instincts, that are telling me everything is going to be okay."

"And how many times did that advice work out for you?"

"Everytime." She took a deep breath and smiled, her tiny golden lilies reflecting little rays of light onto her red lips and powdered rosy cheeks. She looked elegant, calm. Mature, even. Her lily perfume drifted in the air around her, eliciting a warm sense of comfort to Sum. "Thank you, Sum."

He gave a small smile. "You should trust your father's words. I trust him, even though I've never met him. After all, he's the one who raised you."

She laughed and shook her head slightly. "Your clothes are behind the screen. They should fit you comfortably. Go change."

He had asked Serene for an outfit that would make him blend into the higher-class crowd of traders and officials, and Serene had put together an outfit consisting of a blue suit paired with a crisp white shirt, and nice leather shoes.

Now he stared at himself in the dressing table mirror. He looked like a proper westerner— looking smart and well-groomed.

He didn't feel ready, but at least he looked ready.

Since it would be difficult to disguise the entire gang of sea bandits, only Wang accompanied Sum. And now they sat on the steps of a side entrance, waiting.

Sum's hands twitched. Wang noticed and tilted his head towards him, "Nervous, Little Sum?"

Sum scowled.

"No." He said shortly.

Wang sighed and took a pipe out of his pocket. "Want a whiff?"

He lighted the pipe and took a deep breath. Sum shook his head.

Wang's face twitched, momentarily stretching his gruesome scar. He breathed out. "You know, this is what soldiers take before a battle, this *God's Own Medicine*. Some say it calms you down, excites you, or, if you're one of the lucky ones, makes you fall asleep. Want to bet what'll happen to you?"

Sum frowned. But he was interested. Everyday he sees men slouched on their sofas, puffing away. He had never seen the attraction of just sitting around and drawing on a pipe, and the sickly sweet, floral smell was never enough to tempt him. He had only seen the clouds of smoke a small source of vexation.

Wang held out the pipe.

He took it, and brought it to his mouth. He sucked in. The smoke swirled around his lungs before being breathed out again. He took another whiff. And another. And another.

His muscles relaxed, and a wave of warmth came over him. This peaceful mist settled on his mind, soothing his nerves and clearing away his anxious thoughts. He just sat there, swaying.

Wang took back the pipe and stood up, jolting Sum out of his brief reverie.

“We should get going. The performance would start soon.”

The ballroom was a large hall, round tables with ivory lace tablecloths framing the dance floor which is an area in the middle of the room, right in front of the stage.

Sum hid behind a limestone column near the target’s table. Mr He was facing away from where he was standing. Sum checked the gun Lin had given him. There was a single bullet in the barrel. Lin said he didn’t need to be a good shot to successfully hit a man from so close a range.

Then, the host came onto the stage. “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.....”

Mr He swivelled around in his seat to view the performance. There was a water lily sticking out of his suit pocket.

A sense of dread came over me.

A lily?

“Now, can I have a round of applause as we welcome onto the stage, *Serene He!*”

Sum stood there in a daze as Serene walked onto the stage. How could he have not seen the connection? The same curly black hair, remarkably similar features, like their bow shaped lips.....

Mr He was Serene’s father.

He looked over to Wang.

He was situated at the far end of the room. The scar shadowed his face as he knitted his brows, arms crossed on his chest. He nodded over to Mr He.

Sum hesitated, before slowly creeping closer in the shadows.

The first notes of the song started playing, as Mr He leaned back, relaxed. His fingers touched the petals of the lily that was carefully placed in his breast pocket.

Sum’s hands started to grow warmer.

From where he is standing now, Sum could see the proud glimmer in Mr He’s face. He must’ve been quite the looker in his youth, with a strong jaw and deep dark eyes.

Eyes like Serene’s.

It’s sardonic when you finally get to meet the father of your best friend, only to kill the man.

Sum’s heart beat faster as his quivering hand reached up and found the inner pocket of his suit, where the small rifle was located.

His fingers found the cold, metal surface.

Serene’s voice grew louder as she reached a high note.

Sum halted his movements.

Wang’s scar glowered at him.

“Trust your instincts. Everything is going to be okay.”

Cryptic Puzzle Of The Paper Lantern

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Limbu, Mausam – 15

A dreadful dim and foggy day in the whereabouts of Shanghai, where light rays barely pass through the thick dark clouds resulting with a small radius of tube like light on the city, streets filled with roaring noises from hawkers yelling out to people about what they are selling, their products vary from food to daily necessities. To the uncommon folk around the area these noises may sound rather distressing and one may have a difficult time distinguishing the place from a zoo. At the moment Shanghai is ruled by an lousy emperor named 'Ching' who claims to be the chosen one and sent to Earth by god to teach god's way of thinking and morals, but to whom ever serves under his 'royalty' knows the truth that all he does is eat, sleep and indulge with lovely young ladies, whilst feeding off the poor farmers and villagers who work hard every day just to have a meal with their family. And in one of these unfortunate villagers in the poor area of Shanghai was a 11 year old boy named 'Min.'

Now Min is a boy who lives with his grandfather in a small cottage left behind by his parents who used to live there. Every day, Min would wake up exactly half an hour before the sun makes its appearance and go to work. Min's work does not challenge his physical abilities, but rather his intelligence. He works at a Bun Stall and known to be the youngest hawker, but all Min needs to do is to see which type of bun is more popular at that certain time. For example, people in the summer enjoy meat related buns while in the winter they prefer beans. Min is also accompanied by a middle aged woman whose appearance is very appealing to the opposite gender, leading to more male customers which Min's intelligence certainly catches attention. The Bun Stall sells buns that are dripping with different types of filling such as minced pork/chicken, egg and beans. On a good day the stall would usually have 3-4 buns left out of 25 but when the weather is not doing a favour to the business they wouldn't sell any of those delicious buns. It may sound terrible, but with every bun left, Min can take it back home and feed himself and his grandfather, therefore his job is a major contributor to his wellbeing.

After a tiring day at the stall, Min returned home with some leftover buns and walked happily back home, but his happiness was cut short as he found out that his grandfather looked ill and was moaning in agony

'What happened Yéye?' Min asked anxiously.

'My time has come Min, but don't be discouraged you still have a very long way to go. But before I rest in the arms of god I want to tell you ... something.'

Min takes a huge gulp down his throat and pumps his chest out to feel confident

'Tell me Yéye what is it that you want to tell me?'

'It was a long long time ago before you were born, Shanghai was still a beautiful city where everybody in China knew about and would come for the entertainment and luxury at this time I was working in a popular restaurant where there would be a full house of customers everyday. Your father was a very smart boy just like you and it paid off when he became older, he worked in the business stream and worked with white people before he realised it he was rich! And he met your mother....'

Min interrupts Yéye

'So where are they Yéye?'

Yéye frowns upon the question that Min asked but proceeds with the question

'Min you're a big boy now and you must understand that your parents loved you very much and that they would go to great lengths to protect you.'

'So how did they die?' Min asked with a soft tone while fighting back the tears crawling down his cheek bone

Min was too smart and Yéye couldn't hide the truth from him anymore.

sighs 'your father, my son, was killed by an army of soldiers who go by the name of "the Huang Soldiers" they are a group of soldiers who believe in their own strength and that Shanghai's manpower could rule the whole world at that period. It was only after a few days later that we heard that your father passed away as he was very far away from home we were in deep grief, he didn't deserve to die, he was a good boy who would visit me 5 times a week *sobs* but your mother ran away with all the fortune left behind by your father and only left this cottage which was used for their holiday.'

sobs Min did not have the slightest idea that his father was such a respectable person while his mother was no different to a escort that you would find in the sinful parts of shanghai.Min wipes his tears off his cheekbones with his pale coloured shirt and is now see through with the wetness.

'Its alright,because your father showed us an great example to follow and to you especially so as long as you become a good man like him despite our living situation it will lead you to a good life.'

'really Yéye?'

'Have faith and you will see' replied Yéye with a gentle smile .

Suddenly Yéye rises from his bed

'what are you doing?!You're still ill!'

Min realised he did not bat an eye to him and appeared be searching for something.Yéye kept on searching and searching he looked above,left,right,below and finally after a brief moment he took out an item out from one of the wood flanks below it did not take much strength to remove it Min was surprised as he thought he didn't have it in him,Yéye slowly and gently with no mistake carefully placed the mysterious item at the dinner table at first Min thought it was a dusty pineapple but after blowing off some the dust a much clearer picture was formed.It was an lantern,but the downside of the lantern was that it was contaminated by all types of residue including dust,more dust and some more dust Min felt a bit queasy but carried on to listen what Yéye had to make a speech about this lantern,he thought he was at a show and tell event.

'When your father was 12 he made this lantern to me as a birthday present,he knew that i fonded handcrafted items therefore he decided to make me a lantern completely made out of paper i was very pleased with his product.But this is also the very day where i did not care for him despite of his unconditional love for me as a father i did not do the same for him'

' 'what happened' Min said with a timid tone

'You see Min i was a man who worked very hard everyday for the family and in order to fulfill the needs for my family i would do anything in fact i would do anything for a better living standard.Soon i was lost and it all started from a offer that i could undoubtedly accept...'

'What kind of offer...'

'Do not mistake me as a awful person little one.The offer was given by a group of soldiers who went by the name of 'Huang Soldiers''

Min gasps

'Yes my boy it is the very group of soldiers who are going to strike Shanghai with gas and firearm but more importantly our home is in grave danger.'

'Then we must escape right away!'

Yéye stops Min from packing items by grabbing him by his arm

'I have not completed my story but once i am finished with my story you will understand why i do not want to leave from our home to another and live there in fear'

Miin noticed the word fear and started to pay even more attention to the choice of words from Yéye

'After accepting the offer given by the Huang soldiers i had to move away from shanghai and my family i was recruited to be one of their soldiers and in return they would not harm my family and provide me with much more capital compared to my old job,i travelled by boat,airplanes and tanks to many different places to fight,recruit and kill but i always wrote postcards to my family but i never received any back .One day i at base camp i was about to regroup with my group members but something else distracted me away from doing so it was a tent which was supposedly heavily guarded but since there were no guards at the moment i decided to enter the tent only to find out that it was filled with files,mini figurines,maps but out of all the things i first saw this one thing caught my eye so i decided to take a look as i thought it would be no harm on doing so hence i proceed and opened it only to find out their true motive.Apparently that very one file that i opened was the file to a long term scheme by the Huang soldiers which included taking over china and the king for themselves i was terrified and panicked but somehow managed to calmly place the book back to its original position.After a few weeks i requested for and out and surprisingly the request was approved right the next day i guess they found no purpose to keep me in anymore.I then packed my items and took a bus back home,while travelling back i had a lot of time to think what to say to my family i constantly thought over and over again but only to find out that i was gone for 2 years i i was ashamed at myself.As i stepped into the gates of my home i was greeted warmly by most of my relatives but some did not greet as kindly at me maybe it was because of what i have done during the last 2 years but the silver lining to this is that they actually recieved my letters!As i wrote one before i

departed. While i was greeting and shaking hands to the guests i was trying to find your father after trying for half an hour i realised that he probably is in his bedroom and i was right only to find out that his attitude has changed towards me, he was cold and pale but not caused by any sickness but rather a reaction to my presence. I couldn't blame him as i was lost for the past 2 years i was not there for him when he needed me and my boy this is where everything went wrong and it has damned me ever since.'

Min gasps

'I did not know Yéye'

'Its okay Min it was mine to blame. I also want you to do something for me before my time runs out.'

'What is it Yéye i'll do anything'

'Do you remember the lantern given to me by your father? Well there was a riddle written on it that goes 'it is there forever, and it will protect me whenever' i have discovered the answer already but it took me 2 years to figure it out. Do not feel discouraged because i trust you and you will figure it out much faster than i did. Therefore i want you to go on a journey and tell me once you have figured it out.'

'Yes sir' answered Min with determination.

Min packs his bag which consists with a few clothes, some money he earned and some buns from his workplace. Yéye lights up the lantern and tells Min to symbolize the fire as his will and hope when you feel down

Min started his journey to solve the riddle left by his dad and he walked and walked further and further to an extent where he feels homesick, it was dark and cold Min's clothes were not warm enough to maintain his body temperature and could only rely on the lantern's fire then he then saw a sign board with a name written on it but more importantly he saw a farm farmhouse nearby and with the cold temperature dropping even lower he entered the farmhouse with no hesitation. Next morning he was woken up by an outlandish noise which sounded familiar back in Shanghai not only the noises made Min look baffled there were blankets on top of him! He did not know how to react should he be scared or delighted? *sound of door opening* a man with an odd looking hat appeared and greeted Min warmly, turns out that this man is the one who owns the farmhouse and last night he was the one who placed the blanket on Min.

*what is your name?' asked the farmer

Min thought carefully whether or not to answer his real name to him

'The names Min'

The farmer realised that he had the same name as the one he was going to give to his child

Min and the farmer started talking to each other over delicious lunch and got to know each other better, Min told the farmer the same story Yéye had told him. Then the farmer started with his.

'I used to be a father well i was going to be father with my wife being pregnant, we used to live together in this very farmhouse happily and even we even planned the name for the baby already if it is a boy we would call it Min and if it was a girl we would name her Jing, but a tragic incident occurred. My wife was going into labour in our bedroom accompanied by our local town doctor i waited and waited outside the room with some of mine and my wife's friends it was such torture waiting for news, when the doctor walked towards i felt something wrong about it she then told me that she tried her best but there was no saving her. My heart fell into pieces i didn't know what to do she was the only thing i had left and now that is gone too. Many days passed too many days passed i spent those days sitting on my rocking-chair looking far across the rice and tea fields whether life is worth living anymore, one day i came out from a pub drunk and went to the farmhouse shockingly i found a little girl lying on the ground i checked whether she was alive for not but thankfully she was alive, for a few days she did not talk and it turned out she was abandoned by her family because she was a girl and ever since that day i took her in as my own daughter.'

'If you took her in where is she?'

A little girl who looked 3 years younger than Min dashed in with a pile of tea leaves hugging the farmer and repeatedly saying the same word 'han' this was the moment that Min knew the farmer's name.

'Allow me introduce myself, people call me Han and she is Jing'

Min looks around for his lantern

'Are you looking for this?' Jing asked

looks surprised as the light has not gone out

'Thank you Jing' looking relieved



Min starts reading the riddle out loud

‘it is there forever, and it will protect me whenever’

He figured it out! The answer to this riddle was

interrupted by Jing what is a riddle she asked? Farmer Han spilled out some laughter

‘I must hurry back to my home as I must tell Yéye before his time runs out’

Min realises the fire in the candle was gone weaker

‘I have a car’ Farmer Han replied

After arriving back to his cottage he dashed to Yéye but something looked odd he was not reacting to the voice of Min

‘Looks like I was too late Yéye, I’m very sorry’

A small voiced voice arises but it was not Jing it was Yéye! He was alive despite the worsened condition then Min cut to the chase and told Yéye that the answer to the riddle was Family. Yéye applauded Min so as Farmer Han and Jing.

Min and Yéye moved on to live with Farmer Han and Jing, Yéye medical condition improved after seeing the local doctor and Farmer Han got to be a father of two children who has the same name that him and his wife were going to name their child.

The End

Business Loyalty

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Santillan, Zeidrick – 15

Epigraph: Trust is like money; spend it too easily or spread it too thin, you're bound to get a loss.

ACT 1: EFFICIENT PRODUCTIVITY

48 TONNES OF OPIUM SEIZED, THE CRIMINALS BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

Zhengli examined the newspaper carefully, making to sure to absorb every bit of information presented before him.

A rickety rickshaw rumbled by, the driver getting wet in the heavy rain that soaked Old Shanghai's dilapidated buildings. Zhengli nervously adjusted his hat and tossed the newspaper onto the street, the ink instantly beginning to bleed. He walked up to a wooden door and quickly knocked eight times.

"Password." Grunted a deep voice.

"Um...p-p-pleasure p-phoenix." Zhengli managed to say.

Another grunt and a series of heavy *clunks* followed from the other side and the wooden door swung open. The sentry, a big man with a pockmarked face, silently stepped aside. Zhengli walked in and hung his hat on a rack.

The pungent mix of perfume and alcohol wafted in the stuffy air of the old building. Various sounds emanated from every door. Faded paintings ready to fall off hung from the walls. Zhengli covered his mouth and nose with his hand, uncomfortable with the scent.

An opium den. A centre of precious intel, operations and business. Especially more so since it was the beginning of a new year.

New opportunities. New business partners. New risks.

As part of the Snake Syndicate, Zhengli was assigned to do business with competitors. Never leaving anything to chance and thus a worry wart, he went the extra mile and sure that everything that he did was calculated, executed perfectly and according to schedule. And his lack of friends – of liabilities – was the perfect background for this type of job.

The sound of fireworks and music could be heard from everywhere on this special night, the spectacle painting festive colors on happy faces and entertaining eyes with dances. And some like to end it with a bang, so to speak.

Zhengli scratched the back of his neck, where the black tattoo of the ouroboros was burned onto the skin. He remembered the message he received yesterday.

'Room 13...15...16...17...' He thought to himself. He stopped before his location.

'18.'

He raised his hand to knock, but a mass bumped into him. "Oh, I'm sorry." He turned to see a woman, her black hair flowing to her back. Her outer and only garment was opened slightly, and Zhengli managed to catch a glimpse of a tattoo on her collarbone.

A tattoo of the ouroboros, to be exact.

Their eyes met with a curious understanding and recognition. "I must be on my way." The woman looked into Zhengli's eyes once more before shuffling away.

A contact. Good for business.

He turned to face the door once more and knocked.

"Who is it?" Asked a feminine voice.

Annoyed, Zhengli breathed out slowly. He quickly assessed the situation and remembered his message.

Target is a rich man.

Target is British.

Room 18.

Can afford two or three women.

Either three or four people on the other side, including the target.

Plant given paper.

Target is cautious.

Probably only one woman.

Less mess.

Only a simple eradication method required.

"C-c-complim-m-mentary wine." Zhengli stuttered.

"You sound new." She said. "Well, come in." *Shuffle shuffle.*

"But be very quiet. The customer is asleep."

Perfect.

Click.

Zhengli pushed the door with great force, knocking the woman to the ground. Zhengli then was upon her, using his weight to keep the struggling female down. He used his hands to hold her neck and cover her mouth to keep the woman from screaming. She stopped thrashing after a few minutes, falling unconscious.

He stood up and stepped out of the door to start dragging her body out.

He heard a *whoosh* coming from above him and instinctively moved his head aside, grabbing his metal orbs from his clothes. The attacker's fist slammed onto the woman's chest. He pushed the attacker down onto the woman and bashed the attacker's head with an orb. He quickly drew the smooth metallic ball back, the target falling unconscious on top of the woman.

Lucky man. He had a hard head. He would wake up to a massive headache, but he would live.

Zhengli didn't know he was holding his breath. He slowly expelled the air he was holding. The sound of his heartbeat exploded in his ears like drums getting a beating.

He cursed.

Babump.

He should have been more careful. This is not good for business. Too many risks. He put away his metal orbs and quickly got to work.

Babump.

He dragged the target's body back onto the bed and places a stray opium pipe into the unconscious man's open hand. Zhengli removed the Briton's shoes and placed them at the bottom of the bed.

Babump.

Now the woman. He dragged her inside and propped her against the wall, planting an opium pipe into her hand as well.

Babump.

He grabbed two opium pots and fills them with opium that was stored inside a secret compartment. He then lights the two pipes, the burning drug beginning to produce smoke.

All of this takes exactly 3 minutes and 28 seconds.

Barely satisfactory work, at best.

Satisfied with his tampering, Zhengli resumed his work.

He took out the given paper from his garments. Curious, he unrolled it. After seeing the paper was full of words and letters and a seal he did not know of, he gave up and placed it by the now-snoring Briton's other hand.

Now to escape. Going back the same way would be risky, but it was the only option he had. If his tampering destroyed any evidence of him being there, he would easily escape trial. And if questioned, the woman he ran into would give a solid alibi.

Zhengli walked back and saw the sentry again. The guard stood up and unlocked the door. “What’s your business here, anyway?” He asked, as he swung the door open. Zhengli got his hat from the rack.

“I–It’s j–just that, act–tu–tually. I j–j–just did s–some busine–ness with a partner–ner.” Zhengli replied, stepping out. “Nothing m–much.”

As he walked away from the opium den, he rubbed his hands as he searched for another newspaper.

ACT 2: EXTENSIVE CONNECTIVITY

OFFICER WILLIAM MADDOX SUSPECTED OF COLLABORATING WITH FRANCE TO SELL OPIUM & OPIUM DEN

‘Ah, the paper was a deed.’ Zhengli thought to himself.

“Is the transaction complete?” Asked Mushang, her eyes scanning a part of the entire, massive bustling crowd of Old Shanghai.

Zhengli nodded, his hand resting on the smooth wooden bench he was sitting on. He took a sip of his tea and placed the newspaper and passed it across the table.

The ambience was soothing. A couple of ceremonial bells rang in the distance as priests said their prayers, the faint scent of incense was in the air, and the clamoring market could be heard rumbling below. It was a sacred place.

The City God Temple.

On the top floor of a tea house, they could see several people carrying burning joss sticks walk up to the three City Gods. They bowed, some said a prayer of thanks or for fortune, and stuck their joss sticks into the ash-filled containers. Then, they quietly left.

Mushang glanced at the newspaper. She nodded. “Good. Here.” She took out a pouch and dropped it into his hand.

“I m–must ask.” Zhengli said, pocketing the pouch. “H–How did y–y–you know I–I w–would b–b–be in the o–o–opium d–den?”

“It’s part of my job to know if another Snake is in my vicinity.” Mushang replied. “And to give it away, they told me that “Worryman” would be coming that night.”

Zhengli grunted. “Q–Quite a f–fitting name, huh?”

Mushang smiled a little. “So. The life of a thief is always a busy one. Here’s your new assignment.” She produced a small roll of paper from her inner garment. “Directly from the big boss.”

Zhengli took the paper and carefully unrolled it.

Well, Mushang wasn’t lying. The leader’s crude, red stamp was placed at the bottom right corner of the parchment, its image similar to that of their tattoos. Zhengli began reading the message.

Target is Chinese.

Target is rich.

Target is an official.

2nd floor, room 8.

Song Xia Street.

Contact at the front door.

Messenger shall accompany you.

Zhengli did a double take and reread the last line.

Messenger shall accompany you.

He looked up from the paper and gave Mushang a questioning look.

“What?” She asked, clueless.

“I w-w-work al-lone.” Zhengli said, obviously displeased with the arrangement.

“Let me see.” Mushang took the parchment from Zhengli’s hands. She took a moment to read it. “But....why?”

Zhengli got up and walked around for a bit to calm down. It was effective at a microscopic level.

He half grunted, half sighed. “Ord-der-ders are o-orders. P-P-Please tell me-me you c-c-can at l-l-least defe-fend yours-s-self.”

“Well, I have these...” She produced two butterfly blades from her sleeves by pushing her arms outwards and catching the hilts. The short blades were as long as her forearm.

Zhengli sighed. He nodded. “It’ll d-do. I’ll m-m-meet you l-later.”

ACT 3: EFFECTIVE ACTIVITY

FORMER OFFICER WILLIAM MADDOX DEPOSED & TO BE DEPORTED TO BRITAIN AFTER CONVICTED OF ILLEGAL OPIUM HANDLING AND COLLABORATION WITH FRANCE

The sound of the bells and drums coming from the City God Temple were not far away. In the distance, one could hear the clamoring men and the constant bicker of their tools building the New Northern Gate.

Zhengli was waiting in the Wanhua Chamber in the Yu Garden. He leaned on the railing, facing a blossoming tree. He heard footsteps approach from behind.

Light footsteps. Female.

He turned around, and saw his assigned companion. Mushang walked over to him, tying her hair into a bun and sticking through it a metallic hair pin with an onyx set into the top.

Zhengli gave Mushang a questioning look.

Mushang nodded, adjusting the butterfly blades in her sleeves.

Leaving the newspaper, they left the Yu Garden, went through a series of turns and entered into Song Xia Street, where the official was located.

As they scanned their surroundings for any possible entries and exits, they also took account of the people around them.

A clique of women loitering at a street corner.

A small cohort of soldiers passed by, muskets strapped to their backs.

A couple of store owners closing their stalls for the night.

The building in question was three stories high, a few of the windows were open, especially on the second floor. Some shone light through the decorative wooden bars. Two guards stood in front of the door. The tiled roof shone dully in the moonlight.

‘Should we approach directly or take out the guards?’ Zhengli thought as he assessed the situation. ‘Risks, risks, risks.’

“I’m getting bored. I’m going.” Mushang said, starting to walk.

“H-hey! W-w-wait!” Zhengli sputtered, his train of thought breaking as he stumbled after Mushang.

Before Mushang was a stone’s throw away from the door, the guards unsheathed their swords to block her.

“H-hey! W-w-what are y-you doing?!” Zhengli said, catching up to her. He looked at the guards. “Please, ex-excuse my...d-daughter, she i-i-is c-confused.”

“Please, no need for apologies.” Said another voice. The guards immediately sheathed their swords at the voice and bowed towards him. A thin man stepped outside.

“Please, come in. My name is Luoyang.” He gently said, adjusting the *zhuangzhi jin* that adorned his head. “The official has been expecting you.”

Mushang went in without any hesitation. Zhengli followed suit, doubtful. ‘Is he our contact? What a weak-looking man.’

Luoyang, without warning, pulled up his left sleeve to scratch his arm, and revealed the ouroboros tattoo on the back of his forearm. He flashed the two of them a look of questioning confirmation. They nodded slowly.

“Come.” He said comfortingly. “He is on the second floor. He has prepared tea for you two.” Behind them, the guards closed the door.

They walked up the wooden stairs, the steps creaking slightly. Upon reaching the second floor, they walked around the atrium. They stopped before the eighth room.

Luoyang knocked.

No response.

“Ah, forgive me.” Luoyang said. “He must be very busy at the moment. Just enter quietly.”

Mushang gestured for him to open the door.

Zhengli shrugged and pulled out one of his metal orbs.

He entered the room.

What he did not expect to see was a hanging scroll with black ink crudely spelling out the word “idiot” and something sharp embedding itself in his nape through his shirt, right in the center of his tattoo.

Zhengli yelped and tried to pull out the dart, but a cold, static numbness spread to his arms. The metal ball fell uselessly to the floor.

‘Wh...what is this?!’ He thought.

So, with his remaining strength, he slowly turned his numbing legs to see who did it.

Luoyang lowered a blowpipe from his lips.

Mushang had a victorious smirk on her face.

“That hemlock and opium essence was...more effective than I had thought it to be.” Luoyang said.

“See? I told you that it would work.” Mushang said, smug. “Now, pay up.”

The numbness flowed even lower down his legs, causing Zhengli to fall backwards, tearing the scroll down with him. When he landed, the floor pushed the dart deeper into Zhengli’s nape. But he couldn’t feel it. He started getting very drowsy all of a sudden.

“I fulfill my promises.” Luoyang sighed. He took out a pouch and dropped it into Mushang’s waiting hand, the coins inside clinking against each other. “Can I remove the tattoo now? It is getting irritating on my skin.”

Zhengli tried to speak, but his voice failed him. This wasn’t according to plan, no, not at all. His drowsy mind fought to keep conscious.

“Leave us for a while, Luoyang.” Mushang said. “Get the cart ready.”

Luoyang bowed and promptly left, leaving the two alone. Mushang dragged Zhengli into the room and closed the door.

Mushang dropped to the floor, crossing her legs. She sat in silence for a while.

“To ease your concerns, the poison applied to the dart isn’t enough to kill you.” Mushang started. “Your poor, pretty little head must be so full of questions now. I think an explanation is due.”

As if Zhengli had a choice. And as if that would ease the tension and sudden sleepiness.

“Hmm...What is the most effective way to dismantle a powerful, ruthless and secret organization that handles questionable activities as business?” Mushang asked. “Well, what better way to do that...from inside out?”

“After all the years the Syndicate had been active underground, you’d think that your greed for money and power over Old Shanghai would go unnoticed and therefore go unpunished.” She continued. “Well. I wonder what they would think if they saw *you* like this; immobile. Helpless. Or...unprofitable, as your syndicate would say.”

Zhengli was too sleepy. His eyelids began closing involuntarily.

“Well, after I give you over to the righteous government, where I come from, punishment *will* come swiftly.” Mushang said. “And maybe, just maybe, they will consider adding you to the forces, if you’re lucky enough to survive.”

Mushang took out a cuboid object from his clothes and showed it to Zhengli.

The bottom bore a familiar image. An ouroboros.

“It's easy to replicate one, especially since we have a copy of our own.” Mushang said, rubbing circles on her tattoo.

Zhengli was at the brink of consciousness at this point. Everything he heard seemed to be coming from another plane of existence; a distant ethereal echo.

Someone knocked at the door. Luoyang came in. “The cart is ready.”

Mushang nodded. “Good.” She turned to look down at Zhengli. “Sweet dreams, my prince.”

Then, Zhengli closed his eyes and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

EPILOGUE

William chuckled at the paper.

“How was your trip to Austria?” Mushang asked in near-perfect English, sipping her tea.

“It was simply splendid. Although I had been given limited...privileges...I still had a wonderful time.” He replied, flicking the paper down to make it straight. “How's that poor Snake doing?”

“Locked up in prison.” Mushang said. “That forged Japanese letter even got the linguist there believing he was working for the Japanese.”

William nodded. Silence passed.

“I must say, that went more smoothly than I could have imagined.” Mushang said, breaking the ice.

“As my apprentice in the trade, you must place full trust in your teacher, you know.” William chided. “You followed my instructions, and it went splendidly.”

“Right.” Mushang said.

William meticulously folded the newspaper and neatly placed it down on the table, next to his tea. “Old Shanghai will continue to serve as an intermediary of opium in this noise. And besides, what could ever go wrong, right?”

“Of course, teacher. You're right.”

He chuckled to himself and raised his teacup. “Cheers?”

Mushang smiled and raised hers. “Cheers.” They clinked their teacups together.

As they drank, Mushang looked at the newspaper.

**OFFICER WILLIAM MADDOX RESTORED RIGHTFUL HONOR AS TRUE CRIMINAL GU
ZHENG LI AWAITS FINAL JUDGEMENT FOR COLLABORATING WITH THE JAPANESE**

-----THE END-----

Home is Where the Heart Is

St. Mary's Canossian College, Li, Lauren – 15

I don't belong to this ship. I have never fit in well as the runt of the family. All I've known is the disapproving glares of my father, and I was never treated equally as my brave, merciless brothers. To my father they were warriors, I was a coward, and that is all I will ever be.

It was the thirteenth day at sea, and we were approaching the city of Shanghai. I headed out to the deck. It was a cool morning, and through the thick, drifting mist I could just make out the blue silhouette of land. The mast on the old ship creaked with every lapping wave, orchestrated with our snapping big red flag in the wind.

I was immersing in my favorite moment. I liked standing on the deck, deep in contemplation. I often thought about what my life would have been like if I had not been a pirate, and how it would have been so much easier if I had actually taken up an ordinary job for income. At least then I could forgive myself, and for once I could fall asleep without thinking of the people I had unjustly murdered. Their agonizing faces haunted me in my dreams every time I closed my eyes.

I felt a shove to my back. "Gather the weapons, Akio. We will be docking soon." I peered around to the scarred face of my eldest brother and gave him a small nod.

We sailed with three other pirate gangs toward the big city walls of Shanghai. The wall towered twenty feet high. It was just like what the people in the izakaya¹ had described. The grey-speckled marble pieces were engraved with intricate Chinese characters — the names of the Chinese emperors. The wall was built with the intention of keeping pirates out of the city, but it wasn't long before my kind had found a breach in the stones. Today would be the first time we raided Shanghai since the wall was built. We docked the ship, taking care to evade the hawk-like surveillance of the patrolling Ming soldiers, and slowly, weapons at hand, we squeezed through the small opening.

For a moment, I was enticed by the view on the other side of the wall. We had crawled into a local market, and I saw carts and trolleys filled to the brim with fresh vegetables, chopped meat hung on metal hooks. It warmed my heart to hear the hollers of the hawkers, the laughter of the children. These moments never last long. It was just a normal day for these people, and they had no idea of the fate they would face. Then in the corner of my eye I saw my brothers clench their knives. From behind, my father's fleshy, rough hand took hold of my collar. "Akio, this is your LAST chance. Time and time again you've brought me nothing but disappointment. Show me that my son is no coward." He shoved a long sword in my hands and gave me two powerful pats on the back. "Remember what I taught you son. Straight in the stomach. Never hesitate."

Then the raid started. Nausea washed over me as I watched the scene before me unfold. Screams filled the air where laughter once was; mothers watched with anguish as their children fell to the ground with knives jutting out of their shoulder blades. My brothers charged, lashing their knives at the defenseless citizens. What was once a hustling and bustling market had turned into nothing more than a bloody slaughterhouse.

Suddenly the screaming began to cease.

Our gang ransacked the market, rummaging for gold or jewels among the carcasses. The streets were silent except the soft shuffling of my father and brothers.

Then came a cry from afar — the Ming soldiers.

My father pulled a small flask from his pocket. With a grunt, he cast it towards the soldiers. Swirling red flames suddenly erupted from the ground as the flask shattered. The heat hit me like a wave and pushed me to the ground, and then I scrambled to my feet and ran.

I ran as fast as I could until my lungs started to burn. Gasping for air, I looked around. I was in the city outskirts, some sort of village area, and I could see the burning flames over the rooftops of the clay huts. Grey ashes danced around and the distant sound of clashing weapons could still be heard. I took care not to trudge on the bodies on the floor. Clearly the other pirates had already raided the area.

I was in shock when someone grabbed my hand from behind. I whirled around, weapon ready, only to find a little Chinese girl standing there. She was about six or seven, and her cheeks were stained with tears and bits of dirt. Her hair was disheveled, her yellow robes were torn and yet there was still this extraordinary look of hope and expectation in her large, glossy eyes. She uttered something in her dialect that I could not understand,

¹ A type of Japanese pub

and a big teardrop slid down her cheek. My heart instantly softened and I crouched down, smoothing out her hair. She pointed to a woman who lay lifelessly on the cobblestone street. The woman's abdomen was pierced, and crimson trickled from her wound. It was the girl's mother. Sudden rage shot through me once I made sense of what might have happened. It thoroughly sickened me to know that some people had such little humanity towards the defenseless mother and child, and it sickened me even more to know that I was also one of their kinds.

I dropped my knife and took the girl's hand. My immediate response was to seek shelter and ensure the girl's safety. We headed to a temple nearby, hoping the Buddhist monks could provide us with a refuge. Frantically I banged on the studded gates of the red building until someone came and open the door for us.

The monks hurried us past the giant golden Buddha statues to a small storage room which was unnoticeable to anyone not familiar with place. They gave us some water and bandages, and then locked the wooden door of the storage room with a thick log. All was silent as we sat in darkness. Surprisingly, I treasured every moment of staying in a place rid of blood and agonizing cries of distress. Some time passed and my eyes got adjusted to the dim light. The little girl suddenly placed her small palm on her chest. "Zhen."

"Akio," I replied, and a small smile tugged at my lips. Zhen shuffled closer and laid her tiny head on my lap. She wept silently and though we could only communicate through gestures, we had total trust in each other. I sang a Japanese lullaby until Zhen's labored breathing grew steady.

I did not keep track of how long we stayed in the room, but eventually I heard a man shout something in Japanese. I woke Zhen from her slumber and put a finger over her lips.

"Search the second floor! I'll take care of the monks,"

I could recognize my youngest brother's voice anywhere. I gestured Zhen to hide behind a stack of grains. I had to keep her safe from my family, as they would not hesitate to slaughter any living being. We, Japanese pirates were ruthless. It was almost like they killed for pure pleasure.

Straight away, the wooden door was kicked open with a powerful bang. Blinding light flooded the room.

"Akio!" exclaimed my brother with a grin on his face. "What on earth are you doing here? Did you get any gold?"

I shook my head. My brother gave me a stone face. He muttered and ordered me to get back to the ship before nightfall. He slammed the storage room door and ushered me out of the black studded gates of the temple.

My mouth was agape as I stepped out of the gates. The city of Shanghai was desolate. Houses collapsed with rubble scattered everywhere. Dark veins of crimson stained the cobblestone streets. The only trace of movement was from the speckles of dust that danced in the air where sunlight shone.

A while later, my brother stepped out of the temple and together we headed back to our ship. I felt as if I couldn't breathe as my brother walked me proudly through the deserted village and market. From afar I could see that Mother had prepared sake on the deck. The pirates were raising their glasses with each other on their victory.

The anchor was hauled up and the wind pushed us forward.

As we set sail, my eldest brother clambered up on his chair, sake in hand.

"I would like to make a toast!" he announced. He turned, gazed upon the sad, desolate land and grinned. "Look at what we have conquered. Think of the luxuries we are going to enjoy! No wall, no force can possibly stop us. We are victorious, brothers. We are rich!" This earned a roaring chorus of whoops and cheers.

But I knew at that moment that there was none in the world poorer than them.

So I finally made my choice. I ran to the railing and jumped off the deck, plummeting into the sea, and headed ashore.

"Akio!"

I ignored the screaming and yelling. I knew that after a while they wouldn't bother coming after me, so I kept on swimming. The cold waves lapped over each other, rushing into my face. I spluttered and gasped and laughed with delight.

This is what I'd always wanted. I could never have the valor or the savagery that my family expects. I want to be my own man, lead my own life with only my own expectations. I want to stay true to my values and do whatever I believe to be right.

I swam with all my strength till my toes kicked the sand.

The sun was setting, and I was hand in hand with Zhen, watching as the ship I'd been in my whole life slowly faded into the horizon. I was in a foreign land, full of foreign people. I knew not of the languages or customs. All I knew was that in this ravaged land I had a chance to start again.

And I have never felt so at home.



The Table Near the Balcony

St. Paul's Convent School, Li, Clare – 15

The tingling bells of the rickshaws echoed the hustle and bustle of Shanghai. Exotic snakes slithered around the arms of a snake charmer, earning the duo a rather huge audience in the market square. Farmers on bicycles pushed through the crowd, eager to unload their baskets of wheat. Street performers tumbled about on the rugged surface, impressing adults and children alike, while a couple of Japanese travellers looked on with interest.

Yells and catcalls arose as a group of middle-age men playing mah-jong spotted seven elegantly dressed ladies descending from the steps of the theatre. An elderly man crouched at a shabby corner of the street, slurping a bowl of noodles, oblivious to his surroundings, while a religious dignitary, draped in black silk, was taken around the city.

Every Saturday afternoon, a woman sat at the table near the balcony at the theatre around the corner. She smoked, and white fumes billowing like slithering snakes, strikingly silvery against her jet black hair rose into the air.

“Good afternoon, Mò Chóu xiǎo jiě. How are you fairing on this wonderfully sunny day?” A stately gentleman in a navy blue suit approached the young maiden with confident strides. Reaching to lift her pale hand for a kiss, he gazed intently into her brown orbs. Her subtle shudder went unnoticed. Upon exchanging polite greetings, the man moved on to other flowery youthful girls in the vicinity, while the girl remained rooted to the spot. She was dressed in a simple white qí páo, her alabaster skin setting off her wavy black bob perfectly. She glanced around timidly, with an air of fragility about her.

Across the room was a tall, slender figure, leaning aristocratically against the jade-glided pillars, chatting amiably with a few young gentlemen. She looked stunning even from a distance with her sleek black hair tied up in a large bun, with a lily tucked in to match her silk dress in nude pink, blatantly exposing her cleavage. A pearl white shawl embraced her bare shoulders, slithering off every now and then to the delight of male company. The near-translucent fabric reflected the bright sunlight from above, highlighting her ethereal beauty. Yet her beauty could not shield her disdain to the flocking young suitors, for her impatient replies and furrowed brows intensified as more men surrounded her.

Around the corner was a comfy wooden chair hidden behind the velvety (albeit dingy) curtains. A pair of rather unladylike black leather shoes stuck out, revealing a studious-looking girl with her nose in a book. With her frizzly hair swept aside in a neat pin, revealing a rather large forehead, she looked distinctly different from other girls. She sported an unflattering qí páo with pale blue checkers, and was easily overshadowed by the flamboyant women around her. Yet despite her subtle choice of fashion, she carried herself with an air of ease and determination. She waved away several approaching men, and focused intently on her book.

Soon enough, the striking girl in pink got tired of murmuring sweet nothings to her suitors, and glided around in her trailing dress attempting to find a suitable companion. She was not in vain, for she soon discovered the girl in the white qí páo moving idly about. She approached her elegantly but surely, and reached out her hand in one swift motion, “My name is Hóng Xiá, and yours?” The other girl looked considerably startled at Hóng Xiá’s boldness, but returned her greeting just the same. “My name is Mò Chóu. How very nice to meet you.” The two girls sneaked shy glances at each other for a few seconds, before Hóng Xiá abruptly broke the ice and declared, “It’s so dull here. Not a single person is entertaining.” Mò Chóu, though bashful in nature, could not wait to agree, and allowed herself to be pulled along through the elegantly-dressed guests by Hóng Xiá’s firm grip.

Upon reaching the curtains, Hóng Xiá gradually slowed down, allowing Mò Chóu to catch her breath. “It is quite pleasant here, don’t you think? Away from the hustle and bustle of the party,” Hóng Xiá said decidedly, while Mò Chóu nodded in agreement. “I do think we should go for a stroll – oh my! How you startle me?” Hóng Xiá exclaimed in surprise as the book-loving girl came into view. The latter’s head shot up in annoyance at the intrusion, but her hardened features relaxed visibly as she realized they were females instead of male guests again. Hóng Xiá began her introductions, despite looking slightly affronted at her fierce expressions. The girl returned Hóng Xiá’s greetings with a curt nod, and a grim “The name’s Xiǎo Lián.”

Gradually, Xiǎo Lián’s cold façade melted as she carefully set aside her book and gave her undivided attention to Hóng Xiá’s accounts of her upcoming arranged marriage. Mò Chóu turned out to share Hóng Xiá’s worries as well, for she was also betrothed to another young man. Xiǎo Lián listened to the two elder women’s conversation thoughtfully, while adding sympathetic comments from time to time. Time passed swiftly for the

three young maidens as they chatted joyously, and by the end of the party they had already scheduled their reunion during the upcoming weekend, and each returned home with the giddy feeling of having made new acquaintances.

It was Saturday again in the blink of an eye. Three heads were seen huddled together at the table near the balcony, fervently discussing the book in Xiǎo Lián's hands. Their discussion was short lived, however, as it was soon interrupted by a snort and a puff of white smoke. The trio looked up from the book, only to find a lanky girl sprawled on a chair at their adjacent table, dressed in a beige trench coat, with a military green bucket perched on the top of her petite head. Cigarette in hand, tousled ebony hair – she was the epitome of a rebel. “Look at you all getting’ chuffed and chirpy over people in a book kissing. I’ve done even more daring things!”

Hóng Xiá, ever so curious and bold, stuck out her hand and challenged, “Why don’t you come in and enlighten us on your vibrant experiences then?” the girl appeared somewhat impressed at Hóng Xiá’s sarcastic tone, and took it for an invitation to join them. She trudged over to their little circle, leather sandals clanging on the marble floor. She flopped down on an empty chair without a second thought, and interrupted Hóng Xiá before she could start her introductions. “I’m Ní Huáng. I don’t have a surname. My father left when I was two.” The other three blatantly stared at her for her coarse language and unladylike gestures. Ní Huáng returned the stares evenly while removing her unbecoming hat, as if daring them to continue. “So, wanna hear ‘bout my flings?” suggested Ní Huáng, wriggling her eyebrows suggestively. Hóng Xiá and Xiǎo Lián could not help but smirk at her expressions, while Mò Chóu remained stony-faced and dumbstruck. As Ní Huáng rattled on about her various sexual affairs, Mò Chóu began to open up, and tried to join in their rather dirty jokes. Xiǎo Lián turned out to excel at double entendre, thanks to her extensive reading of French novels. Hóng Xiá, with her romantic fantasies and audacious personality, was of course no stranger to these things.

As the girls began to enjoy themselves immensely, Ní Huáng fished out a packet of cigarettes from her pocket and offered it to the other three. Hóng Xiá hesitated for a split second, before reaching out and grabbing one. Xiǎo Lián looked doubtful initially, but followed suit soon enough. Soon the three of them were huffing and puffing out trails of smoke with the exception of good old Mò Chóu, who downright refused to have anything to do with cigarettes. Between clouds of white fumes and animated chatter, time flew.

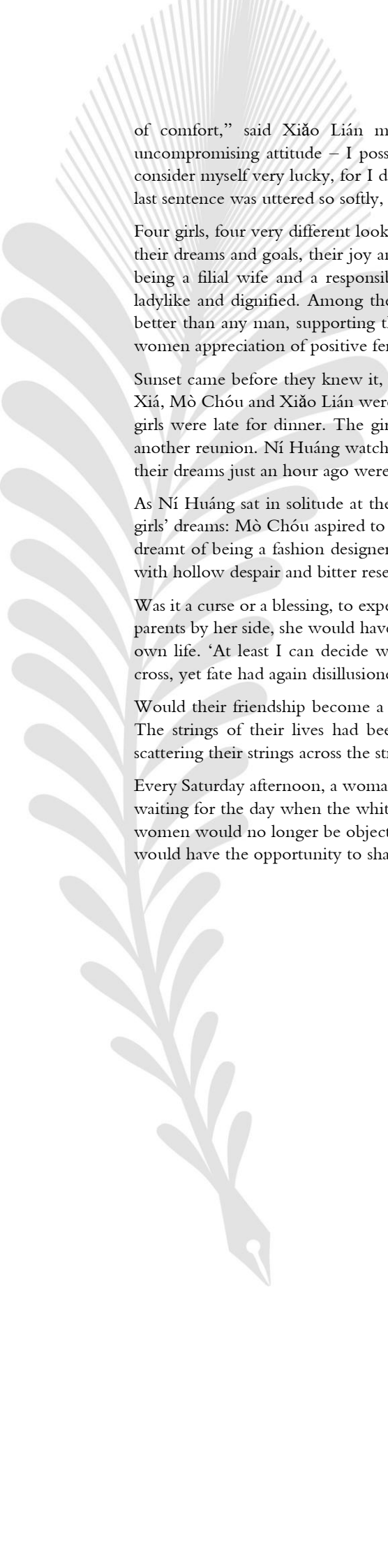
Another week sailed by without much amusement, much to the ladies’ displeasure, until it was Saturday again. At their same old spot near the balcony, four, not three heads were huddled together this time, examining a pair of exquisitely embroidered shoes. It turned out to be Mò Chóu’s gift from her fiancée, yet she looked far from thrilled to welcome the delicate little things. The other three observed in surprise as the normally sweet Mò Chóu shot dark looked at her new shoes. “Why all the gloom my dear lady? These shoes are a work of art!” exclaimed Ní Huáng, who was finding it hard to cope with all the negativity (as if she wasn’t constantly exuding antagonism herself).

Mò Chóu looked up from her reverie, and explained wistfully to Ní Huáng, “According to my family’s traditions, presenting a girl with a pair of embroidered shoes is equivalent to asking for her hand in marriage. Apparently my family thinks Jǐng Yàn is the perfect match for me – in terms of family backgrounds and looks.” As Mò Chóu sighed dejectedly and resumed sipping her tea, Xiǎo Lián nudged her tentatively, “And you? Do you love him?” “Love him? Oh, my dear sister, never in a million years. He is kind, I’ll give him that. But how thrillingly boring he is! He does nothing but stroll about his father’s office all day long, and stays indoors even on weekends,” grumbled Mò Chóu. The girls were not used to gentle Mò Chóu’s sudden outburst, and they gawked at Mò Chóu’s flushed cheeks and heavy breathing, momentarily stunned.

Hóng Xiá tried to divert their attention by outlining her own love life (or the lack thereof), “Be grateful that your fiancée is at least around your age, Mò Chóu. Mine is double my age, if not more. The vile old guy does not even care about my evident disgust for him. All he cares about are ancient antiques and fresh young girls. He seizes every opportunity to gape at girls on the streets, not even bothering to avert his eyes at their warning glares. A meaty man, with no sense of humility whatsoever, he sashays through the main streets of Shanghai, thrusting his money under everyone’s nose.” Hóng Xiá remained calm and collected throughout the whole description of her fiancée, as if she was already used to his uncivilised ways, making the girls’ hearts ache for her.

After a long lapse of silence, Xiǎo Lián finally spoke up, “I guess I should appreciate my plain looks for once. Saves me from the trouble of having to marry at such a young age.” The girls fervently rebuked her for saying that, declaring that she was the cutest thing to have ever lived, but Xiǎo Lián dismissed them with a wave. “I’m used to it, my friends, don’t even attempt to prove me wrong. I was the plainest of my three sisters ever since the day I was born. They had large eyes and distinct facial features, while I’m here stuck with a big flat nose and crooked teeth. My parents never really care about me – they are content as long as my pretty sisters are married off to rich, respectable families.” “To hell with society’s misconceptions of beauty!” Ní Huáng declared, “Forget about their nasty comments, Xiǎo Lián, you are beautiful just the way you are.”

“You don’t have to comfort me, you know. I have always been the queer one, and believe it or not, it has been part of my life since day one. I was constantly an outcast in my family, so I resorted to books as my only source



of comfort,” said Xiǎo Lián mildly. “Well obviously I am no stranger “A tomboyish personality, an uncompromising attitude – I possess the worst traits a man would wish to find in his wife. But mind you, I consider myself very lucky, for I don’t have pestering parents to deal with. Though sometimes wish I had.” Her last sentence was uttered so softly, the girls had to strain their ears to hear it, yet they heard it all the same.

Four girls, four very different looks and personalities. Hunched over tea and dainty delicacies, they talked about their dreams and goals, their joy and worries, their family and marriage. Away from the pressure of marriage, of being a filial wife and a responsible mother; away from the expectations of society, of being stereotypically ladylike and dignified. Among the four, an unlikely and unexpectedly strong bond formed, holding them up better than any man, supporting them more than any dowry. It was a mutual support and a shared women to women appreciation of positive female traits.

Sunset came before they knew it, and valets were soon interrupting the girls’ conversation. One by one, Hóng Xiá, Mò Chóu and Xiǎo Lián were escorted and whisked away by their drivers and servants, all claiming that the girls were late for dinner. The girls were pulled apart before they had the chance to react, let alone schedule another reunion. Ní Huáng watched, disappointed and heartbroken, as the three girls who spoke so candidly of their dreams just an hour ago were back in the claws of fate yet again.

As Ní Huáng sat in solitude at the table by the window, sipping her stone-cold tea, she reminisced about the girls’ dreams: Mò Chóu aspired to be a doctor, Hóng Xiá an artist, Xiǎo Lián an author, while Ní Huáng herself dreamt of being a fashion designer. She sat and thought about their dreams, while regarding the departing cars with hollow despair and bitter resentment.

Was it a curse or a blessing, to experience the lack of parental guidance at such a tender age? If Ní Huáng had her parents by her side, she would have been no different from the other three – she would have no control over her own life. ‘At least I can decide when to go home’, she giggled humorously. Fate had arranged their paths to cross, yet fate had again disillusioned their hopeful dreams.

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The Table Near the Balcony

St. Paul's Convent School, Li, Clare – 15

The tingling bells of the rickshaws echoed the hustle and bustle of Shanghai. Exotic snakes slithered around the arms of a snake charmer, earning the duo a rather huge audience in the market square. Farmers on bicycles pushed through the crowd, eager to unload their baskets of wheat. Street performers tumbled about on the rugged surface, impressing adults and children alike, while a couple of Japanese travellers looked on with interest.

Yells and catcalls arose as a group of middle-age men playing mah-jong spotted seven elegantly dressed ladies descending from the steps of the theatre. An elderly man crouched at a shabby corner of the street, slurping a bowl of noodles, oblivious to his surroundings, while a religious dignitary, draped in black silk, was taken around the city.

Every Saturday afternoon, a woman sat at the table near the balcony at the theatre around the corner. She smoked, and white fumes billowing like slithering snakes, strikingly silvery against her jet black hair rose into the air.

“Good afternoon, Mò Chóu xiǎo jiě. How are you fairing on this wonderfully sunny day?” A stately gentleman in a navy blue suit approached the young maiden with confident strides. Reaching to lift her pale hand for a kiss, he gazed intently into her brown orbs. Her subtle shudder went unnoticed. Upon exchanging polite greetings, the man moved on to other flowery youthful girls in the vicinity, while the girl remained rooted to the spot. She was dressed in a simple white qí páo, her alabaster skin setting off her wavy black bob perfectly. She glanced around timidly, with an air of fragility about her.

Across the room was a tall, slender figure, leaning aristocratically against the jade-glided pillars, chatting amiably with a few young gentlemen. She looked stunning even from a distance with her sleek black hair tied up in a large bun, with a lily tucked in to match her silk dress in nude pink, blatantly exposing her cleavage. A pearl white shawl embraced her bare shoulders, slithering off every now and then to the delight of male company. The near-translucent fabric reflected the bright sunlight from above, highlighting her ethereal beauty. Yet her beauty could not shield her disdain to the flocking young suitors, for her impatient replies and furrowed brows intensified as more men surrounded her.

Around the corner was a comfy wooden chair hidden behind the velvety (albeit dingy) curtains. A pair of rather unladylike black leather shoes stuck out, revealing a studious-looking girl with her nose in a book. With her frizzly hair swept aside in a neat pin, revealing a rather large forehead, she looked distinctly different from other girls. She sported an unflattering qí páo with pale blue checkers, and was easily overshadowed by the flamboyant women around her. Yet despite her subtle choice of fashion, she carried herself with an air of ease and determination. She waved away several approaching men, and focused intently on her book.

Soon enough, the striking girl in pink got tired of murmuring sweet nothings to her suitors, and glided around in her trailing dress attempting to find a suitable companion. She was not in vain, for she soon discovered the girl in the white qí páo moving idly about. She approached her elegantly but surely, and reached out her hand in one swift motion, “My name is Hóng Xiá, and yours?” The other girl looked considerably startled at Hóng Xiá’s boldness, but returned her greeting just the same. “My name is Mò Chóu. How very nice to meet you.” The two girls sneaked shy glances at each other for a few seconds, before Hóng Xiá abruptly broke the ice and declared, “It’s so dull here. Not a single person is entertaining.” Mò Chóu, though bashful in nature, could not wait to agree, and allowed herself to be pulled along through the elegantly-dressed guests by Hóng Xiá’s firm grip.

Upon reaching the curtains, Hóng Xiá gradually slowed down, allowing Mò Chóu to catch her breath. “It is quite pleasant here, don’t you think? Away from the hustle and bustle of the party,” Hóng Xiá said decidedly, while Mò Chóu nodded in agreement. “I do think we should go for a stroll – oh my! How you startle me?” Hóng Xiá exclaimed in surprise as the book-loving girl came into view. The latter’s head shot up in annoyance at the intrusion, but her hardened features relaxed visibly as she realized they were females instead of male guests again. Hóng Xiá began her introductions, despite looking slightly affronted at her fierce expressions. The girl returned Hóng Xiá’s greetings with a curt nod, and a grim “The name’s Xiǎo Lián.”

Gradually, Xiǎo Lián’s cold façade melted as she carefully set aside her book and gave her undivided attention to Hóng Xiá’s accounts of her upcoming arranged marriage. Mò Chóu turned out to share Hóng Xiá’s worries as well, for she was also betrothed to another young man. Xiǎo Lián listened to the two elder women’s conversation thoughtfully, while adding sympathetic comments from time to time. Time passed swiftly for the

three young maidens as they chatted joyously, and by the end of the party they had already scheduled their reunion during the upcoming weekend, and each returned home with the giddy feeling of having made new acquaintances.

It was Saturday again in the blink of an eye. Three heads were seen huddled together at the table near the balcony, fervently discussing the book in Xiǎo Lián's hands. Their discussion was short lived, however, as it was soon interrupted by a snort and a puff of white smoke. The trio looked up from the book, only to find a lanky girl sprawled on a chair at their adjacent table, dressed in a beige trench coat, with a military green bucket perched on the top of her petite head. Cigarette in hand, tousled ebony hair – she was the epitome of a rebel. “Look at you all getting’ chuffed and chirpy over people in a book kissing. I’ve done even more daring things!”

Hóng Xiá, ever so curious and bold, stuck out her hand and challenged, “Why don’t you come in and enlighten us on your vibrant experiences then?” the girl appeared somewhat impressed at Hóng Xiá’s sarcastic tone, and took it for an invitation to join them. She trudged over to their little circle, leather sandals clanging on the marble floor. She flopped down on an empty chair without a second thought, and interrupted Hóng Xiá before she could start her introductions. “I’m Ní Huáng. I don’t have a surname. My father left when I was two.” The other three blatantly stared at her for her coarse language and unladylike gestures. Ní Huáng returned the stares evenly while removing her unbecoming hat, as if daring them to continue. “So, wanna hear ‘bout my flings?” suggested Ní Huáng, wriggling her eyebrows suggestively. Hóng Xiá and Xiǎo Lián could not help but smirk at her expressions, while Mò Chóu remained stony-faced and dumbstruck. As Ní Huáng rattled on about her various sexual affairs, Mò Chóu began to open up, and tried to join in their rather dirty jokes. Xiǎo Lián turned out to excel at double entendre, thanks to her extensive reading of French novels. Hóng Xiá, with her romantic fantasies and audacious personality, was of course no stranger to these things.

As the girls began to enjoy themselves immensely, Ní Huáng fished out a packet of cigarettes from her pocket and offered it to the other three. Hóng Xiá hesitated for a split second, before reaching out and grabbing one. Xiǎo Lián looked doubtful initially, but followed suit soon enough. Soon the three of them were huffing and puffing out trails of smoke with the exception of good old Mò Chóu, who downright refused to have anything to do with cigarettes. Between clouds of white fumes and animated chatter, time flew.

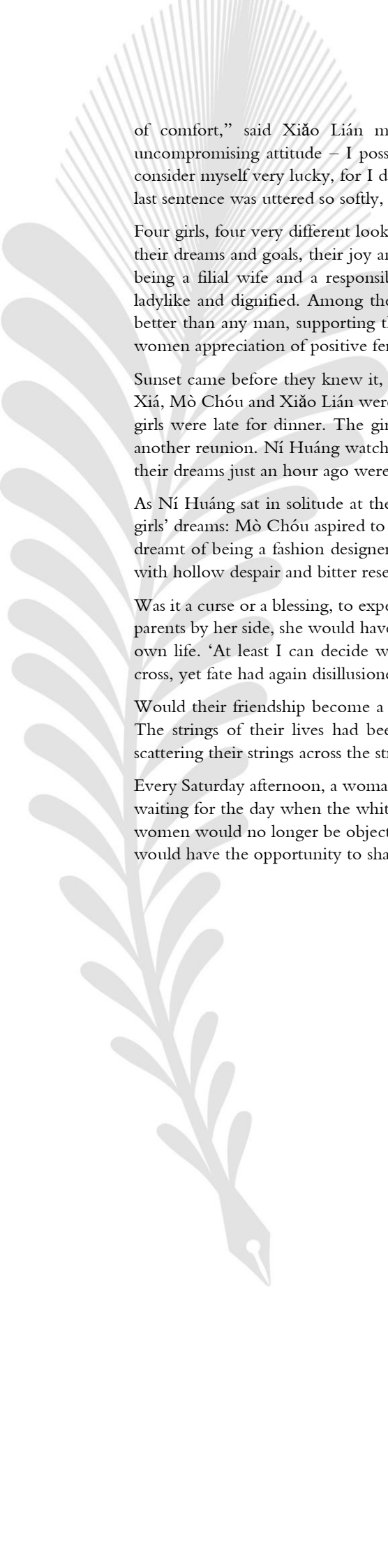
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The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Joseph's College, Lao, Kenneth Wun Lam – 16

Spring 1943, Old City of Shanghai, China — war was coming. Numerous conflicts with foreign powers had been devouring China for almost a century, since the Opium Wars first partitioned Shanghai into foreign-controlled districts. There were uncountable foreign concessions. On every street in every city, there were the bodies, bodies of the dead Chinese soldiers and warriors. To glorify their exemplary heroism and patriotism, the dead bodies were configured in a way that lined the verges of roads, floated in the canals, jammed together around the pillars of the bridges. In the trenches between the burial mounds, hundreds of dead soldiers sat side by side, with their hands joined and heads against the torn earth, as if they had been stranded together, in a deep dream of unending pain. Battles, divisions, corruptions, sacrifices, violence, homelessness, disorder, despair — the wrath of heaven and the resentment of men could be felt everywhere.

Out of the darkness, a young shopgirl named Lin found herself sitting in the back of the automobile, leaning against the windshield. Avenue Joffre was crowded with oceans of people, mostly the twenty-somethings — they were all involved in animated conversations Lin could not hear. The automobile stopped for a light and Lin caught sight of an elegant couple, arm-in-arm at a corner, crossing the avenue as the light altered. A strong gust of wind gave the French woman some difficulty as she tried to knot a green silk scarf around her neck. As the automobile reached the sidewalk, Lin turned back to face the avenue, then receded, swallowed by the swirling lights and reflections.

DECEMBER 1942

A toy train whizzed past one miniature town after one another on a department store display. JEAN, seen from a distance, in a winter coat, stood watching the train, transfixed.

He turned around, smiled charmingly.

Lin arrived at Chang's for lunch. There was no room left at any of the long tables, and more and more people were arriving to wait back of the wooden barricades by the cash register. People who had already got their trays of food wandered about between the tables in search of a spot they could squeeze into, or a place that somebody was about to leave, but there was no place. Lin managed to find a place eventually. She ate nervously, faster than usual, ravenous for food especially after working non-stop at the toy department store she had longed to quit. She knew it deep down in her heart she was not a "shopgirl" material; her true passion was to be a photographer. When she took a picture of people, it would be permanent, and that she had captured the truth of them in that specific moment. She had very little faith in pursuing her dreams — to become what she had always wanted to be.

Nearly every morning when she came to work on the fifth floor, Lin would stop for a moment to have a secret glance at a certain toy train set. The train set was on a table by itself near the elevators of the toy department store. It was not a big fine train, but there was a fury in its tiny little pumping pistons that the bigger trains did not have. Its contradiction held Lin spellbound. The miniature train was always running when she stepped out of the elevator in the morning every day. And when she finished work in the evening, the train would keep running until it reached its destination.

This morning, Lin did not let the train set distract her from work, and went towards the direction of the doll department, where she worked daily. She was confined to this space and was not allowed to leave before she finished work, like a caged bird that was not meant to fly with its silver wings. At half past three, the toy department store became more alive than ever. A few pieces of blue cloth levitated in the air; robots began to toss balls into the air and catch them; the stuffed animals danced gracefully to the music, each and every dance move of theirs could not seem to be more perfect. The handicrafts and the toys reminded her of her childhood — innocent, curious, eager — which were the qualities she still possessed. While I was still living in my little world, Mr Yang, manager of the department store, on the other hand, was stacking shelves with the new arrivals on the glass counters. Mrs Lam-Wei was standing at the cashier to count the bills and coins from her moneybag, with such focus that she could only give Lin a nod or a glance.

By now, customers were emerging from the elevators. When I looked closely to them, I discovered that the customers wore a blonde wig. Not a single one of them wore a black one like I did. The customers looked bewildered as if they were clueless about what knick-knacks their children had craved.

“Do you have the Christmas Special doll?” a woman asked Lin.

“I’m sorry, the doll is currently out of stock. Would you mind choosing another one? This doll in the pink dress is the red-hot favorite.”

“I would like this doll, but in a blue dress. My daughter loves everything blue.” the woman replied, and Lin immediately turned and got the doll she wanted out of a stock shelf. There was no need of salesmanship, Lin thought to herself. The French people wanted a doll, any doll, to give away for Christmas. It was just a matter of pulling boxes out of a certain stock shelf, in search of a doll with a blue dress instead of pink, a matter of calling Mr Yang to open a showcase window with his key. It was a matter of getting used to doing a job of no meaning.

Seeing the French customers come and go every day, Lin thought, behind the cold, powdered faces of these French women, who were the most arrogant generally and who hurriedly bought the most expensive dolls, the dolls with sparkly dresses and shimmering hair, there was a certain degree of goodwill or love in them.

Their eyes met at the same time — Lin glancing up from a box she was about to open, and the man turning his head to look directly at Lin, as if the two lit a passionate spark of fire. He was tall and fair, strong and charismatic. Her eyes traced his tall slender figure, from his messy blonde hair down to his worn boots two sizes too big. Lin didn’t quite get the chance to look at him, so she turned after grabbing one of the boxes from the shelf to have a more detailed look. His eyes were dark, yet dominant as fire, and, Lin could not stop looking away. His cheeks were chiseled like a finely-carved Michelangelo statue. His nose was perfectly symmetrical. His lips were slightly full: the kind that end in a cute little smirk at each corner. The rays of light highlighted the dimples in his cheeks and chin. He heard the customer right in front of her replicate a question, and Lin stood there, speechless. Though there were other salesgirls in the department store, Lin felt absolutely sure that the man would come to her. Then the man walked, step by step, slowly and carefully towards her counter. All of a sudden, her heart started to race and her face started to grow cherry red. The man came nearer and nearer as an inexplicable sensation mounted within Lin’s body and soul.

“May I see one of the toy trains, please?” the man asked eagerly and leaned on the counter.

Lin turned around and took one of the toy trains from the bottom of the stack. When she stood up, the man was looking at her calmly with his dark blue eyes that Lin could neither quite face directly nor look away from.

“That’s the one I like. The train set over there. It is intriguing in a way that somehow fascinates me. But I don’t suppose I can have it, can I?” he said, pointing at the show window behind Lin.

“No... I mean... yes... YES.” Lin answered nervously.

Lin went back to the storeroom immediately for the key. The key was on Mr Yang’s table, but no one was allowed to touch it. Lin took it anyway. She opened the window, took the Christmas Bear down and put it on the counter.

“You’re giving me the one on display? Thank you.” He smiled. Lin took a deep breath, inhaling his strong cologne that she found herself almost gagging on the powerful scent. However, his smile of such charisma prevented that from happening and instead, transformed that night into one she would never forget. The man filled in the order slip, and, went away afterwards, with a step as slow as when he had come. Lin watched him go as she tried to take him all in — his mannerisms, his style, everything. He turned back for a moment and pointed to Lin’s cap.

“I like your hat,” the man said tenderly.

Lin was flattered and her face reddened. Then the man vanished into an elevator. For a moment she watched as the vacant spaces left behind were filled by shoppers and staff members. She craned forward to have one last look but it’s no good. He’s gone. Lin sighed. She looked down at her doll desk and noticed the order slip that the man had just completed. Lin scribbled down the address immediately on her notebook.

NAME: MR. J. DUJARDIN

ADDRESS: 1538 AVENUE JOFFRE

ITEM(S) BOUGHT: TRAIN SET

That day after work, Lin went down to the third floor of the department store and bought a card in the greetings-card department. It was not a particularly interesting card, but at least it had colors on it. She took a

pen and pondered what to write to Mr. Dujardin on the card – something like “I wanna say that I’m deeply in love with you. I don’t know why but please forgive me — because I really do...” — however, she did not have the guts to do so and later went with the dreadfully dull and impersonal:

SALUTATIONS FROM ST. PETERSBURG’S DEPARTMENT STORE. EMPLOYEE 371–C.

Then she went down to the post office. There she stood in front of a postbox, hesitant. What would happen? Why would Mr J. Dujardin even care? There’s not a soul that was alive enough to be in sight in the cold night. Lin dropped it eventually, despite being unsure. That night, she flung herself on her bed and drew a line with pence on a piece of paper. And another line, carefully and slowly. A world was born around her, like a forest with millions of golden leaves. There was not a single moment when she did not dream about or see Mr Dujardin in her mind, and all she witnessed, she seemed to see through Mr Dujardin, as if the milk bottle dropped and broken on the floor, became insignificant to her.

JANUARY 1943

It was January. January was mysteriously familiar, yet strange at the same time, for which one could almost but not quite define.

“You’re wanted on the telephone,” Mr Yang told her, pointing to the telephone by the wrapping table.

“Hello?” she said.

“Hello, is this employee three seventy–one C, Mialin Wang?” the operator’s voice said over clicking and buzzings.

“Yes,” Lin answered.

“So it was you.”

“Oh — hello. Mr Dujardin? Did you receive the train set alright?”

“I did. And the Christmas card. Thank you so much for sending it to me. I just called to say — thank you, really.”

“Of course,” she said subtly.

“Do you get a lunch hour there at St. Petersburg’s? Let me take you to lunch. It’s the least I can do.”

Lin held a long breath before replying.

“Yes, I’d like that.”

“How about tomorrow? Shall I meet you at the Old Shanghai Teahouse at... around twelve?”

“Sure,” Lin said enthusiastically.

The next day came. It was eleven thirty in the morning and Lin was already waiting at the front of the restaurant. Mr Dujardin came shortly after Lin had arrived. They sat down at a miraculously quiet table, with white tablecloths and wooden rafters. Mr. Dujardin ordered creamed spinach over poached eggs and a dry martini, and invited Lin to have the same. And when Lin hesitated, Mr. Dujardin sent the waiter away with the order.

Mr. Dujardin then offered Lin a cigarette from his pocket. Mr. Dujardin lit Lin’s cigarette and Lin proceeded to smoke it, though not without some effort. Lin thought he was beautiful — the way that he moved, the way that he did things and the way that he talked. His face was now a blur because Lin could not bear to look at it directly.

“So what kind of name is Mialin?”

“It’s Mialina. It’s changed,” Lin said softly.

“It’s very innovative.”

“And yours?”

“Jean.”

“That’s beautiful,” Lin answered eagerly.

“And what do you do in your spare time?” The lamplight made Jean’s eyes fiery golden. Even the pearl at his earlobe looked vividly alive, like a teardrop that a touch might destroy. Happiness was like a green vine spreading through Lin’s body, growing into flowers and bearing them through her pristine flesh. Lin had never been that excited in her entire life, and that for one moment, it seemed like Lin finally knew how to set it all free. Jean sipped at her martini, with tenderness. Lin watched her for a moment, then sampled her.

The sweet smell of his cologne came to Lin once again, a smell suggestive of a certain kind of flower. Lin tried to lean closer towards it as the alluring odor kept drawing her towards Jean. She wanted to push the table aside so that she could spring into him and bury her nose in his grey scarf that was tied closely around his neck. Once the back of their hands brushed on the table, Lin felt more alive than anybody else in the room. She had never seen that man before. But if she had, could she have forgotten about him? In the silence, Lin felt they both waited for the other to speak. In fact, Lin’s heart was screaming out loud — kept chanting the words, “you are magnificent” or simply “I love you”.

“What do you do on Sundays?” Jean asked.

“I don’t know. Nothing in particular. What do you do?”

“Nothing lately. If you’d like to visit me sometime, you’re welcome to. Oh, would you like to come out this Sunday?”

“Yes,” Lin said with sheer anticipation.

Lin felt herself blush, and therefore, she looked away from Jean. Instead, she tried to attend to her lunch and martini. She could now recognize her by the touch alone, by smell; she would know him blind, by the way his breaths came and his feet struck the earthly grounds. She would know him in heaven, and in hell.

Sunday came faster than usual. Jean was already waiting at the entrance of St. Petersburg. “Hi!” Jean called, and leaned over to open the door for her. Lin got in the automobile and pulled the door shut. The automobile was warm, a long grey one with green leather upholstery. Jean drove slowly north.

To Lin, this little world inside Jean’s car was a revelation on its own, from the green leather upholstery to the effortless and relaxed style and elegance of its driver. It seemed to Lin, as if the sounds of the world were replaced with mellifluous melodies. The rest of the world was black and white, but Lin and Jean were in screaming color. The two roared into the Tze-Yu-Wan Tunnel. A wild, inexplicable excitement mounted within Lin’s body as she glanced through the windshield. Lin wished that the tunnel would cave in and kill them both, and that their bodies could be dragged out together. Lin watched his supple fingers gripped the wheel and was fascinated by the ambiguity beyond those worldly eyes when he concentrated on driving.

They were out of the tunnel. Jean then stopped by a grocery store. Lin sat in the automobile loading her camera with film. When she had finished, she spotted Jean outside as a teenaged boy collected his money for what he had bought. The boy had a really bad cold and out of kindness, Jean offered him tissues. Lin stepped out of the car, aimed her camera and took a few shots. When Jean returned to his automobile, Lin showed the pictures that she had taken of him. Knowing that she had always wanted to be a professional photographer for her entire life, Jean decided to give his own camera to Lin.

Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others. Every bit of his flesh was as significant as her own: in pain and sufferings it would still be clear — that their worlds would collide eventually. It was love that brought the two completely different worlds together. She loved him more than he would ever know; he loved her more than he would ever show. Together Jean and Lin possessed a miracle.

Lin would treasure it forever.

They had just driven into a small town and out of it. Now on the driveway, they finally reached a red three-story mansion. Jean turned off the engine as they headed into the mansion.

The mansion had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted oceanic blue, with a golden brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall, similar to a tunnel, a comforting one with pink paneled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with wooden chairs and tables. It was the sort of mansion that you never seemed to come to the end of, and it was full of adventitious places. It was a fine old house.

Jean showed Lin around the house with such eagerness that he seemed to be genuinely happy for once in his life — Jean's parents passed away when he was very little, and the only way to deal with the depression caused by this was to be with Lin, and only with Lin could he find true serenity in life.

The two spent the happiest times of their lives as their relationship transcended time and space and transformed into something far beyond their expectations. One night, Jean sat on the edge of his bed, smoking a cigarette before they turned the lights on. Lin lay in her own bed, watching her closely to read the meaning of the confused look in Jean's eyes. Jean was hoping that Lin would let him sleep tonight in the same bed with her. He wanted to kiss her, to feel her, to imitate her, to channel her, and to be vulnerable. Jean was looking at Lin. Then he walked toward Lin and kissed her, as if they had kissed a thousand times before. Jean touched her head, just behind her ear.

"I've never loved anyone the way I loved you," Jean whispered to Lin's ear.

"Me either. Now we know how," Lin replied, softly.

Jean turned the lights off. In the darkness, two passionate shadows made their ways through the hopeless to have one last touch of each other. His hand drifted down her throat, moved across her chest. His hand lingered over her hips, drawing all the way down the line of her thigh. Lin closed her eyes to feel every complex emotion, to soak everything in. Lin pulled out the lights as she thought to herself: why did people always talk of death and heaven when there was so much happiness in this world? Their naked bodies touched perfectly, as if the stars aligned. They kissed each other on this bed of roses as the colorful perfume of the red roses infuse the everlasting, invigorating fragrance of blossoms in the springtime of their ever-growing memories.

They gave each other the most breathtaking, the most unconditional of gifts.

FEBRUARY 1943 – MARCH 1943

A clear morning, a ribbon of daylight showered upon Lin's face. Eyes still shut, Lin reached out for Jean, but Jean was not there. There was not a single sound uttered from the bathroom. She lifted her head and checked the clock — it was eight in the morning. Lin sat up in the bed. There, seated in an armchair in the semidarkness, was Mrs. Lam-Wei, whom also worked at St. Petersburg's department store. Silence lasted for a few seconds.

"Jean's gone?" Lin asked in confusion.

"Early this morning," Lam-Wei answered.

"How did you get here? Did he send you here?"

"Yes. Jean called me."

"Is he coming back?" Lin asked.

"No. Perhaps never," Lam-Wei said.

"Why? This is all my fault."

"Nonsense. But he did leave this letter to you."

Mrs. Lam-Wei handed Lin a letter. She then tore it open. It was a long letter, and the ink was pale blue on the first few pages, and dark on the others. She read the first page, then went back and read it again. Tears kept rolling down her face as she read it.

"My angel, my darling,

By the time you read this, I'll be far away. You know what I'm going to say. I love you. I love you more than anything in the world. I'm blind for you; I'm wild for you; I'm sick with you. You know how much I love you, I'm sure you do.

There are some battles, no matter how much you don't want to fight them, you just HAVE to fight. Fight for whatever that is worth giving your life for. Fighting for what's right – fighting for my own country. I want you to know that should something happen to me, don't worry about my body. My soul isn't going to return to it, nor to God. It will be flying straight to you, where it knows how to find you, no matter where you are and who you become.

I've loved you since the first time that I met you. You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought. I've never had a moment's doubt. I love you so much that I believe in you completely. You are my dearest one. My true reason for life.

Anywhere you are, if you look up and find stars in the sky, find that smile, and hear the galactic wind whisper your name, and you'll know that it's me, me calling for you.

Goodbye, my love, my soulmate. Goodbye, and may you find a better life, find comfort again and your beautiful smile. Goodbye and have faith, Mialin, my Lin.

Never stop chasing your dreams.

I'll return someday.

JEAN"

Lin found herself sitting in the back of the automobile, leaning against the windshield while Mrs. Lam-Wei was in the front seat driving her home. The automobile stopped for a moment before continuing. There she saw an elegant couple, for which reminded her of the time that Lin and Jean had spent together.

A stunning impact.

A blinding flash of light.

And then, nothing, as it cuts to pitch black.

A Living Memory

Stewards Pooi Kei College, Lui, Joseph – 16

Museums. Always a delight to visit one. Each shelters a unique culture under its roof; each cultivates age-old legends upon its very ground, and each hides many a secret between its walls. The latter is a very apt description of this particular museum, with its mysterious ancient fortifications. It was not the weathered stone, nor the sheer height of the construction that caught my eye, for it was simply a defense system, dwarfed in every aspect by the Great Wall of China.

“In 1553, a wall was built around Old Shanghai as a defense against the pillages of the Japanese pirates. This place is the Dàjìng Gé Pavillon, previously a temple, now a.....”

I tuned out the drone of the guide. Not that I wasn’t interested, it was just that I liked to experience things for myself, drink up every titbit of information, and breathe in the essence of the stories behind every artifact, every monument. What had caught my attention was a faded-out patch of brownish-yellow, barely to be seen in the glare of the afternoon sun. Yet it was in sharp contrast to the dark grey surface of the rough bricks. I brimmed with excitement. Ordinary visitors might not even notice the difference. They certainly would not comprehend the significance of this color change. However, I saw in this spot a legend untold, a myth concealed, a tale buried. I shivered at the prospect of immersing myself in the memories of the wall, knowing well that I was about to discover what no one else had, and no one else could.

I put my palm flat on the surface of the walls and felt the smooth stones pressing on my skin. My mind lingered a while longer on the texture and I closed my eyes. A swirling chaos of strange phenomena flashed into my mind. Then as if entering the eye of a storm, a sudden calm came over my raging thoughts. The chaos dimmed, until it was comparable to the serene mind of a baby. Forcing my hands not to tremble, I breathed in deeply and slowly traced my left hand along the wall.

Two words floated, unbidden into my mindscape: Prehistoric Shanghai—

These were not the wall’s own experiences, it was like a story told by another— fragmented and lacking detail. I glimpsed the image of a barren land, which then shifted into a bleak winter, and finally the image of cultivated earth.

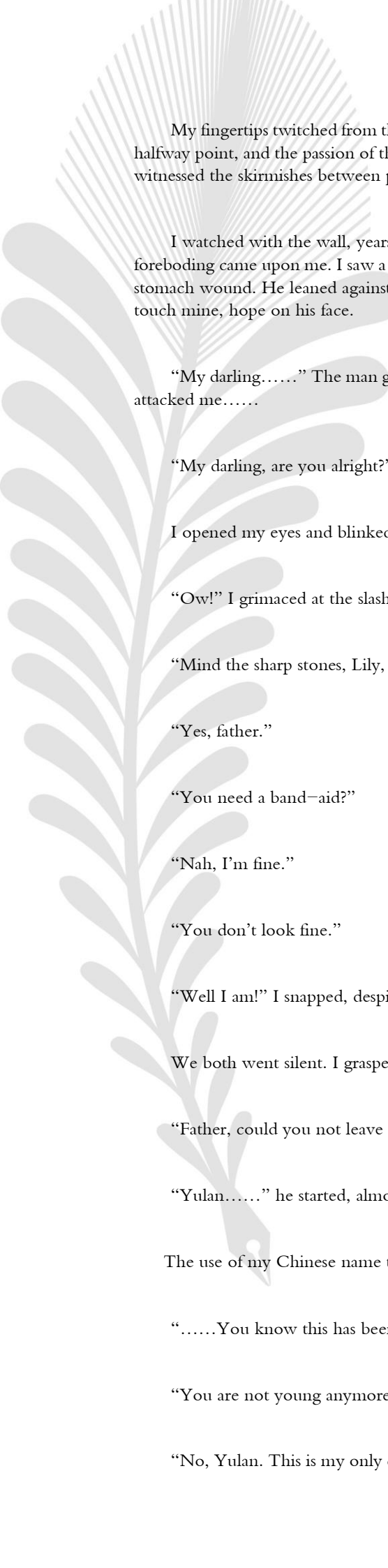
Ancient Shanghai—

Humans came and went; their little huts thrived until they formed an agricultural village. They survived famine, flood, and plague, and prospered into a city with a large population—Shanghai.

Old Shanghai—

It grew in importance as it turned into a trading center. Major constructions were vital to improve living conditions so it was at this time that the walls were built.....

A fierce sense of duty hit me— this was the beginning of the wall’s memories. Born with the sole task of protecting the inhabitants of the city, it knew its job well. I sensed the pride of the wall. Guarding the city was its task, and guard, it did, vowing to stand firm through rain, shine, sleet, and snow.



My fingertips twitched from the sudden change in texture. The surface of the walls roughened as I neared the halfway point, and the passion of the wall dimmed in contrast. It was replaced by a steadily increasing sadness as it witnessed the skirmishes between pirates and the inhabitants.

I watched with the wall, years passing in seconds. Then suddenly everything slowed down and a sense of foreboding came upon me. I saw a figure approaching. A man staggered upon the wall, blood seeping through his stomach wound. He leaned against the wall for support, and with a herculean effort, raised a trembling hand to touch mine, hope on his face.

“My darling.....” The man gave a cry as a sudden spasm overtook him, and fell. I echoed the cry as the pain attacked me.....

“My darling, are you alright?” a familiar voice queried.

I opened my eyes and blinked at the sudden brightness, bringing my aching hand towards my vision.

“Ow!” I grimaced at the slash of scarlet across my palm. “It’s just a scratch. I’ll be fine.”

“Mind the sharp stones, Lily, they don’t have eyes to see you with.”

“Yes, father.”

“You need a band-aid?”

“Nah, I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

“Well I am!” I snapped, despite knowing that my entire body was trembling like a leaf in a storm.

We both went silent. I grasped in my mind for something to say.

“Father, could you not leave for Tibet?”

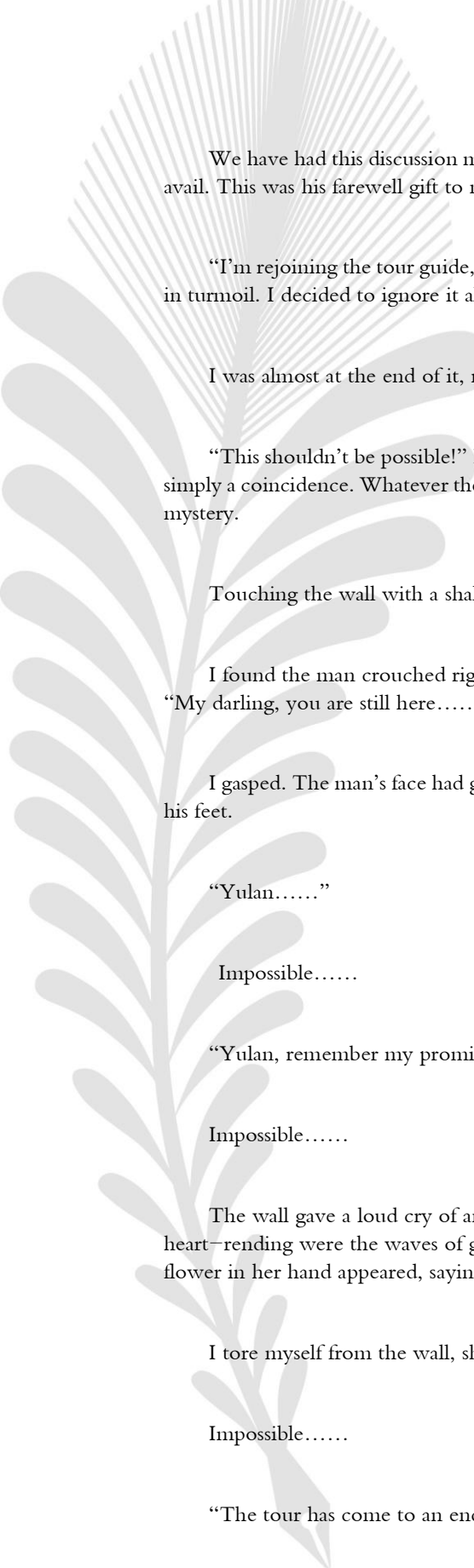
“Yulan.....” he started, almost pleading.

The use of my Chinese name took me aback.

“.....You know this has been my dream since I was young, to see the world from above.....”

“You are not young anymore! And you now have a daughter who is telling you to stay!”

“No, Yulan. This is my only chance to visit the Himalayas. Don’t worry! I will return before you know it.”



We have had this discussion many times. I had been trying to persuade him not to leave for weeks, but to no avail. This was his farewell gift to me; trying to placate me with a visit to a museum.

“I’m rejoining the tour guide, have fun with whatever you were doing.” My father walked away, leaving me in turmoil. I decided to ignore it all for now and concentrate on the wall again.

I was almost at the end of it, right at the beige-colored patch.

“This shouldn’t be possible!” I muttered. The man should not have been able to see me. Or perhaps that was simply a coincidence. Whatever the case, my interest was aroused, and I could not feel at rest until I had solved the mystery.

Touching the wall with a shaking hand, I whispered, “Take me back.....”

I found the man crouched right at the foot of the wall. He seemingly heard something and raised his head, “My darling, you are still here.....”

I gasped. The man’s face had gone pale, his eyes drooping. The blood dripped from his wound and pooled at his feet.

“Yulan.....”

Impossible.....

“Yulan, remember my promise? I shall return.....”

Impossible.....

The wall gave a loud cry of anguish, mourning the loss of yet another soldier to the pirates. Even more heart-rending were the waves of grief emanating washing over me, as the image of a young girl with a white flower in her hand appeared, saying, “Don’t leave.....”

I tore myself from the wall, shaking my head, trying my best to stop the uncontrollable sobbing.

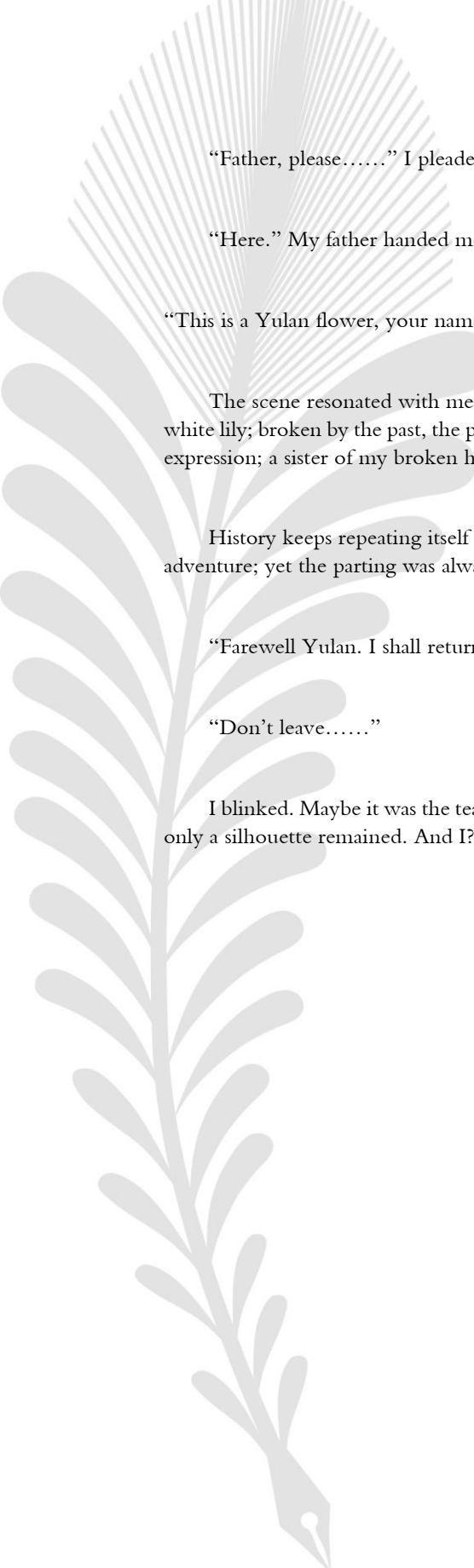
Impossible.....

“The tour has come to an end. If you have any queries please feel free to ask. I wish you all a good day.”

“Lily.” I was still too stunned to react to my name. “Lily! It’s time!”

I wiped away the remaining tears and faced my father.

“I have to go meet up with the team. You can stay here for a while longer. I’ll go directly to the airport after that, so don’t wait for me at home.”



“Father, please.....” I pleaded once more, my eyes watering: the second time today.

“Here.” My father handed me a delicate white flower. A sense of déjà vu overwhelmed me.

“This is a Yulan flower, your namesake. It will keep you company till I return.”

The scene resonated with memory: an old memory, an ancient memory; of a young girl, tightly grasping a white lily; broken by the past, the present, and the future. Each a shadow of my grieving self; an echo of my pained expression; a sister of my broken heart.

History keeps repeating itself in the circle of time. Perhaps there had been a war, a quest, or simply an adventure; yet the parting was always the same: the same sorrow, the same torment.

“Farewell Yulan. I shall return!”

“Don’t leave.....”

I blinked. Maybe it was the tears blurring my sight, but instead of my father, I saw a soldier pacing away, until only a silhouette remained. And I? I became the young girl, who could do nothing but return home.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

True Light Girls' College, Wing, Ip – 15

I remember how I gawked at the piece of jade lying in its natural glamor on top of my trembling palm, perfectly polished and carved in delicacy, its iridescence shining through the thin layer of dirt that laid atop its glossy surface with time and through the air surrounding me. I took a moment to appreciate its fascinating beauty, completely oblivious of the glimmering hostility sparkling within the stone. I was, as a dumbfounded child, utterly aware of the danger I was holding in my hands, and I examined the jade with curiosity as it continued to glow in its own color, brighter and brighter with each passing second. I was fully petrified at that point, and I watched in amazement as it blazed with a piercing bright white light, forcing my eyelids shut until my consciousness decided to turn its back on me. That was how it all started. That was how I ended up here.

I sit, leaning against a worn-out wall in one of those quaint streets in the city, furrowing my eyebrows at the perishing sunlight that bathes my glistening torso in a pool of faint orange. *I want to go home*, I mumble mentally, but quickly retort upon myself as though struck by a painful revelation once again.

But this is home.

I slowly get up from the ground, with feeble feet as I stare off into the distance. My home should be somewhere near that far-off alley— if it still stands.

It took me a long while to finally figure out what happened. This piece of jade, which I acquired from the Temple of the City Gods, carries a certain sort of unexplainable magic that enables me to experience the future world, decades from that I am from. This is the era where the defensive walls that surrounded the city have been torn down, where tranquility has been replaced by crowds and noises. This is a new era for the Old City of Shanghai, and I am still desperately trying to comprehend what a confusing mess this place I call home has become.

I drag my feet along the pebble path, towards the boulevard with reminiscence from my childhood frolicking wildly inside my brain as pieces of scattered memories. I miss the sweet scent of home. I miss leaning back on the rattan chair and quietly admire the stunning antiques that stand in pride and elegance, inside the artifact shop that my family has been running for years. That is where I truly belong, and I would be heading straight to home regardless of the circumstance— as taught by my mother.

I shuffle, my bare feet landing harshly against the rock on the path with each step I take. Flashbacks of what happened inside the temple strikes me like a lightning, I grimace at the memory.

It was another ordinary morning in the Old City of Shanghai. The shrill calls of early birds tore the city's serenity apart, and my eyes fluttered open at the piercing sound. I climbed out of bed and down the rusty ladder, adrenaline rushing through my veins as I rushed out of the artifact shop downstairs and towards the narrow alley into the warmth of the dawn. I dashed along the streets in a flurry, eventually stopping by the Temple of the City Gods. The temple is one of my favorite spots to be wandering in in solitude. The remaining sticks of incense, half buried into the ashes with burnt tips inside the golden tray, swayed in devastation as the morning breeze caressed their withered form. Wisps of turbid smoke lingered in the wintry air, and I followed its lead as I

entered the temple and hurried past the solemn statues of the deities, making my way towards the back of front hall, my secret hide-out.

It was then did I realize something was out of place. I examined my surroundings, skeptically as my eyes strived hard to adjust to the gloomy environment. I sneaked out to the front hall and took a clandestine glimpse at the statue of General Huo Guang. He, dressed in pure golden with hands to chest, still sat in authority just like many other times I had visited. I returned to the darkness behind the statues, and I caught something, faint and swift, flickering for a brief moment out of the corner of my eye. I approached the dead-end of the narrow chamber, riddled with dirt, and looked for the light source in alertness. I pushed aside a pile of darkened cloth that blocked the way, narrowing my eyes with the determination to satisfy my curiosity.

It flickered again, and I fumbled for anything I could get my hands on just to quickly sort it out. That was when I came across something smooth and cold to the touch.

I secured it in a fist and it slowly slackened to an open palm. In my hands laid a breathtaking jade, finer than any of those waiting to be sold at our artifact shop, sparkling with an irregular pattern, sometimes bright but mostly faint. I stroked its surface, and the light within swirled following the glide of my thumb. My eyes widened in astonishment, and as though sensing my emotions, the stone responded by beaming an even brighter light, which at last stung my eyes as it swallowed me whole at the wake of a powerful blast.

I woke up much later after, frowning at the scorching sunlight that danced briskly on my flesh. I pushed myself up from the ground and immediately gasped at what surrounded me.

It was crowds all around.

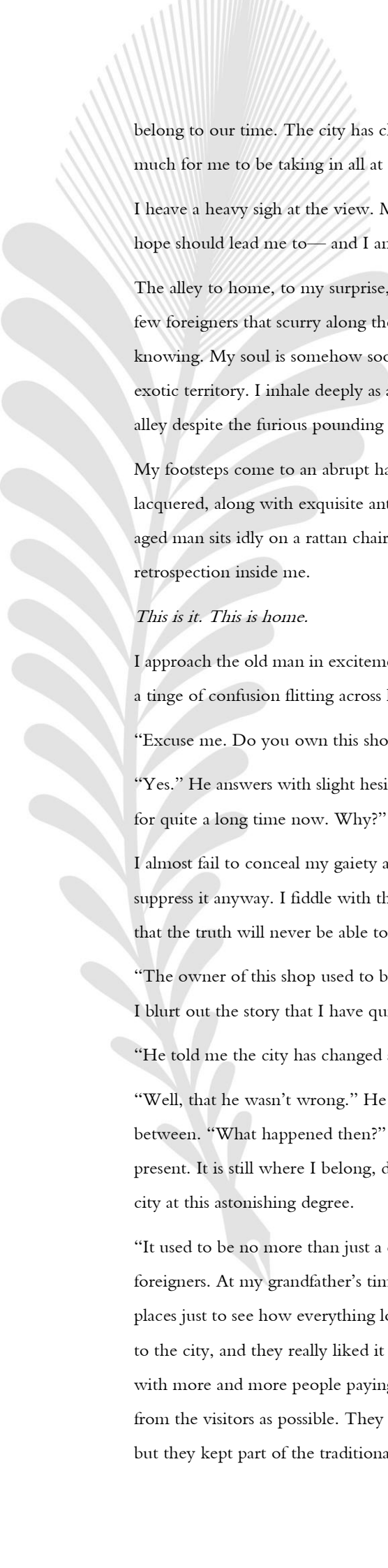
Little did I know this was the start of my adventure to the future, which turned out to be quite a late revelation.

As I march steadfastly towards the boulevard that may lead me straight to home, I take my time to examine the city and find out how much it has altered. As I stroll through the main streets of the city, all I can hear in my head are hysterical screams out of terror.

It is a flabbergasting mixture of tradition and *modernity*, a term I have managed to obtain from observing the city's peculiarity that I am far from being acquainted of. Amidst the hustle and bustle of the roadways stand series of odd shops, grand but queer to my eyes, with gigantic signboards casting a heavy shadow over me as I canter along the street in sheer puzzlement. *Starbucks Coff  e*, *McDonald's*, I tilt my head at the brand names, at the same time striving to search for traces, even pieces, of the Old Shanghai I genuinely know.

I lift my weary eyes in melancholy. *There they are*, I take a moment to gaze at the familiar silhouettes of traditional Chinese architecture that dwells on the roofs of these shops, upright and solemn as though trying to make a point that they have not collapsed in the cyclone of time. I laugh bitterly at the bizarre sight in front of my eyes. The standard building format of old Chinese edifices with state-of-the-art commercial stores built underneath as bases are seen everywhere, bathing the city in a vibrant ambience with its concocted culture.

Different kinds of people walk to and fro around me, blonde and brunette, foreigners and locals, with some babbling about the city in excitement and some contemplating on where to go next. I look, through the hoary haze towards the direction of the Temple of City Gods. Tendrils of smoke drift off into the overcast sky, thick and murky, which immediately dawns on me that the temple is probably no longer the placid sanctuary I remember as a part of my memory, but merely an overcrowded spot at which people pay visits to the gods that



belong to our time. The city has changed, for the better or for the worse. It has become something way too much for me to be taking in all at once.

I heave a heavy sigh at the view. My emotions are beyond words now, but I know just where my last piece of hope should lead me to— and I am very happy to witness the outcome myself.

The alley to home, to my surprise, still looks as ravishing as I have remembered it to be, with the exception of a few foreigners that scurry along the road from time to time. It looks exactly like the one I have grown up knowing. My soul is somehow soothed at that instant, as though having found a piece of indigenous land in an exotic territory. I inhale deeply as a preparation of what is about to come, and I anxiously stride my way into the alley despite the furious pounding inside my chest.

My footsteps come to an abrupt halt at the sight of an artifact shop. The walls of the brightly-lit store are finely lacquered, along with exquisite antiques placed neatly on the wooden shelves glittering in their own colors. An aged man sits idly on a rattan chair that looks all too familiar, the scene immediately pulling a string of retrospection inside me.

This is it. This is home.

I approach the old man in excitement, swallowing a lump in my throat. He lifts his head slowly to greet my gaze, a tinge of confusion flitting across his feature.

“Excuse me. Do you own this shop?” I gingerly question. The old man raises an eyebrow at me, intrigued.

“Yes.” He answers with slight hesitation. “It was possessed by my ancestors and we’ve been running the business for quite a long time now. Why?”

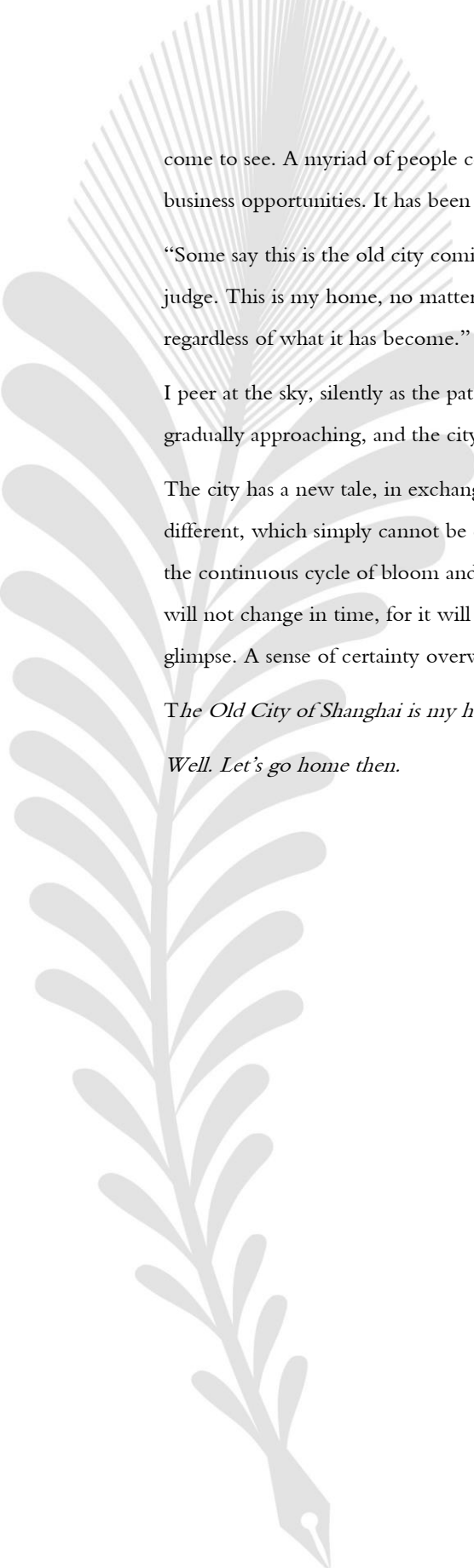
I almost fail to conceal my gaiety at this point, knowing that the shop still exists after decades, but I manage to suppress it anyway. I fiddle with the piece of jade that has brought me here, making the convenient assumption that the truth will never be able to convince the man of my true origin.

“The owner of this shop used to be the predecessor of a relative of mine. I heard about the artifacts from there.” I blurt out the story that I have quickly come up with.

“He told me the city has changed a lot over the years.”

“Well, that he wasn’t wrong.” He murmurs, ruffling through a head of hair with streaks of gray lurking in between. “What happened then?” I carry on. The old city must have its own story to tell, in the past or at the present. It is still where I belong, despite all vicissitudes— and I am eager to know what exactly has changed the city at this astonishing degree.

“It used to be no more than just a city really,” the old man leans back, deep in thoughts. “There were barely any foreigners. At my grandfather’s time, at least. But then people started traveling around the world, visiting new places just to see how everything looks like on the other side of the globe. That was when people started coming to the city, and they really liked it to say the least. It made the city’s economy bloom like a flower in the dawn with more and more people paying their visits, and things quickly got commercial so as to make as much profit from the visitors as possible. They built hotels, opened restaurants and souvenir shops around the community, but they kept part of the traditional constructions, rebuilt them even, knowing this is basically what the tourists



come to see. A myriad of people come and go every day, making the city thrive in the nourishment of countless business opportunities. It has been living up to a different fate ever since then.

“Some say this is the old city coming to life, but some say this is the city’s demise. Either way, I’m not going to judge. This is my home, no matter how much it has changed. I am still going to spend the rest of my life here regardless of what it has become.”

I peer at the sky, silently as the patch of early burgundy start to engulf the last beam of sunlight. Evening is gradually approaching, and the city looks so peaceful all of a sudden as if time has frozen still.

The city has a new tale, in exchange for its time-honored history. It has been reborn as something so fresh and different, which simply cannot be determined as having become better or worse. But I do know that in spite of the continuous cycle of bloom and perish, I will always have a home to run back into. It is the only thing that will not change in time, for it will always be held within the depths of my heart. I give the artifact shop one last glimpse. A sense of certainty overwhelms me as I look down at the jade laying atop of my palm.

The Old City of Shanghai is my home, no matter how much it has changed, I think to myself.

Well. Let’s go home then.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

True Light Girls' College, Wing, Law Ka – 15

They say it used to talk.

It used to talk to its people.

Words of wisdom sent with a gust of wind, music of life spread by the chirps of birds.

But they do not know when the Old City of Shanghai has stopped speaking, when it has started to remain silent, when reticence has begun radiating off the land.

Nor do they know its silence is reminiscent of betrayal, of lament, of sorrow.

They do not know.

They really do not.

But I do.

The metallic doors heaved a sigh as I pushed open them, grazing the concrete pedestrian street. I swivelled out the door, glancing back with a hint of smile. Beams of light skidded across the tiles of the roof, the winged corners stood with imperiousness, towering over bamboo doors sculpted with delicate carvings. My mother endeared the engravements; the pavilions, the trees, the scenes on the doors were scrubbed and cleaned daily, she could not stand them withering with dusts. People looked up to our house, said it was a cultural paradise, with arrays of books stocked up on shelves; they called it *Shuying Tower*—a building hidden with paperbacks.

The City was a labyrinth, streets and roads overlapping one another, forming a maze of perplexity. It was common to get lost here, with the winding and confusing alleys. I glided my fingers on the walls as I walked, keeping myself content in the lonesome journey. Mother refused to let me bring one of the *amahs*, said I was independent enough.

I was astounded by the clumps of crowds on the *Jiuqu Bridge*—the bridge of nine turnings, though it was fair for them gathering here, it was New Year after all. Most were dressed smartly, crimson qipaos embroidered with bronze floral embezzlements, navy Zhongshan suits with simple silver patterns, efforts were made to look the best as they could. I peered down at my beige cheongsam and shrugged, I was not here to party anyway.

A queue had already spiralled outside the Nanxiang Mantou Dian. Huffing of annoyance, tapping of embroidered shoes, wailing of children were sounded in the air, frustration was eminent. I joined in the snake, my basket swinging on my forearm.

'Tsk tsk, my dear, what are you doing here? Why didn't you just go up the kitchen?'

I looked up as the Shanghai dialect hit me, just in time to see who yanked me out of the queue.

'Seriously Mrs. Waang, I'm good here,' I reasoned as she ushered me up the stairs, watching in awe that she never tripped on one step in her heels.

'Nonsense, *you will not line up*, you hear me?'

I pursed my lips into a thin line, knowing better than to argue.

'It's The Day, yeah?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'It's been a while since I've last seen your father,'

'Yeah, me too,'

'Tell him I said hi, would you?' She added. 'And tell him to visit me before setting off for another trip.'

'I sure will,' I smiled. 'I bet he misses your xiaolongbao more than you though.'

'Well, I'm not surprised.' She huffed. 'Why else would your mother send you here to pick up your order?'

'How much did she ask for this time?'

'4 dozens,'

My jaw dropped instantly, 'How am I going to take all of them home?'

'Didn't you bring any amahs?'

'No, Mother refused to,'

'Independence practices, I see,' She let out a chuckle. 'But I guess it is rather harsh this time.'

'You bet,'

'Is the Kwok's order ready?' Mrs. Waang bellowed, pushing the wooden door of the kitchenette open.

I stood by the door frame, sighing in contentment as the warm steam breezed by. January was intolerable in Shanghai, winds never took down a notch, they could not care less about slapping one across the face, rather, they were willing to punch one in full blast. The aroma of minced pork and ginger seeped into my nostrils, baiting me to fall in love with the buns here, nonetheless, I already had.

'Jing, hand me your basket, would you?' Mrs. Waang poked her head out. 'No, rather, just come in.'

'If it isn't my favourite girl,' Ah Wang, one of the chefs, beamed at me. 'Here with our boss today?'

'Yup,' I smiled politely, refraining from cringing at his greasy hair. 'Dad's back.'

'Good news, huh?' He returned to his work. 'Haven't seen the guy myself for quite a bit.'

'That's what everyone says,'

'It's the truth, my dear, it's the truth,'

I nodded, shifting from one foot to another, observing in amazement as the kitchen operated in a brisk manner. Workers here were poles apart from the amahs at home, they never bickered, never quibbled, never gossiped, they performed their tasks with solemnity.

'Here you go,' Mrs. Waang shuffled the basket forward into my arms.

I stumbled backwards, the weight of the buns eating me away.

'Sacrificial for enjoying our food,' She smirked.

'Worth it though,' I puffed out a breath.

'You have quite a mouth on you, little miss,'

I laughed, 'I'll see you around, Mrs. Waang.'

'You know the way out,'

'Goodbye and have a nice evening,'

'You too, little one,'

The sky was tinted with smears of red, eminent with tints of orange and yellow, swirling with a burst of warm colours. Patches of thin cloud wandered around, creating a pebble ceiling for the earth. The silhouette of moon could be seen with squinted eyes, craters obvious on the surface.

My shoulder bumped open the unlatched front door, which creaked in response. It was never locked, people sauntered in and out, it had become a tradition to leave the door agape, no one bothered to slam it shut.

I stumbled towards the kitchen, squeals of quibbles could already be heard outside. Our amahs were notorious for gossiping, they knew all the rumours going around the town; they took the issues seriously, discussing them like men quarrelling over politics. My mom stopped minding them while later, it was futile.

'Aiyz, why didn't you call out for us?' *Ping Jie* rushed out, a scowl across her features.

'You guys probably couldn't hear me anyways,' I rolled my eyes.

'She has a point,' Someone belched out at the back.

'I'm not going to shout for nothing, you know,'

'Yeah, yeah, whatever,' Ping Jie huffed. 'Your father's in the study, go find him now if you wish to speak with him alone, dinner's nearly ready.'

'Thanks,' I scrambled out the door, scurried deeper into the house.

The door to the Study was unbolted, a small creak left open, a sign that Father was at home. He hated when the Study was closed, said it was troublesome to force it open; the doorknob was broken, that was why, but he never did remember to fix it. I got a glimpse of Father furiously jotting down notes on a paper, the cap of the pen rouletting on the desk, edging closer to the brim.

I softly knocked on the door, startling the old man.

'C'mon in,'

'Dinner's ready, Father,' I smiled, stepping into the room.

'Here comes my favourite daughter,' He stood from his chair, engulfed me into a hug.

'I'll try not to tell the others,'

He belched out a laugh, 'If only you have siblings.'

I peered over his tall frame, scanning his paper. Father's handwriting was delicate and neat, a practice he had had since little, Gramps had forced him to work on penmanship everyday.

'What are you working on?' My curiosity got the best of me.

'A letter,'

'About...?'

He shrugged, fending off the question. I detested it when grown-ups hid things behind me, I was not an immature child anymore, I was already fifteen, I could handle messages.

'Father, not you, not anyone but you. You know I despise people treating me as a kid,'

He let out a breathe, 'Of course I remember, but this is not something I can tell you that, not with the absence of your mother.'

'Why?'

'Because it's a decision that involved her. I respect her, and will wait for her before I reveal it,'

'Is it about me?'

'Yes, dear, yes,'

I pouted at the stern tone my father pulled, signalling the discussion came to an end. I mused on the letter, confident that it was not about the maritime trading business, under no condition Father would scatter such confidential information around the table, lest chewing over with Mother. The peculiarity was egging on me.

'Let's head to dinner, honey, we'll talk over food, alright?' Father raised his eyebrow, eyes swirled with expectancy.

I nodded grudgingly, still pondering over the mail.

'I heard we are having *xiaolongbao*, right?'

'Yeah, I went over to the Waang's today,'

'How are they?'

'Better than ever, business still going strong,'

'Good to hear, I haven't seen them for a while, kind of missed them,'

'You mean their food,'

'Well, that's for sure,' He laughed quietly.

'Mrs. Waang asked for you today,'

'Glad that they still remember me,'

'Why wouldn't they? They basically grow up with you,'

'Flourishing with wisdom, I see,' He smirked.

'Thanks for your input, dad,'

The *amahs* were already setting the table in the hall, settling dishes down on the roulette. The rosewood furniture was a significance of our family, the luxurious wood was not affordable for everyone, and the glass roulette on top just added the price, neighbours visiting eyed the table with admiration all the time.

An extra set of cutlery was placed next to my usual spot, my pupils narrowed with suspicion at it. I was not informed about having a guest over, no one had mentioned it to me.

'Are we expecting somebody?'

'Yes, you'll meet him soon,' Father tensed up beside me.

'Is he your business partner?' I prompted.

'Not exactly, he was my accountant.'

I nodded in acknowledgement. Mother strode in, balancing a bamboo steamer on one hand. Puffs of smoke pivoted around the kitchenware, masking the cuisine with mystery.

'Now that your mother is here, you can ask her,' Father gestured.

'Hmm?' Mother hummed absentmindedly.

'What's the letter about?' I shot off.

Mother knitted her brows in response, confusion masked her pupils.

'Honey, you got to be more accurate,' Father chuckled.

'Dad was writing a letter when I joined him in the study just now. He said it was about something you and him had decided on, I would like to know what it is about,' I elaborated.

'I see,' Mother bobbed her head. 'When is your ideal time to get married?'

'Huh?' I stuttered out, jaw slacked at the sudden swerve in our conversation.

'Like mother, like daughter,' Father muttered, earning a glare.

'Let me rephrase that, when do you plan on getting married?'

'I'm not sure, when I've found The One?' I blinked.

'Don't you think it might be too late when you finally found him, I mean, you are fifteen now, aren't you?'

'Yeah, but I don't see it as a problem.'

'Of course it is!' Mother exclaimed. 'Girls around your age are already planning their marriages.'

'But you and father have never talked to me about it, lest rushing me into one.'

'We are not forcing you into one, we've just, well, found you a perfect partner,' Father rubbed the nape of his neck.

'Excuse me?'

'Well, your mother and I have selected an ideal partner for you.'

'Seriously? You've never even asked for my opinion!' I raised my volume.

'Because we know you'll just throw a tantrum like this!' Father waved his hands around.

'So this is a tantrum?' I shouted, disbelieved. 'Did you even hear what you had said? You have found me a husband without my consent!'

'That's what all parents do,' Mother reasoned.

'Not mine,' I snickered. 'Who has always encouraged liberty.'

Father pursed his lips tightly, lost at words.

'And feminism,' I added.

'That's quite enough, Jing,' Father regained his composure. 'I'm the head of the family, and you will do what I have told you.'

'I'm doing what you have taught me to do in every respect, fighting for fairness and justice.'

'Do not use my words against me,' He sneered. 'You will get married, no matter what.'

'So it is true then?' My breath disheveled.

'What do you mean?'

'That you would do anything for money.'

'Where did you hear that gibberish?'

'Rumours around the town,' I nodded. 'But I guess they are no longer false, for I have finally come across with your cruelty.'

'So now I am cruel?' Veins bulged from his forehead. 'I am cruel because I'm deciding what's best for you, I'm cruel because I hope you would have a better future, I'm cruel because I present you my blessings. What a nonsense!'

'Oh my, of *course* you are *not* cruel! You are opening a *happy charity*,' Venom dripping off my words.

'Respect your elders, missy,' Father hissed.

'I will not respect ones who do not respect my opinions,' I held my head high.

'Down a notch, would you? He is here,' Mother shushed.

My head snapped to the doorway, a middle-aged man approaching. His hair was gelled into perfection, not even one bit of it was out of place; spectacles hung on the bridge of his nose, his calculating eyes beamed behind them; the thin line of his lips radiated his sternness. His appearance, if not, had further fuelled my loathe towards him.

'Mei,' Father acknowledged.

'Mr. Kwok,' Mei nodded.

'Mei, this is my daughter, Kwok Jing; Jing, this is Mr. Chen Qi Mei,'

My stubbornness held my posture. I withheld from befriending with him, despite he would be sleeping beside me in the near future. Fiancée or not, I would not pay him my respect.

Mei dodged my impoliteness swiftly, 'I'm sorry to inform that I will not be able to join you all dinner tonight. Instead, I'll simply converse about the details with Jing.'

'We sure understand,' Mother smiled. 'Jing, lead Mr. Chen to the Study.'

Silence fell between us, footsteps ringing in the hallway, accentuated the hollowness of the night. Owls hooted once in a while, startling the serenity of the environment. My hands dangled on my sides, palms soaked with sweat, I was never comfortable around strangers.

I pushed the door open, revealing our Study to Mei. I stalked to the table, sat on the edge and crossed my arms, my eyes focus on the cap of the pen lying on the table, mindlessly picking it up and capped it back on.

'So I'm not going to beat around the bushes, I need your help on,' Mei said.

'Why, in the name of God, do you think I am going to help you?'

'Because you are my soon-to-be-wife,'

'And?' I raised a brow.

'And wives obey husbands, that's why,'

'I'm not one to follow tradition,'

'Well, I don't care whether you are follow it or not, you are doing as I've told,'

'And if I don't?'

'Well, this is going to be simple,' He picked his nails. 'Your father's business is going to be rough,'

'Are you hijacking me?' I gulped.

'No, I'm just offering you a choice,'

'I *just* know that these are all about money,'

'You are partly on track,' He answered nonchalantly.

'What do you want me to do?'

'I've been thinking about taking down the walls of the City to merge the culture between it and the Northern City,'

'I beg you pardon?' I bulged my eyes.

'I wish to tear down the boundary between the Southern City, which is where you are brought up, and the Northern City. Therefore, I need information on that. It makes persuasion to my head easier,'

'In this case, I'm not helping you,' I held my stare.

'Excuse me?'

'I will not help you on this, this is basically betraying my City,'

'You are exaggerating it,'

'Why is it not a disloyalty to my town? We are proud of our uniqueness, we are glad that our tradition can be maintained without being corrupted by modernity.'

'I couldn't care less about what you all commoners think, all I take into account are the benefits to our party,'

'Us *commoners*,' I sniggered at the word. 'And I believe your party is *high* and *almighty*, isn't it, Mr. Chen?'

'Do not insult the Kuomintang,' He jeered.

I blinked, 'Kuomintang? You are from the Kuomintang?'

'And whoever opposes me, opposes the party, so you are not simply running against me, you are against a whole group of people,'

'And we'll make sure your life drown in hell.' He slowly added.

I was lost in words, trapped in a corner without any way out. I lowered my head in defeat, dumbfounded.

'So what do you think?'

'I'll do it,' I mumbled.

'I couldn't hear you, darling, speak up,'

'I will do it,'

'That's the answer I'm looking for,' He added. 'It's not a hard task, I just need you to fetch me proves about how the City has barely changed within the recent decades,'

'When do you need the evidences?'

'When is our wedding?'

'I don't know,'

'As soon as possible, I am hoping to demolish it in 1912, which will be two year from now, the wedding has to be in this year,'

'Why are you in such a rush?'

'My mother urges me to, she would refrain me from work if I don't,'

'I see,' I fiddled with my fingers.

'Do you think October will do, which is two months later,'

'I'll see what I can do, though I don't think it's a problem,'

I sat in the sedan, fidgeting in the small closed-area, discomfort was eminent. My Qipao hugged my body closely, like a snake engulfing its prey; its beauty did not fend off my discomfort, the golden embroidery did not make my collar feel less suffocating. I stilled my head, preventing from disheveling my hair; the posture numbed my neck. I ran my fingers through the satin curtain, the silk under the pads of my fingertips felt smooth and soft, I peeled the corner open, revealing the night sky. Clouds obscured the moon, the stars, seemingly furious at my act. Mei said he was not wishing for a glamorous wedding, a small secretive one would do, and here I was, being escorted to my new home in the Northern City, away from my childhood.

'We're at the boundary,' An amah murmured.

'Tell them to halt, I need to bid my goodbye,' I ordered.

The sedan was laid on the ground, debris and sands whirled up a little. I pushed the curtain open, picked up my dress and stepped out. My sewed shoes rubbed on the soft grass, I sighed in relaxation. I walked on the natural carpet towards the walls, the concrete brick walls, walls that I vowed to tear down. I raised my hand and placed it on the bricks, thumb rubbing comforting circles on the infrastructure. My forehead pressed against the walls, the cold material calming my nerves.

'I'm sorry,' I whispered.

'I'm sorry,'

My shoulders trembled and slumped forward. Defeat, anguish, agony, bubbled up my heart. I could feel it, the tears, the weakness threatening to surface, I suppressed it, I pressed down the frailty.

And then I heard it, its steady, husky voice, swivelling along with the wind, the breeze, 'You will suffer, you will be punished, for the cowardly actions you have shown. You will pay for all the people inside, you will pay for the specialty lost. You will live around until every single person behind the wall fades. And may I bless you here, will your life be lived in remorse.'

The Emerald Ring

West Island School, Tam, Victor – 14

The characters on the walls surrounding the flat were written with fine jet-black ink, each stroke attended to with care. Its meaning was unmistakable; anyone who came across it instantly recognised the writing. In the corner of the room an incense stick burned, with a glowing spark on its tip. A few footsteps paced around the room, back and forth from the bed to the miniature wooden desk across from it. The footsteps created the sound of a loud drumbeat, rhythmic and heavy. There was a knock at the door. Silence filled the walls.

“Yes?”, a grunt replied.

The door creaked open slowly. Light poured in, and a still silhouette stood at the doorstep. The figure wore a makeshift postman’s outfit, complete with a bag strapped round his shoulder. In the dim glow reflecting off the postman, a grin revealed a set of crooked teeth. “Package for Mr. Li,” the man spoke with a firm tone. With one hand, he handed the package out to the receiver, as if shoving it to him in a hurry.

“Thank you very much,” acknowledged the voice, taking the package from the postman.

Closing the door behind him, the man scanned over his name and address before pacing back to his bed. He opened the parcel he had been delivered and spread out the contents in front of him. The items were simple; a rope, his passport, a wet cloth, several uniforms and a pair of sunglasses. After all this was packed into a rucksack lying on top of the wooden desk, the man slung the rucksack over his shoulder and headed out the door. The murder was about to begin.

She was waiting for her appointment wearing torn and stained clothing. One could clearly see that she had once been youthful and attractive, but her body had aged so much since that exhaustion and pain had taken over her facial features. Her forehead was wrinkled with furrows and creases – caused by enduring years of hard work. Occasional strands of long grey hairs could be seen through her rigid and bored expression. Her face hardly ever showed any signs of joy, as if any feelings of happiness were completely drained from her.

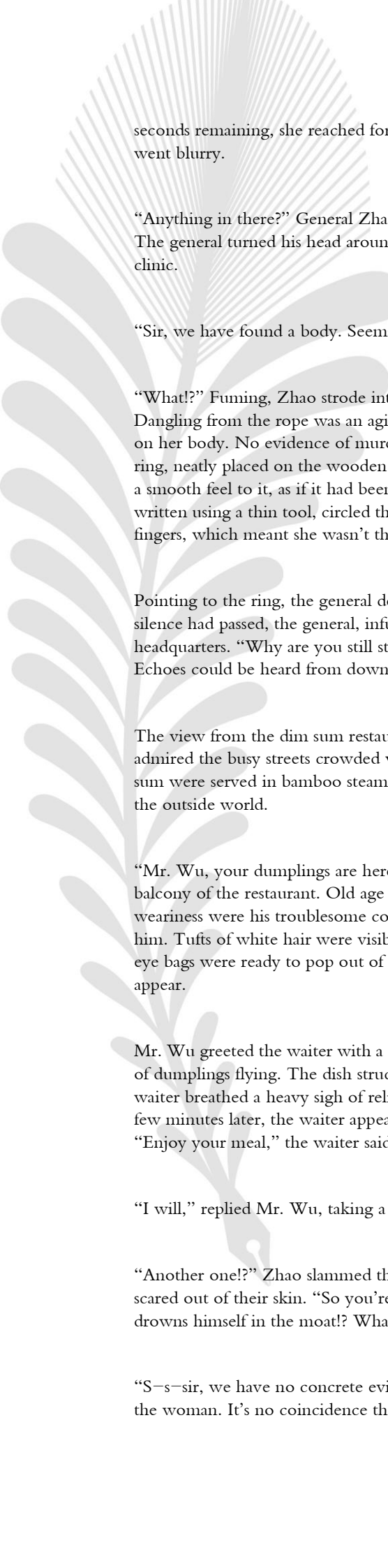
The creases in the woman’s face tightened as she rubbed her forehead. Impatiently tapping her foot and glancing frequently at her watch, she wondered how much longer she was going to wait. Just as she was about to give up, her head turned in the direction of a doctor entering the clinic. A sudden gut instinct told her that there was something different about this doctor.

“Please, take a seat,” the doctor offered.

The doctor, now greeting her with a friendly smile, had replaced the old man whom the woman visited once a week. Specks of greying hair were visible on his aging body. His back had a slight hunch. Each step he took was careful, as he approached his desk and sat down without a sigh. The narrow eyes behind his dusty spectacles glimmered with warmth, and the smile on his face complimented his welcoming manner.

With shaking hands, he placed the file in his hands on the desk in front of him. As he cleared his throat, he could sense his patient sitting across felt unnerved. “Don’t worry, Ms. Wang”, he exclaimed. “As your original doctor, Doctor Feng, has reported in sick today, I will be in charge of treating you for the moment. Allow me to check your pulse first,” he ordered calmly.

Before the woman had time to react, the doctor had abruptly held her face in a firm grip. From the pocket of his coat, he whipped out a cloth full of chloroform. The woman couldn’t breathe at all. Her head started to throb, black spots starting to form in her vision. She tugged at his arm, trying to loosen the doctor’s grip. With a few



seconds remaining, she reached for her handbag, but darkness completely blanketed her vision, and everything went blurry.

“Anything in there?” General Zhao barked to his officers. He stood with an alert expression, surveying the scene. The general turned his head around to find an officer saluting him, before gesturing towards a room inside the clinic.

“Sir, we have found a body. Seems to be suicide,” the officer informed.

“What!?” Fuming, Zhao strode into the room. A string of rope hung from the isolated light bulb on the ceiling. Dangling from the rope was an aging woman who seemed to be in her mid-fifties. There was no blood anywhere on her body. No evidence of murder was left behind. The only thing which looked out of place was an emerald ring, neatly placed on the wooden table at the woman’s bedside. The ring gave off a strong lavender scent and had a smooth feel to it, as if it had been polished many times. On the ring, a name was engraved. Three characters, written using a thin tool, circled the outside, which read an anonymous name. There were no marks on any of her fingers, which meant she wasn’t the owner.

Pointing to the ring, the general demanded, “Find something about the owner of this ring!” After moments of silence had passed, the general, infuriated, stormed out of the scene and headed back to Shanghai Municipal Police headquarters. “Why are you still standing there? Meet me back in my office when you’ve found something!” Echoes could be heard from down the street as the general yelled in rage.

The view from the dim sum restaurant was simply breath-taking. It never got boring, no matter how much one admired the busy streets crowded with carts and noises, and shops all around. As mouth-watering dishes of dim sum were served in bamboo steamers, one could overlook the looming wall separating home from the moat and the outside world.

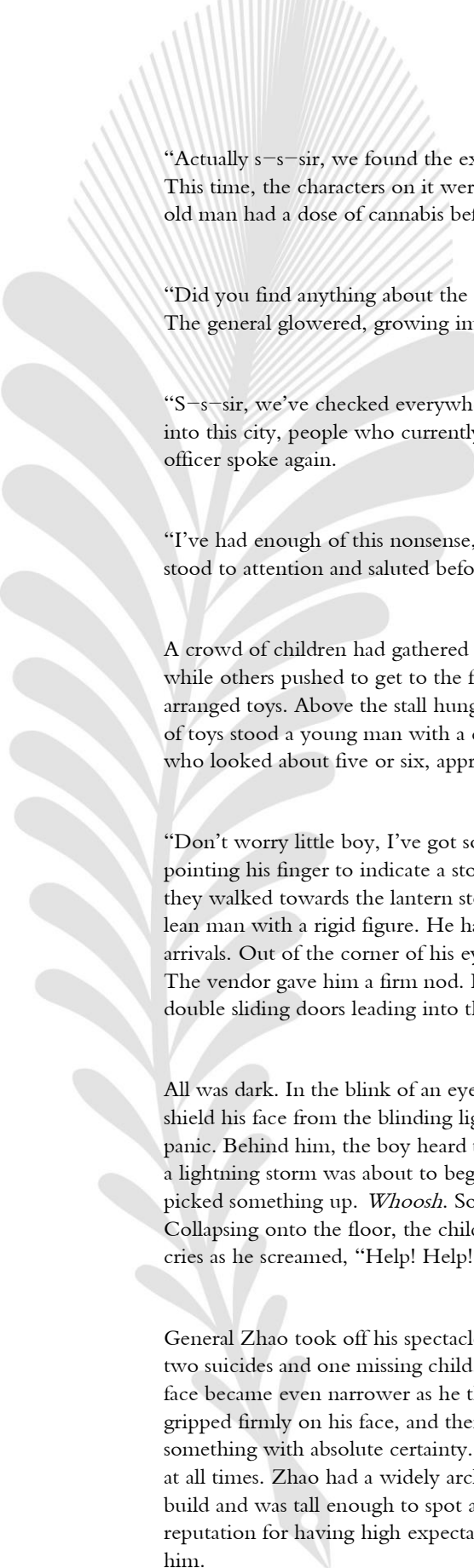
“Mr. Wu, your dumplings are here,” a waiter said, bringing a dish of dim sum to an elderly man sitting by the balcony of the restaurant. Old age seemed to have got the better of him. Aching joints, haunted memories and weariness were his troublesome companions, always by his side, yet he remained cheerful to everyone who met him. Tufts of white hair were visible on the man’s bald scalp. His face was heavily lined with wrinkles and bulging eye bags were ready to pop out of his eyes. Whenever he smiled, the dimples on either side of his cheeks started to appear.

Mr. Wu greeted the waiter with a smile and a nod. The waiter clumsily tripped over his own legs and sent the dish of dumplings flying. The dish struck his cup of tea square in the middle, and it toppled over. “I am so sorry.” The waiter breathed a heavy sigh of relief. “I will clean up this mess immediately and get you another cup of tea.” A few minutes later, the waiter appeared with an identical cup and placed it down where the previous cup had been. “Enjoy your meal,” the waiter said with a light and warm tone.

“I will,” replied Mr. Wu, taking a sip of his tea.

“Another one!?” Zhao slammed the file in his hand down on his desk. Standing in front of him, two officers were scared out of their skin. “So you’re telling me that out of the blue, an old man makes his way past the wall and drowns himself in the moat!? What evidence do you have?”

“S-s-sir, we have no concrete evidence, but we do believe the suicide is somewhat connected with the death of the woman. It’s no coincidence that these two events would happen subsequently,” an officer stammered timidly.



“Actually s—s—sir, we found the exact same ring at the riverside. The ring was emerald and smelled of lavender. This time, the characters on it were the name of another person. I—i—in addition, a medical test showed that the old man had a dose of cannabis before his death,” the other officer started.

“Did you find anything about the owner of the ring? How about the owner of the previous ring in the clinic?” The general glowered, growing impatient by the second.

“S—s—sir, we’ve checked everywhere in our files; people who’ve moved elsewhere, people who’ve immigrated into this city, people who currently live here, but we haven’t found a single clue leading us to anywhere,” the first officer spoke again.

“I’ve had enough of this nonsense,” the general sighed, “Just get out of my office.” With that, the two officers stood to attention and saluted before gingerly closing the office door behind them.

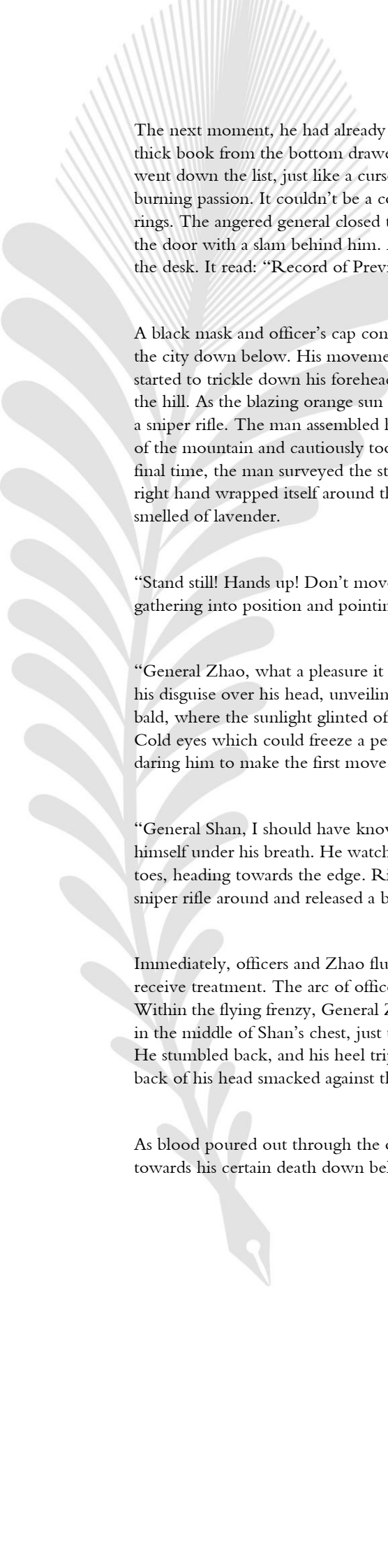
A crowd of children had gathered around a brand-new stall on the street. Some children were leaping in joy, while others pushed to get to the front of the group. Everyone was trying to grab something from the tidily arranged toys. Above the stall hung posters and flashing lights attracting the children’s attention. Behind the display of toys stood a young man with a composed smile amongst the eager bunch of children. An overly-excited boy, who looked about five or six, approached the vendor. “Do you have any lanterns?” he asked cheerfully.

“Don’t worry little boy, I’ve got some in my storage back there. Let me bring you there,” the stall vendor replied, pointing his finger to indicate a storage room in which the lanterns were kept. Gently holding the child’s hand, they walked towards the lantern storage taking one step at a time. Eventually, they turned the corner and found a lean man with a rigid figure. He had a neatly trimmed beard with a crew cut, and barely batted an eye at the arrivals. Out of the corner of his eye, a young boy skipped around the vendor, laughing and smiling in delight. The vendor gave him a firm nod. No more instructions were needed to be given before the guard had opened the double sliding doors leading into the warehouse storage facility.

All was dark. In the blink of an eye, several rays of light beamed at the boy. He covered his eyes, using his hands to shield his face from the blinding light. “Where am I? Where are the lanterns?” The young child couldn’t help but panic. Behind him, the boy heard the sound of doors come to a halt as they closed, making a loud thud, like when a lightning storm was about to begin. He started to cry. Footsteps sounded all around him. The boy’s right ear picked something up. *Whoosh*. Something long came into contact with him and wrapped itself around his neck. Collapsing onto the floor, the child’s vision became a blur, the world spiralling out of control. Nobody heard his cries as he screamed, “Help! Help! Please help me!”

General Zhao took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. These past few weeks had been pretty rough, what with two suicides and one missing child. He looked many years older than his actual age. The pair of narrow eyes on his face became even narrower as he thought intently about another case he had to solve. His bushy eyebrows tensed, gripped firmly on his face, and then descended down slowly, as though he were suspecting somebody or something with absolute certainty. Some people thought he always had a stern expression, one that meant business at all times. Zhao had a widely arched moustache and a cleanly shaven beard proportionate to it. He bore a stocky build and was tall enough to spot a suspect in the crowded streets of the city. Unsurprisingly, the general had a reputation for having high expectations – all the officers in the police department never wanted to work under him.

Dawn was approaching. The fading orange sunlight swept across rivers and buildings, before creeping behind the green mountains gazing at the scenic view down below. Trees leaned against each other in the midst of the whispering wind, swaying to and fro. Refreshed by the encouraging voice of the breeze, Zhao relentlessly got up out of his office chair and walked towards the filing cabinet, where stacks upon stacks of information were stored. The general opened the top drawer and began searching through the files in it. Suddenly, his eye came across an unnoticed file. Scanning over the documents inside the file, General Zhao found the names on the rings which belonged to unknown people. His eyes widened with a jolt.



The next moment, he had already skipped over to his desk and placed the important file down. Zhao grabbed a thick book from the bottom drawer underneath his office desk and flipped to the page he knew best. As his finger went down the list, just like a cursor scrolling down a page, it landed on the one name he despised most with a burning passion. It couldn't be a coincidence – his surname matched the first characters on each of the discovered rings. The angered general closed the book shut, then hurried out of his office to alert the other officers, closing the door with a slam behind him. A title was printed onto the thick book in huge golden font, which now lay on the desk. It read: “Record of Previous and Current Officers of the Shanghai Municipal Police”.

A black mask and officer's cap concealed the cunning face hidden beneath. He crouched to catch a better view of the city down below. His movements were swift, almost as though he was in a hurry to escape. Beads of sweat had started to trickle down his forehead and the sides of cheeks from embarking on the perilous journey to the top of the hill. As the blazing orange sun glared at him from above, he heaved heavily and zipped his case open, revealing a sniper rifle. The man assembled his weapon with ease, then propped it up onto the tallest rock towards the edge of the mountain and cautiously took aim. As time started to tick away, the man crouched closer and closer. One final time, the man surveyed the street down below, peering through his weapon to set his target in his sights. His right hand wrapped itself around the pistol grip. On the index finger of his right hand was an emerald ring which smelled of lavender.

“Stand still! Hands up! Don't move!” the general's voice rang. A swarm of officers closed in on the masked man, gathering into position and pointing their guns at the target.

“General Zhao, what a pleasure it is to meet you here,” a distinct, familiar voice replied. The man in black lifted his disguise over his head, unveiling a face wounded with many deep gashes and scars. The top of his head was bald, where the sunlight glinted off his scalp. A disorderly, misshapen beard outlined the sides of his tough jaws. Cold eyes which could freeze a person on the spot scowled menacingly at the general, looking as though he was daring him to make the first move.

“General Shan, I should have known it was you. I've wondered where you've hid all these years.” Zhao cursed himself under his breath. He watched carefully with his gun still raised, as Shan lightly bounced backwards with his toes, heading towards the edge. Right when General Zhao was about to surrender, his enemy swung the perched sniper rifle around and released a barrage of shots, sweeping his weapon across the group of surrounding officers.

Immediately, officers and Zhao flung themselves to the ground. A few officers were injured and retreated to receive treatment. The arc of officers, including the general, started to fire back. Bullets ricocheted everywhere. Within the flying frenzy, General Zhao blindly took aim. His shot pinged through mid-air, then hit its target right in the middle of Shan's chest, just to the left of his heart. A shocked, contorted expression formed on Shan's face. He stumbled back, and his heel tripped over the tip of an unnoticeable rock. General Shan fell backwards, and the back of his head smacked against the rock, splitting his skull open.

As blood poured out through the open wound, Shan tumbled over the edge of the mountain, plummeting towards his certain death down below.

Waiting

Yew Chung International, Yu, Cynthia – 15

As the dawn fights its way out of the night, Shanghai forcefully inhales another broken breath.

The stale scents of perfume and cigarette smoke weave through the streets lined with small shops, mixed in with the morning fog. Dirt-covered fingernails dig into a thin shawl in hopes of finding warmth in solitude. Bare feet, calloused from nights of sleepless wander in merciless weather, patter astray in a rhythm to a deranged waltz that the city upon the sea dances to. They never see that under her heavily drawn makeup is a fatigued young woman, just a year over thirty; at this time of day, she counts the profit she has made from the night before and grasps in her palm— not a death sentence, but a sentence that guarantees her suffering to last another day. The life before she escaped being sold off from her parents is heaven compared to what it is now.

Seven kilometers away, a pair of small hands dart in and out of pockets and bags. The narrow figure hides in alleyways, waiting for the next opportunity. He waits for rare blessings: businessmen in blazers and top hats who wear leather watches, women with neatly weaved hair with lipstick red as ripe dates, donned in *qipao* lined with refined patterns, complimented by a pair of earrings flickering weakly in the light.

In the central district, the internal gears of Shanghai turn simultaneously, creating a distant rumbling, as though the city is a great creation of artificial intelligence in its great wake. Englishmen converse promptly as they walk to work in the midst of the regal European-American financial buildings that haughtily stand, overlooking the harbor. Statues lining the Bund reproachfully stare at the other side in a unified coldness and hostility that reflects the despondent sky in all its dark glory.

It is no place for an orphan— the only individual with a soul in the lost world. She crosses, silently, every bridge, road, and street, looking into the fog of the people's minds. Not even the men in uniforms stop by to question her presence in the metropolitan area. Nor do the brisk pedestrians as they pass her without second thought.

A caterwauling shatters the mundane humming of the district like a glass bowl upon contact with a marble floor.

The men and women turn to see a boy, running deftly along the railings of the harbor with a black wallet tightly gripped in his hands. A middle-aged Frenchman soon follows, waving his briefcase in utter panic and outrage, sprouting coarse words of his language as he tries to keep up. Few young American men smirk as they watch the thief shrewdly weave through the crowd, where he is likely to disappear into the labyrinth of converging paths.

The orphan, as she passes by the Bank of Taiwan, sees the boy, and his eyes are alive with fresh fear. Shocked by the sudden dyes of emotion standing out in a mundane crowd, she gestures towards him to follow in her direction. He sees it.

Two children are running now.

Into the labyrinth they run, the streets that they know so well that are permanently mapped in their minds. A series of sharp veering leads them to a crossroads, where men, women and children swarm the streets in a frenzy. They know the businessmen do not veer into places like these. They only stay along the banks.

“Thank you.” the boy reaches out his palm and offers a handful of coins to the orphan. She shakes her head, but cocks her head to one side curiously.

“Did you steal them?” she asks. Her voice is thin and weak, as if she hasn't spoken in years, but it offers no hint of surprise.

“Yes.” he admits, but stiffens up defensively, frowning. “But the rich are corrupt. They don’t know how to use money, so I cannot see why they need it. I, however, have a sister to take care of.”

“Then save it for your sister.” the eight-year old girl takes his fingers and closes them in a fist. “I don’t have a family, so I cannot see why I need it.”

Reluctantly, he does, after a moment’s hesitation. “I’m sorry I can’t take care of you, either. My sister and I have already taken up all the space. But if I could, I would.”

The orphan reassures him with a smile, filled with cerulean and scarlet hues that mix in a frenzy with such flamboyance that it pierces into the boy’s heart, right to the core. “That won’t be necessary. Your sister is more important. Besides, I can fend for myself. Have been, as well.” To demonstrate, she spreads out her arms.

They part ways from there.

As she continues to wander absently, sounds of jeering men fill her ears. At the corner of a pillared building is a crowd, pointing at a thirty-year old woman with lidded eyes who looks on blankly, taking no notice of the insults being thrust at her. Her state of mind is already in oblivion.

Drawing closer, the men notice the orphan.

“Little girl...”

“She looks like she’s homeless.”

“It’s likely she will grow up to be like that disgrace,” one of them sneers.

Suddenly, the woman’s eyes go into focus, and her knees abandon the weight of her body as she crashes onto the pavement.

“Yi-er...” her broken voice croaks out. “Yi...er.”

“What’s that, you say?” a man says. “Is she insane? We should go before she strikes out at us!” he proceeds to laugh heartily, as if this were a social gathering and he had just made a joke worth of priceless value.

“Tch! She looks pitiful enough. Let’s leave her as she is.”

The group of men disperse, leaving slivers of spit as they slowly walk away.

The orphan runs over and kneels down, wiping away the saliva from the woman’s bruised face, but her wrist is gently taken by the latter.

“You are...Yi-er?”

“No, just a wanderer.” The girl answers in bewilderment at the older woman’s question. “Is Yi-er your daughter? Do you want me to find her?”

The sharply drawn eyebrows of the woman furrow, and she closes her eyes. “I lost her since birth...and her brother too, just a month older. I need to find them...I need...”

“You need to find a place to sleep.” An idea strikes the girl. “You can sleep where I do. It’s no mansion, but it’s dry. But you need to walk there.”

There is no choice for the woman but to do so.

The world is blind to need, and that blindness purges the world of its color.

...

The woman has slept at night the first time in almost a decade. As the souls of the people stretch over the sky along with the clouds, she rises. Beside her, the orphan continues to doze. Tenderly, the woman caresses the child’s cheek, sending a silent prayer to God, a new religion introduced to her by a kindly Englishman, that at the same time, her children would feel her touch. Faith is just another fragment of wishful thinking to her.

Her suffering is not about to last.

In the obliviousness of the city, men in helmets flood the area. But even the ignorance of Shanghai dissipates as gunshots decorate the air.



“We need to hide,” the orphan warns the woman. She obeys.

But she doesn’t want to go.

At the same time, the boy takes his sister and they run, and run, and run.

And at the crossroads, the woman, the orphan, and the children meet.

As of today, the sky proclaims a cloudless azure, and golden whips of haze touch the stone buildings for the first time.

All around, soldiers dig their boots into the heads and backs of men and women alike, ending lives with no remorse.

The woman gazes across the street and immediately breathes, her eyes clear. “Yi—er.”

With her last words, she falls into what her last moments of consciousness believe to be the welcoming arms of God, leaving an echo of a gunshot behind.



Fiction

Group 5

Siege

Carmel Pak U Secondary School, Tse, Gabrielle – 17

*Let night and death on the border of darkness,
Launch the thousandth siege of eternity;
As we plunge whirling down, Heaven beneath;
Into the maelstrom of your limbs.*
– Yu Guangzhong, *The Double Bed*, 1966

1930, Year Geng Wu.

Someone was already at the balcony. She was attempting to light a cigarette, but each of her ill-fated matches managed only a brief flare before the wind snuffed them away.

I approached and proffered a lighter. “Need a light?”

“Thank you,” she said without meeting my eyes; and she cast away the dead match in her hand impetuously. The tip of her cigarette burned bright sulfur.

“Couldn’t let a girl like you be covered in soot,” I said. “What’s your name?”

She inhaled a deep breath of smoke and turned aside.

“Shame,” I said.

I looked down the balcony and saw Shanghai’s nighthawks, illuminated by their Mid–Autumn lamps, flickering like the figures on a revolving lantern. Here, and gone; here, and gone again... The mahjong players in the adjoining rooms let out a raucous whoop.

She rested her elbows on the mahogany balustrade and gazed listlessly at the full moon. The smoke engulfed her like a shawl.

“Happy Mid–Autumn Festival,” I said quietly. Her cigarette had burned out. She drew out another match from her purse languidly; and this time, it went ablaze.

★

She was there again the next evening, her short hair coiffed into rakish curls that gleamed in the night. I strode towards her with my lighter in hand, and she accepted the gift of fire with an almost pious bow towards the flame.

“Thanks, Mister,” she said. Her Shanghainese was low and languorous. “Sorry I didn’t talk much yesterday, I was dying for a smoke. You know how it is, right?”

“Of course,” I replied. I hadn’t smoked in years.

She half-raised her cigarette to accede. I leant against the balustrade to watch the women in their silk cheongsams float below like butterflies; their arms entwined, feet astride, and their cheeks pink with mulled wine.

“You’re not from these parts,” she said. It was a statement, not a question.

“What gave me away?”

She remained silent, pressing her lips into a smile.

“I’d like to show you my favourite place here,” she said again, and it was an order, not an invitation.

So I buttoned up my overcoat and followed her down the endless stairs, my heavy feet after her light ones.

★

She led me to a tree of cuckoos lamenting mournfully by a lake.

“How beautiful,” I murmured. The presence of the moon and water called for quietude; and yet, a boatman was chanting afar as the cuckoos tolled their knell, their songs joyful, tuneless, and disconnected through the night...

She blew out a soft strand of smoke. Only the yellow tip of the flame lit the darkness, like a burning chiaroscuro.

1931, Year Xin Wei.

It marked the beginning of a little whirlwind that never made its way into the history books. She took me to the local markets with her sun-coloured parasol in hand, where the streets were filled with sweetmeats, lute music, and the fragrance of florida-water. Somebody urged her to buy handkerchiefs folded into rhododendrons; and someone else lifted a wicker of snow-pears that glistened as if carved from jade to our eyes. The crowd cried in radiant malice as two tomcats fought on the hot earth, each of their fast, taut steps like a barbarian’s dance. A pigtailed child was peddling caged doves by the ring, looking diffident.

“Who do you think will win?” she asked under her breath. Her palms were curved as if in prayer. She was cupping the folded handkerchief.

“It’s just a matter of time,” I whispered, and she smiled wryly. Her heels sang on the rough cobblestones like copper coins as we walked away. A woman in a silk kimono glided past us, a comb in her long hair, and a certain sangfroid in her dark eyes.

★

Under the archive’s lamplight we read of demise, within the embossed scrolls about courtesans who drowned in satins, and their emperors who drowned in wine. They eyed us impassively from within their paper prisons. There were also odes to flowers and elegies to fowls, to which she pointed –

“Ah, a cuckoo bird!”

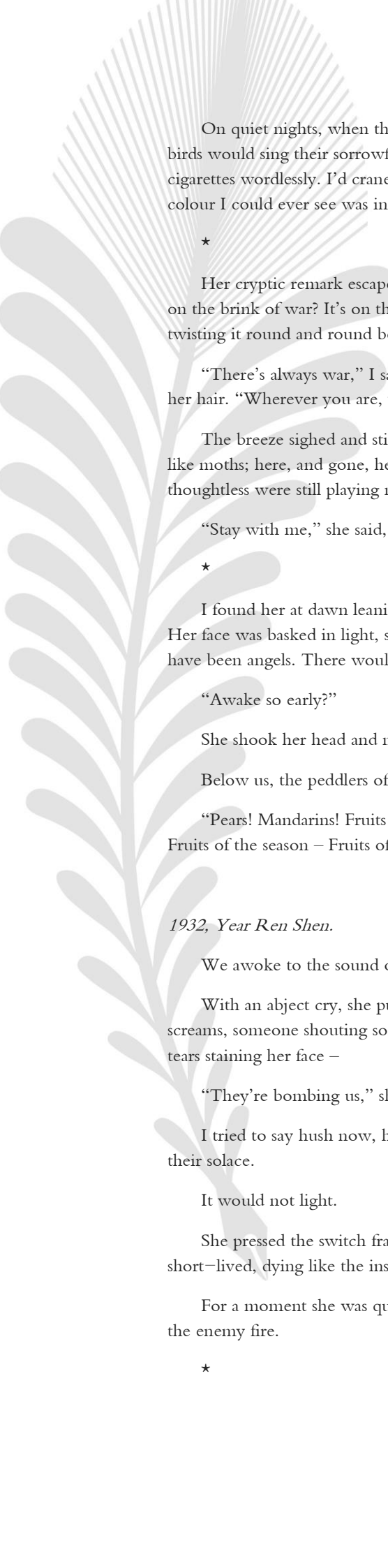
And it was a cuckoo bird indeed, which was brought to life in the barest of strokes. A waterfall plunged behind it, alongside a few lines of ineluctable prose.

“It’s crying,” I whispered in her ear, almost afraid the bird might hear and take flight.

“Yes.” She ran a finger across its eloquent eyes. “They are said to weep blood in trying times.”

Very gently, she folded the scroll shut and tied it up with its faded chrome ribbon, ending a narrative that had been woven across millennia.

★



On quiet nights, when the darkness had no borders, she would bring me to the lake. The cuckoo birds would sing their sorrowful songs to the lone fisherman, and she would smoke her perfumed cigarettes wordlessly. I'd crane my neck to search their infinite eyes for a glimpse of red, but the only colour I could ever see was in the flickering flame by my side. The moon would shine, uninterrupted.

★

Her cryptic remark escaped me until she asked one evening in my arms, "Don't you know we're on the brink of war? It's on the papers, every day." She was toying with a crumpled handkerchief, twisting it round and round between her fingers. "They're all about war, war, war."

"There's always war," I said quietly, encircling my arms around her waist, pressing my lips onto her hair. "Wherever you are, wherever you go. You can't run."

The breeze sighed and stirred the linen curtains gently. Outside the window, the people flickered like moths; here, and gone, here, and gone again; but their footsteps had hastened into a stride. The thoughtless were still playing mahjong, their impetuous laughter a key sharper than yesterday.

"Stay with me," she said, her voice hard and fragile all at once; and I obeyed.

★

I found her at dawn leaning halfway out the window, cigarette in hand, hair tousled into a nest. Her face was basked in light, softened by the dawn's tender touch. In another life, I thought, we could have been angels. There would be nothing beneath us but sky.

"Awake so early?"

She shook her head and murmured, "Just one last time before the siege."

Below us, the peddlers of Shanghai had begun their aubades:

"Pears! Mandarins! Fruits of the season! Come buy your pears! Mandarins! Fruits of the season! Fruits of the season – Fruits of the season –"

1932, Year Ren Shen.

We awoke to the sound of bombs.

With an abject cry, she pulled apart the curtains. There was smoke, smoke everywhere, piercing screams, someone shouting something foreign, guttural; and then she turned towards me with bright tears staining her face –

"They're bombing us," she said hoarsely. "*They're bombing us* –"

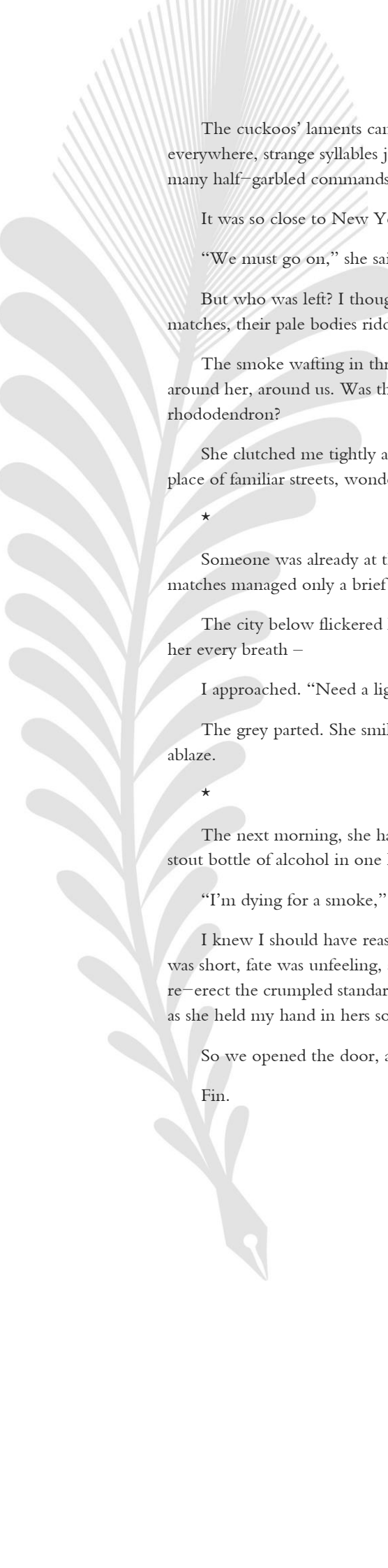
I tried to say hush now, hush... Her trembling fingers fumbled on the nightstand, searching for their solace.

It would not light.

She pressed the switch frantically. Still it would not light. A spark came to life, but it was short-lived, dying like the insurgents at daybreak.

For a moment she was quiet. Then she drew dry, heaving sobs, and her tears fell as ceaselessly as the enemy fire.

★



The cuckoos' laments came to my ears note by note. People were shouting in harsh tongues everywhere, strange syllables jutting from their teeth like broken jades. The radio crackled with so many half-garbled commands that I prayed someone would just blast it into fragments.

It was so close to New Year.

"We must go on," she said to no one.

But who was left? I thought disorientedly. The dead were cast away on the streets like used matches, their pale bodies ridden with starbursts of bullets.

The smoke wafting in through the window smelt of burned flesh and singed hair. It wrapped around her, around us. Was the moon bloodied as well, and the stars in the sky? As red as the stains in a rhododendron?

She clutched me tightly as I kissed her; wondering if tomorrow would leave smoldering embers in place of familiar streets, wondering if there was world enough, and time.

★

Someone was already at the balcony. She was attempting to light a cigarette, but each of her matches managed only a brief flare before the wind snuffed them away.

The city below flickered like a revolving lantern. My love was shawled by a smoke, it suffocated her every breath –

I approached. "Need a light?"

The grey parted. She smiled and drew out another match from her purse. This time, it went ablaze.

★

The next morning, she had done her hair again into their rakish, resolute curls. She was holding a stout bottle of alcohol in one hand, and bedlinen torn firmly into stark white strips in the other.

"I'm dying for a smoke," she said, looking straight into my eyes. "Are you coming?"

I knew I should have reasoned with her. I should have grabbed her and told her urgently that life was short, fate was unfeeling, and that there was nothing, nothing we could have possibly done to re-erect the crumpled standards on the trampled streets. But I stood and seized my coat from the stand, as she held my hand in hers so tightly –

So we opened the door, and welcomed in the war.

Fin.

For All Time

Chinese International School, Wang, Catherine – 17

Mei – if that was her real name – disappeared in late October, when the nets had been hung over the courtyard, dark weeds splayed across the surface of a lake.

First to notice Mei's absence was the Shizhang, who had just finished intoning the morning announcements in the thin, nasal voice that had earned him the nickname "old mosquito". He licked his lips and called into the crowd, "Has anyone seen Yue Mei?"

There were several muffled coughs, and people hesitantly glanced up from their shoes. The pause threatened to prolong itself until a voice from the back rows shouted: "She's probably in the bathroom."

"For a whole hour?" Shizhang snapped.

There were a few weak chuckles, but none of us were too concerned. Our rooms had inured us to abrupt disappearances. On bunkbed frames as thin as playing cards, the most idealistic or the most homesick girls would flee overnight, their vacated mattresses holding new workers by the morning.

We had all ran before, plunging into the city and its filth – the musk of car exhaust, the wails of infants, as shrill and persistent as the howls of stray dogs, trailing from the yellow-lit cavernous apartment blocks peering over the roads. As we spent hours peddling souvenirs or washing dishes, we would discover that we had merely exchanged one brand of misery for another, sourer, more toxic one. Groups of us would eventually return, disillusioned, unable to escape the factory's powerful orbit. The girls who left alone never returned.

What about Mei?

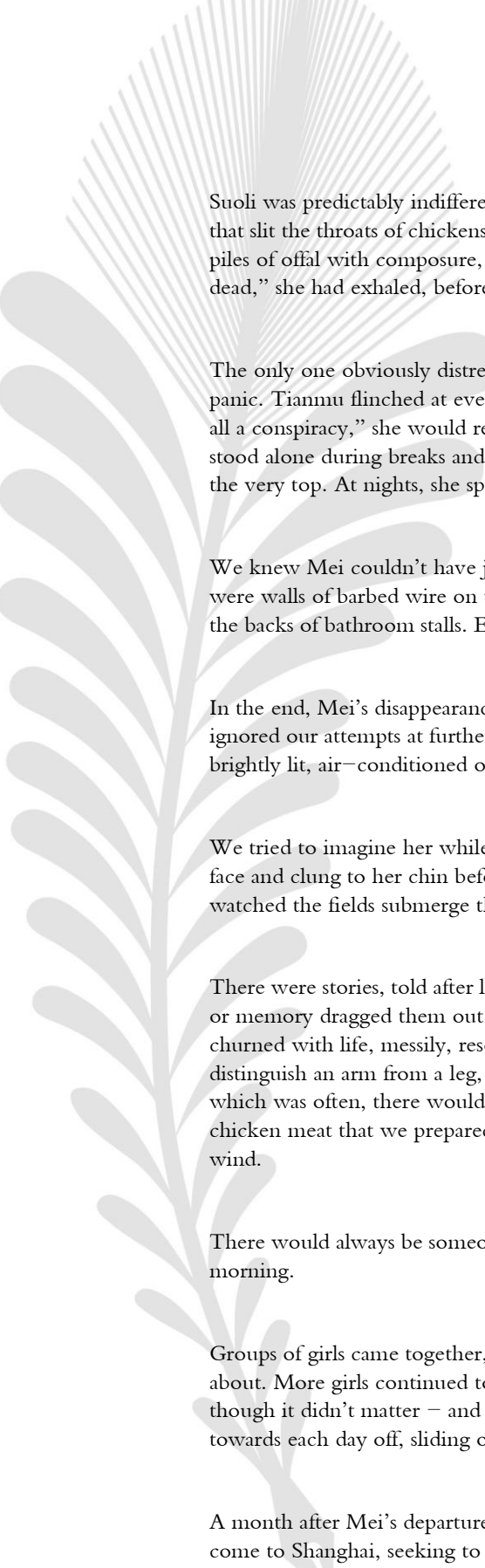
Mei could sing better than any of us. There was a soft, metallic ring to her voice, like coins clinking in a pocket.

Mei was afraid to smoke. In the showers we noticed cigarette burns on the backs of her legs, like crimson bubble wrap grafted to her skin.

Mei liked to wear patterned skirts that stopped just above the knee. She owned a pair of round sunglasses. Or were they square?

The truth was, despite the rumors percolating like clouds through the corridors, no-one knew enough about Mei to grasp why she left. No-one knew that she wasn't going to come back.

"Maybe," Yong whispered to us, leaning conspiratorially over her meal tray, "Someone got her stomach big." We were sure that Yong knew about these things. She changed the color of her hair as often as she found a new boyfriend – her hair had been dyed almost every shade of the rainbow before, and was currently an electric blue.



Suoli was predictably indifferent. From morning to night, Suoli worked shifts on the mechanized saw that slit the throats of chickens, funneling their blood into gently sloshing barrels. She was able to regard piles of offal with composure, even fondness, as if examining inflated party balloons. “Mei is probably dead,” she had exhaled, before proceeding to brush her teeth.

The only one obviously distressed about Mei was Tianmu, who was admittedly in a constant state of panic. Tianmu flinched at every noise – doors slamming, pipes gurgling, lighters releasing flame. “It’s all a conspiracy,” she would repeat to whoever accidentally made eye contact with her. She always stood alone during breaks and showed up ten minutes early, her uniform tracksuit zipped furiously to the very top. At nights, she spent her time typing on her mobile phone.

We knew Mei couldn’t have jumped. The nets had been up since the last girl succeeded. Now, there were walls of barbed wire on the balconies, thumbs-up posters exhorting us to “be happy” glued on the backs of bathroom stalls. Every hallway had taller railings. We were reminded – warned – to work.

In the end, Mei’s disappearance was defined as a ‘personal emergency’ by an expressionless Hushi, who ignored our attempts at further questions. Apparently, the news had even travelled to the director in his brightly lit, air-conditioned office. It was clear, then: Mei was gone.

We tried to imagine her while arranging the little she had in a backpack. Tears slid glassily down her face and clung to her chin before wetting the dollar bills she carried. Then, on a cross-country bus, she watched the fields submerge their short buildings.

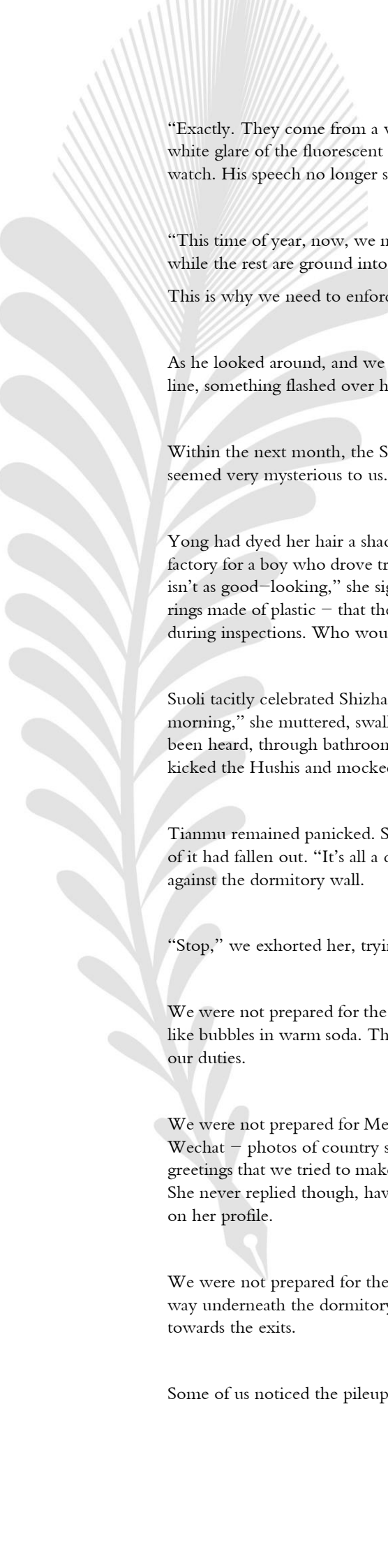
There were stories, told after lights out, about rooftop ghosts, who paced the railings until either gravity or memory dragged them out. We could not understand those deaths, not least because everything churned with life, messily, resoundingly. We slept in rooms so cramped that it was impossible to distinguish an arm from a leg, a stomach from a pillow. If someone was on their menstruation cycle, which was often, there would be the faint trace of iron in the air. We felt, giddily, as packed up as the chicken meat that we prepared. Whispers would travel in the darkness like hair ribbons pulled by the wind.

There would always be someone crying in the dark. When asked, nobody would ever admit to it in the morning.

Groups of girls came together, fell out, fought over the same things that everyone sooner or later forgot about. More girls continued to run away. Some relationships, forged on days off, lasted – most didn’t, though it didn’t matter – and we all were caught in the immeasurable push forward, towards each meal, towards each day off, sliding on a downward slope until we could finally come to rest.

A month after Mei’s departure, Shizhang was delivering more announcements. “The foreign press has come to Shanghai, seeking to make money off of our honest factory. They want to do so by condemning our equipment, our standards, our people. Do we want to lose our jobs?”

“No,” we responded flatly.



“Exactly. They come from a world where there is more than enough.” His bald head glinted in the white glare of the fluorescent perimeter lights. He squinted, pacing back and forth, like a sailor on watch. His speech no longer seemed directed at us, but at himself.

“This time of year, now, we must remember Darwin’s theory of evolution. Only the fittest can survive, while the rest are ground into the dirt. You must ignore those who try to weaken you.

This is why we need to enforce costs. This is how we must operate!”

As he looked around, and we could have sworn that when his gaze landed on Mei’s vacated space in line, something flashed over his face. In a second, it was gone.

Within the next month, the Shizhang left. It was said that he had moved to a better factory, but it seemed very mysterious to us.

Yong had dyed her hair a shade of purple, and she had exchanged the boy from a nearby clothing factory for a boy who drove trucks. Apparently, she had been fond of the Shizhang. “The new shizhang isn’t as good-looking,” she sighed with her lips pouted. Yong showed us trinkets – cheap keychains, rings made of plastic – that the Shizhang had afforded her, having discreetly tucked them in her pockets during inspections. Who would have known?

Suoli tacitly celebrated Shizhang’s departure. “I heard the Shizhang beating his secretary the other morning,” she muttered, swallowing her soup with one gulp. Multiple accounts affirmed this – he had been heard, through bathroom doors and during infrequent deliveries to the head offices, to have kicked the Hushis and mocked them when they could not stand.

Tianmu remained panicked. She had taken up the habit of pulling at her hair, so that now large clumps of it had fallen out. “It’s all a conspiracy,” she would continue to mutter, while banging her head against the dormitory wall.

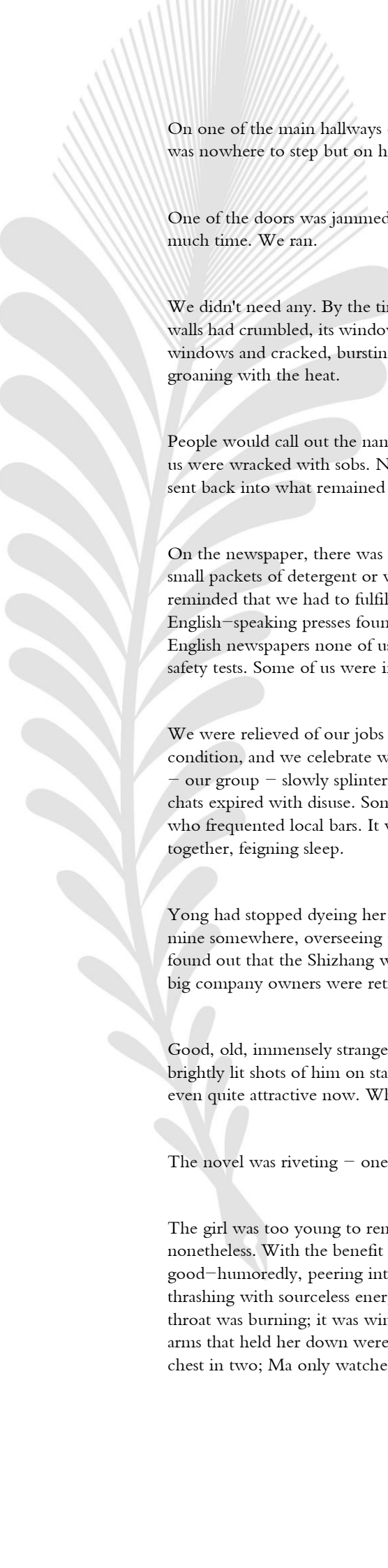
“Stop,” we exhorted her, trying, unsuccessfully, to pull her away.

We were not prepared for the feelings we couldn’t quite describe. Quietly, we let our conclusions settle, like bubbles in warm soda. There was so much we didn’t know, we gave up and returned reluctantly to our duties.

We were not prepared for Mei’s re-emergence. Every now and then, Mei would still send messages on Wechat – photos of country scenery, unedited selfies. We tried to chat with her, often with vague greetings that we tried to make more casual than we felt, like “how’s it going?” and “long time no see!” She never replied though, having seen our messages. After a while, we stopped posting birthday wishes on her profile.

We were not prepared for the fire. The alarms had not sounded when the smoke started to weave its way underneath the dormitory door. Only the swirling red lights of the alarms, as everybody ran towards the exits.

Some of us noticed the pileup of bodies in one of the exits.



On one of the main hallways one of us had fallen, spread on the ground like an overripe fruit. There was nowhere to step but on her body. She could not scream.

One of the doors was jammed, we heard the girls inside struggling against it . It would have taken too much time. We ran.

We didn't need any. By the time we stood outside, the factory had stained the night yellow. Part of the walls had crumbled, its windows sagging like saddened eyes. We watched as girls tried to jump from the windows and cracked, bursting, against the ground. The main building had split along its sides, groaning with the heat.

People would call out the names of those presumed missing. We jostled, shouting in response. Some of us were wracked with sobs. No sirens announced rescue over the horizon, and in morning, we were sent back into what remained and told to sleep.

On the newspaper, there was no news of the fire. Every worker was handed a consolation bag with small packets of detergent or wheat crackers; during roll call before the morning shift, the manager reminded that we had to fulfill their contracts or else receive no pay. When the foreign, English-speaking presses found out three days later, things changed. There were articles, published in English newspapers none of us could understand, about how the factor had apparently failed multiple safety tests. Some of us were interviewed, our photographs taken.

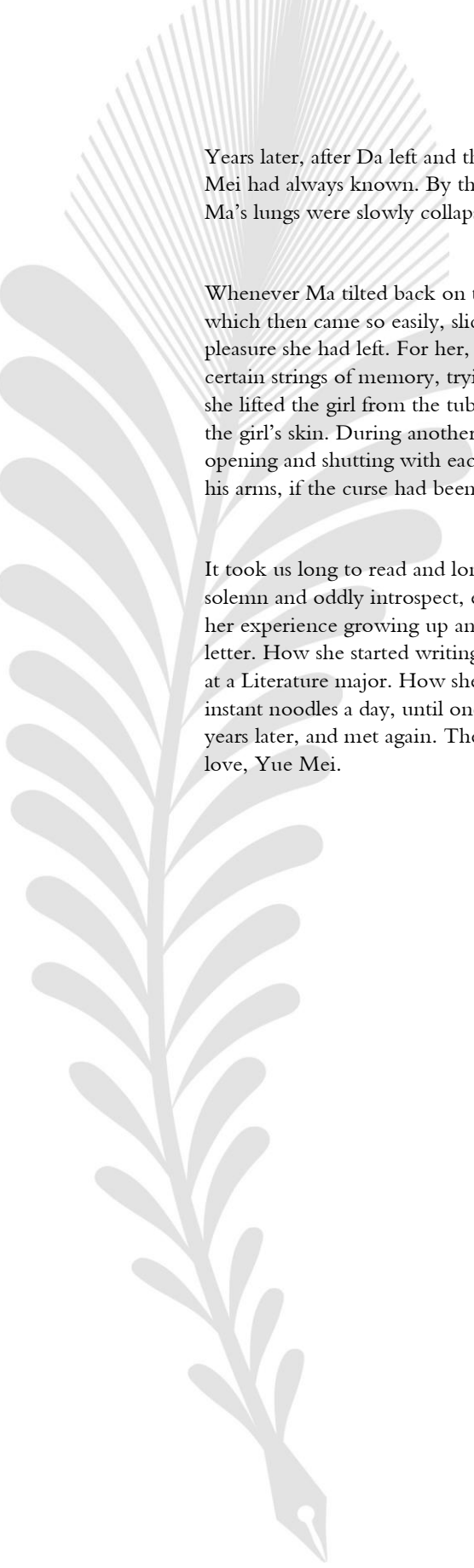
We were relieved of our jobs and nobody could believe it. There were bonuses imparted for our condition, and we celebrate with an uncertain sense of triumph. Life as we had known it was over. We — our group — slowly splintered and landed across the country, like seeds blown in the wind. Group chats expired with disuse. Some of us began working in hot-pot restaurants, others became dancers who frequented local bars. It was hard to remember the nights spent we spent as one, breathing together, feigning sleep.

Yong had stopped dyeing her hair and became a waitress. We heard about Suo, who was working in a mine somewhere, overseeing the explosions that would tear apart the entrances to new mines. We also found out that the Shizhang was moving to a company that manufactured computers and phones. The big company owners were retiring, we imagined, in suburban with neatly ironed lawns.

Good, old, immensely strange Tianmu went on to receive some sort of literary prize. We looked at the brightly lit shots of him on stages decorated with lurid pink bouquets, her face now acne-free, maybe even quite attractive now. Who would have known?

The novel was riveting — one of those artistic novels, about an unnamed girl.

The girl was too young to remember the time her parents tried to drown her, but she remembered it nonetheless. With the benefit of retrospect, she could revisit the memory as a tourist, indifferently, even good-humoredly, peering into a precipice of the ages: she was naked and hysterical, a starved dog thrashing with sourceless energy; an incandescent bulb wove shadows across the bathroom tiles; her throat was burning; it was winter, during a dim early evening, and there was an edge to the air; the arms that held her down were slippery and motionless; the water she inhaled was a blade cleaving her chest in two; Ma only watched, wordlessly; she was exactly one year old.



Years later, after Da left and the fields were burned down, Ma would repeat the drowning story that Mei had always known. By that point the house had become a miasma of grassy medication and urine. Ma's lungs were slowly collapsing, and her skin had turned thick and porous, like orange peel.

Whenever Ma tilted back on the plastic-covered sofa to watch daytime television skits, her tears, which then came so easily, slid down the crinkled rivulets in her face. Nostalgia was the only real pleasure she had left. For her, recounting the drowning story was a desirable mental exercise, at the certain strings of memory, trying to fit a thread through the eye of a needle. Ma confessed that when she lifted the girl from the tub, she saw for the first time the smooth and oddly incandescent sheen of the girl's skin. During another telling of the memory, Ma described the cabinet of the girl's chest opening and shutting with each breath, ribs as thick and pronounced as tree roots. Da had asked, drying his arms, if the curse had been broken.

It took us long to read and longer to understand. Those who could pry from it its meaning grew to be solemn and oddly introspect, even guilty. In the foreword, Tianmu explained that she was inspired by her experience growing up and falling in love. How she confessed her love late one night through a letter. How she started writing as an act of survival, receiving a scholarship from a no-name university at a Literature major. How she had slid from one government subsidy to another, living on one pack of instant noodles a day, until one of her works was selected for a prize. How she found her previous love, years later, and met again. The book was dedicated to her companion, teacher, her eternal light and love, Yue Mei.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Harrow Beijing, Liu, Cat – 16

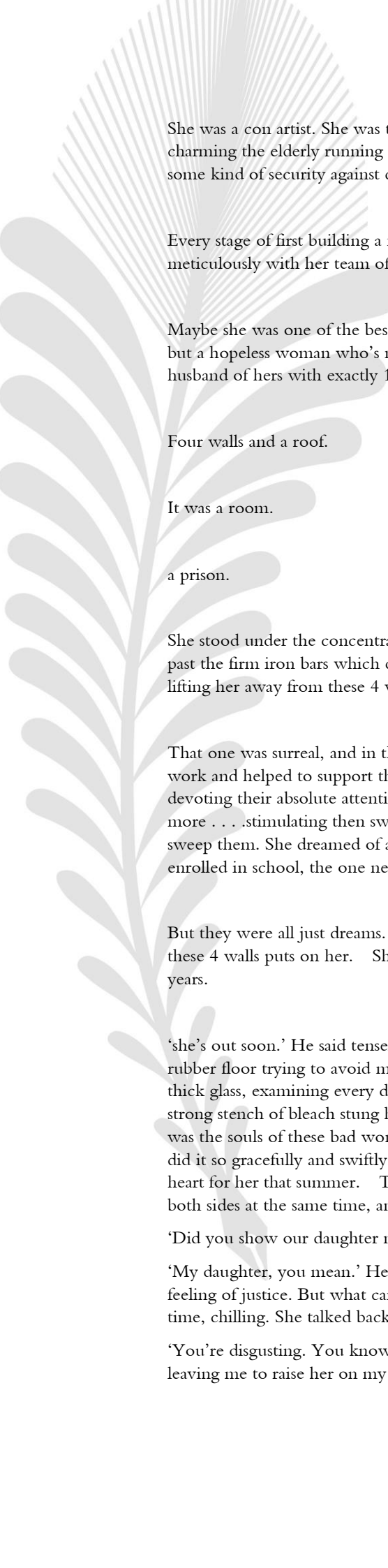
All they asked for was a name. A name. The disgust and contempt in their tired and hoarsened voices as they demanded on a chilly Saturday morning which apartment *that* woman lived in. Few white and blue uniforms was occasional, but few white and blue uniforms *with* curiosity of where someone lived *and* a van parted in the main courtyard on ground floor? That was very very rare. Everybody, Young and old, tall and short, men and women all piled towards their dirt stained windows, ones at the front being squished against the chilling glass for a peak of who these people came for.

At first, the screech of a young girl echoed from the apartment near the staircase on level 3. People rushed from the apartments to the ledge where they hung their undergarments, socks, occasionally bed sheets of the outdoor corridor outside on levels above and below level 3, for a view of what was causing all this ruckus, a chance to find the epicentre of all this drama like one of those Hong Kong soap operas that they deprived in their very ordinary lives in this old and worn out apartment block. It was 6 in the morning and everybody was ready for the grand reveal.

‘Ping Ann. You have to take a trip with us to the station.’ This man in his mid 30s, demanded. His communist pin shone in the dusk as the soft rays of light hit the polished outlines of the flags as he turned to issued with his hands for the help of another officer as they slowly approached awkwardly *that* woman. Ping Ann slouched on the small wooden stool which was a wedding present from when she and Zhou got married. Seems like centuries ago as the stool’s surface was now smoothed by the endless times she sat there every morning looking out her dusty window at the array of apartments, all like tofu blocks aligned together. She sat there every day of the year while her husband was still dreaming, and little Mei snoring quietly on the inflatable bed she bought with money nor from her or Zhou’s standard salary. Cigarette hanging from her mouth, she was always afraid that Zhou will creek open his eyes, march over and yank it out of her mouth like how does when he is awake, telling her only ‘bad woman’ smoke.

Today was a bit different. Zhou didn’t come home yesterday so it was only her and little Mei with these two strangers in their uniform the probably cost the amount of Zhou’s standard salary for a month. Their hands eventually grabbed her by her thin and slender arms, first pulling her gently out the door as she turned again and again for a glimpse of her daughter. Little Mei grabbed on to Ping Ann’s trembling limb as her hands hit the polished leather shoes of the officers who started to grip for her mother’s arms even harder when Ping Ann started to yank with all the strength a slender woman who held the wok everyday and hand washed everyone’s clothes in the family had. She broke free and her knees hit the warm concrete floor to her daughter, who’s tears have rushed down her red chubby cheeks like the Huangpu river which she cupped maybe the last time . ‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry alright? Be good, listen to your father. I will be back in no time. I promise.’ She ushered the words out desperately, then stuffing the cigarette back into her mouth as the stranger’s hands found her. She also wanted to remind Little Mei to brush her teeth before bed every night and always eat with your mouth closed but there was no time.

Down the walk of shame she went, neighbours crowded in the corridors, knocking over pans, basins, and other bits and pieces, the hissing and whispering grew louder and louder. Stares of confusion, surprise and even disgust showered Ping Ann, just like how she imagined getting arrested was like in her nightmares. The nightmares where the white and blue uniforms saw through her web of lies, her carefully constructed façade, and her sharp thinking that made many people’s money disappear into the rusty soap tin she kept in the back of the closet, all stacked, counted, and arranged.



She was a con artist. She was the nice lady selling you insurance that was as ensuring as nothing, charming the elderly running from the decaying force of time with her plastic smiles. They wanted some kind of security against death. She provided.

Every stage of first building a foundation, the build up, the pay off, the disappearing all executed so meticulously with her team of amateurs. Who *wouldn't* have trusted her?

Maybe she was one of the best Shanghai has had for a while, but in this very instant, she was nothing but a hopeless woman who's maleficence has backfired, isolating her away from daughter and that lazy husband of hers with exactly 1243 quai in the soap tin.

Four walls and a roof.

It was a room.

a prison.

She stood under the concentrated beams of light that illuminated this small jail cell and tried to look past the firm iron bars which dispersed it and shut her eyes to feel the warm radiating glow, somehow lifting her away from these 4 walls to another world.

That one was surreal, and in that one, women roamed the streets along with men freely, the went to work and helped to support their families instead of being confined to only the apartment blocks, and devoting their absolute attention only to the business within it. She dreamed of doing something more . . . stimulating then sweeping the floors that didn't need to be cleaned because all she did was sweep them. She dreamed of a life where she could get paid properly and help support Mei and get her enrolled in school, the one near the bund, because it was the best.

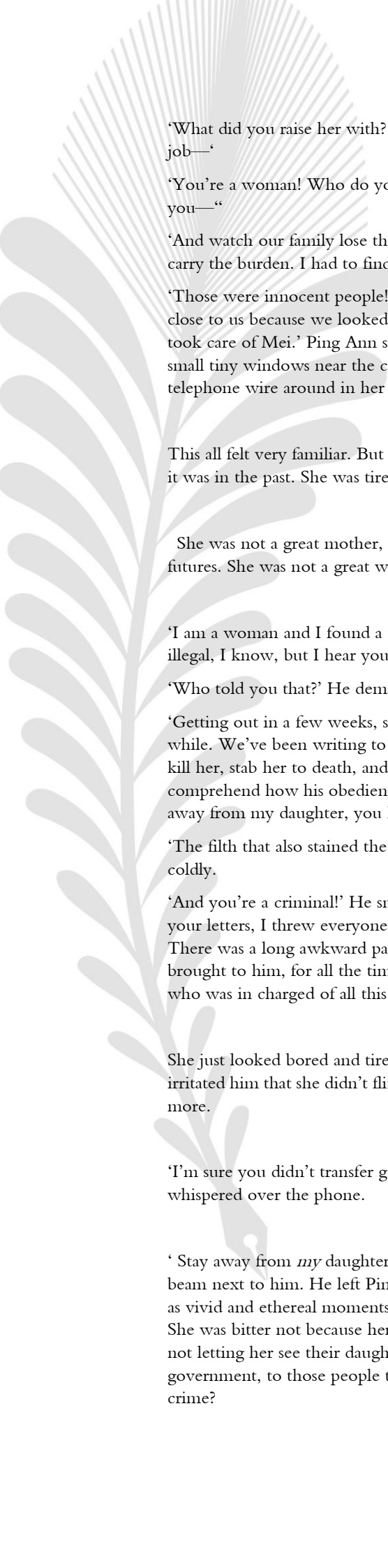
But they were all just dreams. Scenarios that one can only fantasize about, to dull the pain of the forces these 4 walls puts on her. She continued to stand there every morning and afternoon for the next 12 years.

'she's out soon.' He said tensely to himself, shoulders hunched in while focusing his gaze on the gray rubber floor trying to avoid making eye contact with the disgusting women on the other side of the thick glass, examining every detail with her squinty red droopy lids. The room smelled like death. The strong stench of bleach stung his nose with something else, a faint smell of something rotting. Perhaps it was the souls of these bad women locked up, he thought. The guard signalled for her to sit down. She did it so gracefully and swiftly, just like how she used to be when he first felt a warm airy feeling in his heart for her that summer. Those days were long gone. The both picked up the orange telephones on both sides at the same time, and for the finally, he looked at *that* woman.

'Did you show our daughter my letters?' She croaked

'My daughter, you mean.' He attacked viciously. He can see that it stung her, which gave him a slight feeling of justice. But what came after was something unfamiliar, something surprising and at the same time, chilling. She talked back to him. 'Our daughter.'

'You're disgusting. You know that? You go on a happy trip to this place for a couple of decades, leaving me to raise her on my own and now she's your daughter? She'll barely recognize you. ' he spat.



‘What did you raise her with? Dust? We could barely pay the rent back then. And if I could’ve found a job—’

‘You’re a woman! Who do you think you are? All you had to do was take care of the children and you—’

‘And watch our family lose the apartment? Because you couldn’t work hard enough? No. So I had to carry the burden. I had to find ways around your stupid rules and support my daughter to get educa—’

‘Those were innocent people! Did you know how shameful it was? Neighbours won’t even come close to us because we looked like thieves. everything could’ve all been fine if you stayed at home and took care of Mei.’ Ping Ann sighed heavily as she looked away from her useless husband and to the small tiny windows near the ceilings on the other side of the glass. She twisted the dirty orange telephone wire around in her bony freezing fingers and then looked down on her hands

This all felt very familiar. But not the good type of familiarity but the type which makes her happy that it was in the past. She was tired of explaining herself to him. Tired of trying to make him understand.

She was not a great mother, but she provided when her daughter dreamed big about prosperous futures. She was not a great wife, but she tried to love him unconditionally, took the time and effort.

‘I am a woman and I found a way to earn more than you back then. So what? Deal with it. It was illegal, I know, but I hear you had no issue spending it.’

‘Who told you that?’ He demanded.

‘Getting out in a few weeks, staying at one of my friend’s place since she agreed to take me in for a while. We’ve been writing to each other.’ It made him shiver with contempt and hatred, he wanted to kill her, stab her to death, and all that held him back was the thick glass between them. He couldn’t comprehend how his obedient wife has turned into this atrocious monster. ‘You tell your goons to stay away from my daughter, you hear me?! Don’t let this filth take her away from me!’

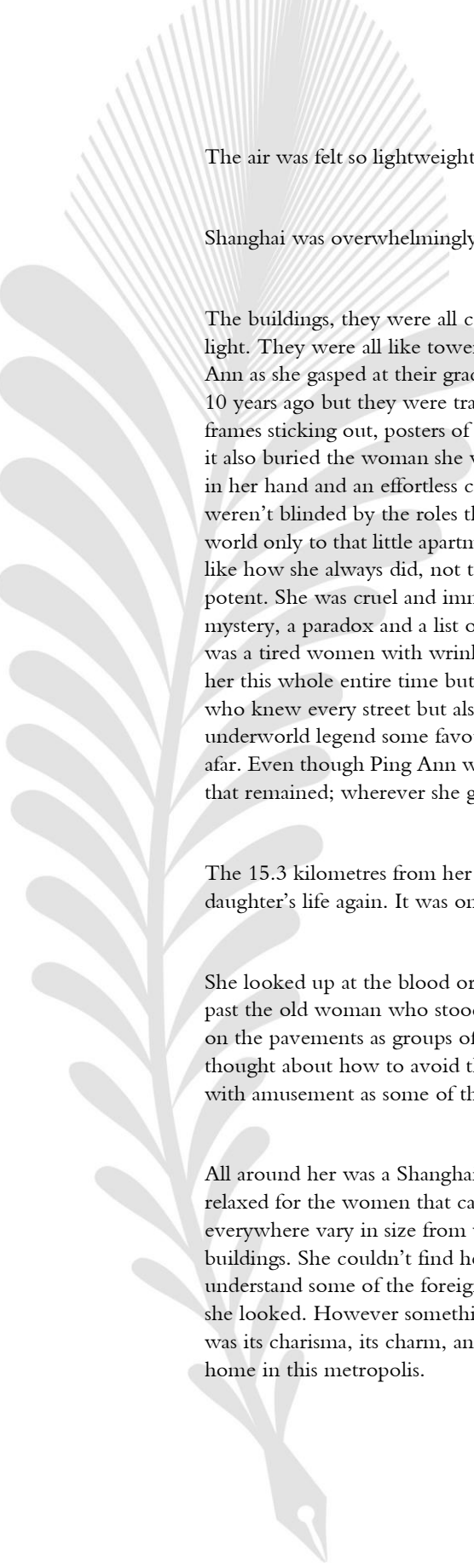
‘The filth that also stained the money you used to raise our daughter? You’re ridiculous!’ she laughed coldly.

‘And you’re a criminal!’ He snickered boisterously ‘She is never going to call you her mother. And your letters, I threw everyone of them in the trash because I was worried that they carried bad luck!’ There was a long awkward pause. He wanted to hurt her. For everything. For the embarrassment she brought to him, for all the times he had to braid little Mei’s hair in the morning because the woman who was in charged of all this nonsense was locked up.

She just looked bored and tired. Like this dark and nasty place have devoured her soul, her energy. It irritated him that she didn’t flinch a bit, alongside the fact that he was irritated which annoyed him even more.

‘I’m sure you didn’t transfer god knows how many bus stations just to come here and insult me.’ She whispered over the phone.

‘Stay away from *my* daughter.’ His grasp on the telephone loosened, as he slammed it back onto the beam next to him. He left Ping Ann sitting on the other side, bitter. It spread inside of her, like a virus, as vivid and ethereal moments that she shared with little Mei played again and again inside her head. She was bitter not because her husband tried to insult her, but because he chastised her effectively by not letting her see their daughter. She could never finish paying her penance, to him, to the government, to those people that trusted her, but since when was trying to support her own family a crime?



The air was felt so lightweight as she strutted down the bund for the first time in the past 10 years or so.

Shanghai was overwhelmingly different.

The buildings, they were all covered with shiny polished glass as they caught the colourful spectra of light. They were all like towers that probably headed already into heaven, casting a shadow on Ping Ann as she gasped at their grace. Previously that day she went to find the old apartment blocks from 10 years ago but they were trampled down to mountains of bricks and walls with the interior iron frames sticking out, posters of Teresa Tang still stuck on them. Inside the rubble, Ping Ann believes that it also buried the woman she was 10 years ago. That woman, the one with the coal black hair, cigarette in her hand and an effortless charm was a wild creature. She was eccentric and strange because her eyes weren't blinded by the roles the world told her she should take by the ones who wanted to limit her world only to that little apartment on the third floor. And even when they tried she found her way past, like how she always did, not through brute force, but through the strength that was so elegant but so potent. She was cruel and immoral but loving and sentimental at the same time. She was a pioneer, a mystery, a paradox and a list of other things that people could not comprehend. What remained today was a tired woman with wrinkles and strands of white hair, in search of the only one that mattered to her this whole entire time but then lost her completely. Ping Ann still were in contact with people who knew every street but also every alley of this city, who still felt honoured to do this old school underworld legend some favours. She knew exactly where Mei lived, but decided to support her from afar. Even though Ping Ann wasn't as sharp as she was 10 years ago, there was still one dimension of her that remained; wherever she goes, trouble followed.

The 15.3 kilometres from her place to Mei's felt so close but she did not travel them to risk ruining her daughter's life again. It was only 15.3 kilometres. But on some days, it felt like infinity.

She looked up at the blood orange sky as people rushed from one place to another in their busy lives, past the old woman who stood still for a moment to acknowledge the beauty of this city. Heels clicked on the pavements as groups of confident young women march down the streets after work. Some thought about how to avoid the traffic while others thought about their children. She watched them with amusement as some of them pulled out a small shiny screen and looked at it sometimes discretely.

All around her was a Shanghai she didn't recognize. A Shanghai that seemed more liberated, more relaxed for the women that called this place home. She felt like a complete stranger to the screens everywhere vary in size from what you can hold in your hand to gigantic ones that covered the buildings. She couldn't find her way around the city as effortlessly as before. She couldn't even understand some of the foreign languages spoken between people who looked very different from how she looked. However something permanent still remained that time did not decay and declare passé. It was its charisma, its charm, and the beauty in its strength and fearlessness which made ping Ann feel at home in this metropolis.

Prejudice Within

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Tsai, Coco – 17

Everyone stared. The two knew they were being stared at. After all, it was the first time foreigners, let alone two of them, had sat down at their minuscule tea shop, dressed in what seemed to be excessively costly clothing; it's design far too distant for a patron. But nobody said a word.

"This is the first time they allowed anyone into their city," Said the individual with the golden hair, in his obtrusively thick British accent. "Sure, I'm just here for a small political meeting with the governor, but I believe this marks the beginning of a new tale, a new era of China. Isn't that exciting?" He lifted the delicate china cup to his lips and sipped at the Pu-erh tea. He raised his eyebrows in a somewhat appreciative manner. "Tea originated from England, so the authenticity of this beverage is questionable; however, this cup of tea is surprisingly pleasant to the tongue. I guess the Chinese can be good for something afterall."

"Is that so, Mr. Fletcher? I am very flattered." His escort spoke in the same accented alien language, and the impossibly thick tension in the room increased even more. He should be one of the people; brown hair, black pupils, skin like the colour of coarse sand. He was definitely a Chinese, yet...

"Don't look so offended, Yao. I obviously didn't mean you. I just think the whole lot of them ought to learn how to speak English, just as you have." Yao was a son of a merchant, who followed his father across the world to England, where he grew up. Only seven years old then, he learned to speak English like any other native speaker. He was different in colour, but same in his core. It was for this reason, he was chosen to escort the councilman in the first place.

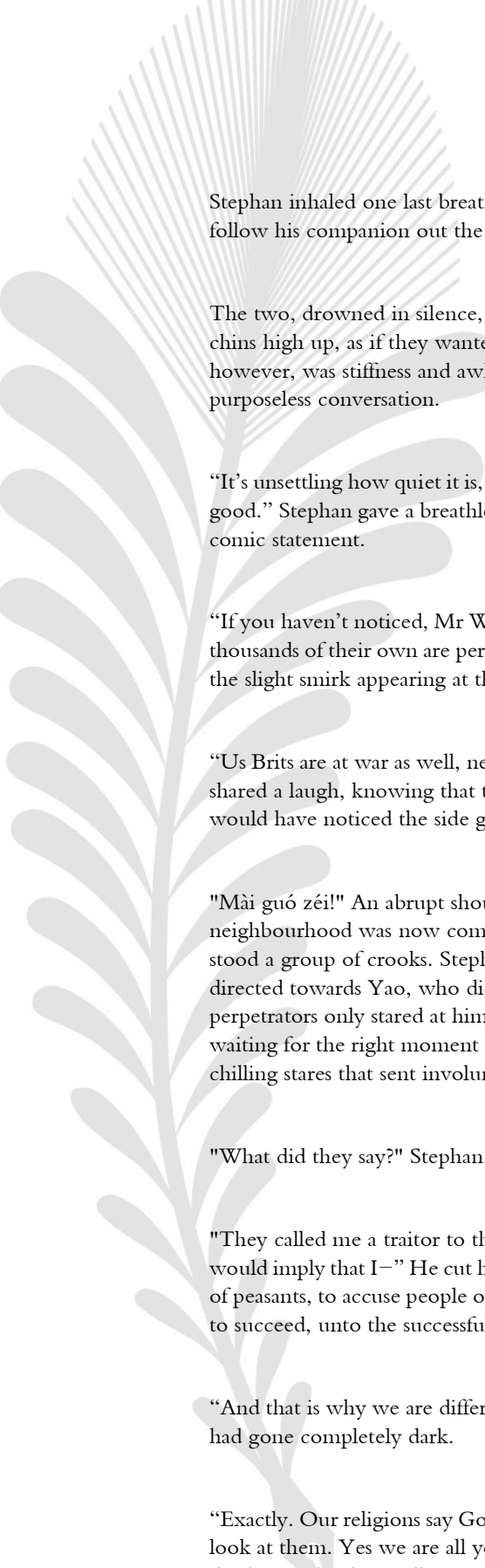
"Yes Stephan, I speak English, but I am undoubtedly Chinese by blood. I do agree that they should learn English though. " He imitated his associate and drank from his cup, but scowled in distaste almost immediately from its bitterness. He proceeded to ask the waiters for some sugar, but nobody said a word. They did understand him (he spoke perfectly fluent Chinese), but they have realised he was an outsider despite his skin colour, a stranger that was not one of them. So nobody said a word.

The silence that answered Yao's request was mocking. He looked as if he would burst of anger from the humiliation that wounded his pride. He would have slammed a fist onto the table, swept the fine china onto the ground, and left them in tiny fragments, but he knew better than anyone that he was a gentleman, and gentlemen would do no such thing. So instead, he retrieved his tiny pocket watch from his left breast pocket and checked the time. "It's half past five." He remarked.

"Oh my, have we really been chatting for two hours? Time really flies by. We should leave, the sun is setting." Yao nodded; he stood up to put on his coat and hat that he had neatly placed beside him. He carefully took out the amount he needed to pay and smacked them right onto the table top.

Stephan followed. He handed the waiters the money, a little more than what he had to pay. "Won't you give them a tip? I quite enjoyed my stay here," He asked while adjusting his top hat. "It's a sign of appreciation."

Yao only look at him in disbelief and scoffed. "Appreciation? The tea was absolutely horrid. Same as their service. It would be complete bollocks if I showed them even an ounce of appreciation. They will get what they deserve. Should be grateful I'm not paying them any less." Then he stormed out the shop, almost bumping into a few people who gave him dirty glances, but nothing more.



Stephan inhaled one last breath in the shop, took in the musky scent of the tea leaves, then took off to follow his companion out the door.

The two, drowned in silence, continued to walk down the unusually quiet street, their shoulders back, chins high up, as if they wanted to prove something with their posture. Hidden beneath the demeanor however, was stiffness and awkwardness neither can dispose of. Out of hopelessness, Yao struck up a purposeless conversation.

“It’s unsettling how quiet it is, knowing that the Chinese are more often than not, too loud for their own good.” Stephan gave a breathless laugh, not as a sign of mockery, but as a silent agreement to the slightly comic statement.

“If you haven’t noticed, Mr Wang, most people prefer not to parade around during a time of war, when thousands of their own are perishing.” The sentence could have conveyed a more solemn tone, if not for the slight smirk appearing at the corner of Stephan’s lips.

“Us Brits are at war as well, never seen a single one of them turn down a pint of beer though.” The two shared a laugh, knowing that the statement was doubtlessly true. Had they not been so distracted, they would have noticed the side glances shot towards them, low murmurs of disdain filling the air.

“Mài guó zéi!” An abrupt shout doused in hostility rang through the streets, and the once quiet neighbourhood was now completely silenced. The two turned their heads towards the voice and there stood a group of crooks. Stephan did not speak Chinese, but the phrase was evidently offensive. It was directed towards Yao, who did nothing to retaliate, though he was conspicuously agitated. The perpetrators only stared at him, with their slitted, snake-like eyes, just like the cold-blooded predators, waiting for the right moment to strike. Their ice-cold stares prompted the pair to leave, as they felt the chilling stares that sent involuntary shivers their spine.

“What did they say?” Stephan asked when they were far enough, out of genuine curiosity.

“They called me a traitor to this country. Do they not understand what the word ‘traitor’ means? That would imply that I—” He cut himself off with a deep breath, a means to calm down. “But it is very typical of peasants, to accuse people out of jealousy, while transferring their rage, induced by their own inability to succeed, unto the successful.”

“And that is why we are different.” Stephan concluded. He made a mental remark that by then, the sky had gone completely dark.

“Exactly. Our religions say God is equal. I don’t buy into that,” Yao said. “You look at me, and then you look at them. Yes we are all yellow-skinned, but I live outside these walls, they don’t. Trapped behind this barricade, they will never be able to reach as far as I have.” Stephan didn’t reply, he just listened.

“That is why we are—” Stephan wished he had heard the last word, but Yao was cut off by the sound of breaking china. Again they turned their heads towards the sound. The same bunch of crooks, but with weapons, knives and broken shards of china. Which ones blunt or sharp did not matter, they all hurt the same. Stephan was frozen in fear. He saw the looks on their faces; they had come to cause pain.



He felt a harsh push on his back, tripped over his own feet and fell to the ground. Above him, there was Yao, holding his hands up as a sign of truce. Stephan felt cold sweat dripping down his temples. His escort had just pushed him to his death to save himself. His limbs felt numb, he had no way of protecting himself in this state, let alone against a gang. So as they closed in, he whimpered. Death was so near he had only hoped it would be painless.

But they had not attacked him. He laid there on the ground flummoxed to no end, the moon and stars the only things in his vision. Were they to jump him from behind? He did not think so. It was almost as if he was invisible as the gang slowly made their way towards Yao, they kept chanting the Chinese phrase "Mài guó zéi!" "Mài guó zéi!" "***Mài guó zéi!***"

It only got louder and louder, until Stephan couldn't hear anything else. The noise hurt his ear so much, he forced himself to get up and ran the opposite direction. He ran, and he ran into the streets and alleys of the isolated city.

Saturated with prejudice, the tale of a british councilman and his escort was left within the walls of old city of Shanghai, to stay and to rot, never to be discovered.

The Collection

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Tse, Rie – 16

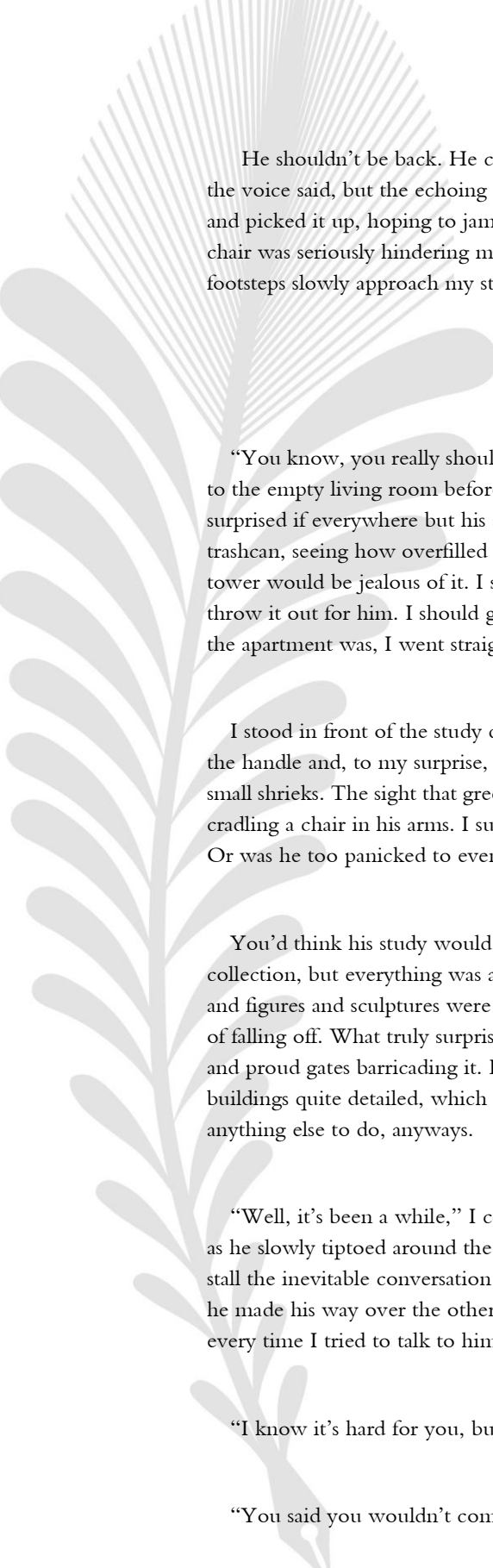
Shutting the door after some words with the man behind it, I lugged the groceries he delivered to the kitchen. Mankind has surely reached the pinnacle of technology with online ordering and delivery, I thought to myself as I put away the groceries. Making sure the pantry and fridge were well organized enough, I shut myself back into my study once again, where I now spend most of my days.

The study itself is a work of wonder by itself, if I must admit. My collection of figures, maps and scrolls, all accounting for varying periods of history line the walls and shelves, being my very own miniature museum right in the comfort of my home. As I viewed my own hoard with astonishment, my gaze fell upon one of my most treasured possessions. Captured by its beauty per usual, I found myself picking it up and admiring it as I've done countless times, feeling hypnotized by its craftsmanship. A small-scale figure of a terracotta warrior, its artisanship could compare to that of its brethren in the actual chamber. I could barely believe I found this treasure in a humble street stall, buying it without a thought as it stood out amongst the rest of the junk there. Each time I look at it, I realized, I discover another bit of detail put into the figure, finding myself more and more bewildered at the creator and his unprecedented handiwork, from the wrinkles of its face down to the creases on his hand. With such attention to detail on such a small sculpture, I couldn't help but be captivated by its allure.

With the figure still in hand, I turned towards my current undergoing project, which may challenge the warrior for the title of my proudest possession. Taking up most of the floor, a small-scale model of the city of Old Shanghai lies before me. I couldn't help but crack a smile at my work; modelled clay buildings, markings where the rivers would be, and of course the clay walls surrounding the city, making for a near perfect replica of the city's old layout. It was quite comforting to know all those months of work were absolutely worth the effort. Staring at the model for a while, I mindlessly crouched and put the terracotta warrior at the wall, right outside the city. Realizing what I'd done, I chuckled to myself. The figure seemed like a giant next to the city, perhaps the fearsome titan warrior has come to terrorize the citizens of Old Shanghai, I amused myself. Historically inaccurate, but amusing nonetheless.

I decided I should finish my project as soon as possible considering it's close to completion, albeit it needing some polishing up and final touches. Tiptoeing around the city to make sure nothing gets knocked over, I pulled up the chair at my desk and sat down to finish up the sculpture of the front gate of the city. Just as I picked up my modelling spatula to resume my work, an impatient pounding at my front door caught me by surprise, causing me to nearly drop my tools onto the unfinished gate. Scowling at the possibility of the details I worked hard on being smudged, I turned my glare towards the sound, checking off in my mind a list of potential unwanted guests. It couldn't be the mailman, he'd leave letters at my mailbox and be off on his way, and I just had my groceries delivered. I settled for ignoring the person in hopes that they'd go away after they came to the conclusion no one was home, although the incessant knocking and doorbell ringing was incredibly frustrating. What sensible person would even make such a ruckus?

A short while later, the obnoxious noise from the surprise visitor stopped all at once, and I breathed a sigh of relief. That is, until I heard the click of the front door unlocking and a familiar voice.



He shouldn't be back. He can't be back. Even after all that mess? I was too in shock to hear what the voice said, but the echoing of footsteps was enough words. Eyes widened, I scrambled off my chair and picked it up, hoping to jam the door with it, but maneuvering around a tiny city while carrying a chair was seriously hindering my efficiency, and I tried my best to be hasty yet careful as I heard the footsteps slowly approach my study.

"You know, you really shouldn't leave your key under the mat like they do in cartoons," I called out to the empty living room before me. I briefly inspected my surroundings, although I wouldn't be surprised if everywhere but his study has been covered in layers of dust by now. I glanced towards the trashcan, seeing how overfilled it was. The rubbish stacked so high in such peculiar ways that a Jenga tower would be jealous of it. I sighed, thinking about how I'm the one who has to bundle it up and throw it out for him. I should get this over with, I thought. Ignoring how much of a wreck the rest of the apartment was, I went straight towards his study.

I stood in front of the study door, the thing he uses to lock himself from the rest of the world. I try the handle and, to my surprise, the door swings right open, accompanied with nervous footsteps and small shrieks. The sight that greets me was odd, to say the least. There he was, standing behind the door cradling a chair in his arms. I suppose he was trying to bar the door, but couldn't he just use the lock? Or was he too panicked to even realize?

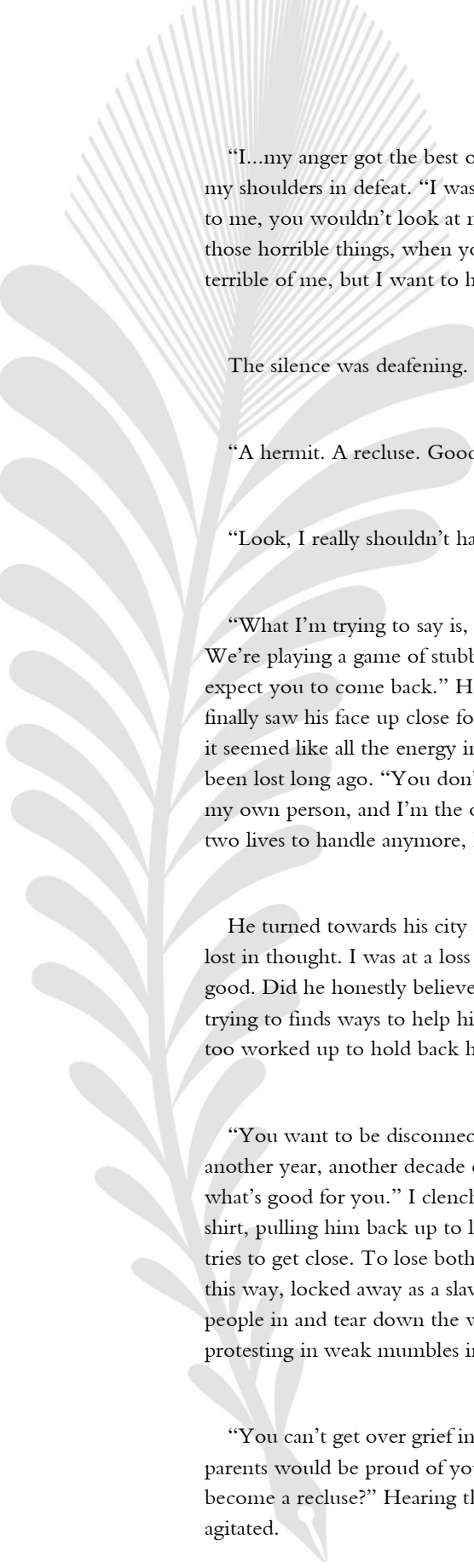
You'd think his study would be in tip-top condition considering how much he cared for his collection, but everything was a cluttered mess. Scraps of paper and maps seemed to be tossed around, and figures and sculptures were placed randomly, some right at the edge of shelves that were in danger of falling off. What truly surprised me was a mini ancient-styled city on the floor, complete with walls and proud gates barricading it. He wasn't an expert at sculpting, but he managed to make the walls and buildings quite detailed, which most likely took up way too much of his time. Not that he had anything else to do, anyways.

"Well, it's been a while," I commented, still taking in the view of the study. He muttered gibberish as he slowly tiptoed around the city to put back his chair, which was pretty obvious he was trying to stall the inevitable conversation as much as he could. I sighed as I waited for him to put it back, and he made his way over the other end of the room after, with the jaded expression printed on his face every time I tried to talk to him.

"I know it's hard for you, but you can't keep on going this—"

"You said you wouldn't come back."

He turned towards the wall, reading the maps he stuck up on it, purposely facing his back towards me, avoiding eye contact. His words caught me off guard; I honestly didn't expect him to say anything, all he'd ever done was sit there quietly until I left. I realized it had been months since I'd last heard his voice, or saw him smile, or laugh, for that matter.



“I...my anger got the best of me that time. I shouldn’t have exploded like that, at you.” I slumped my shoulders in defeat. “I was too frustrated, frustrated at trying to help you, you wouldn’t say a word to me, you wouldn’t look at me, not even now. And I let my emotions take over and called you all those horrible things, when you had your own problems you’re dealing with too. I’m sorry, it was terrible of me, but I want to help you, I really do.”

The silence was deafening. When I was about to apologize again, he spoke up.

“A hermit. A recluse. Good for nothing. No one will be there for you in the end.”

“Look, I really shouldn’t have said those things but—”

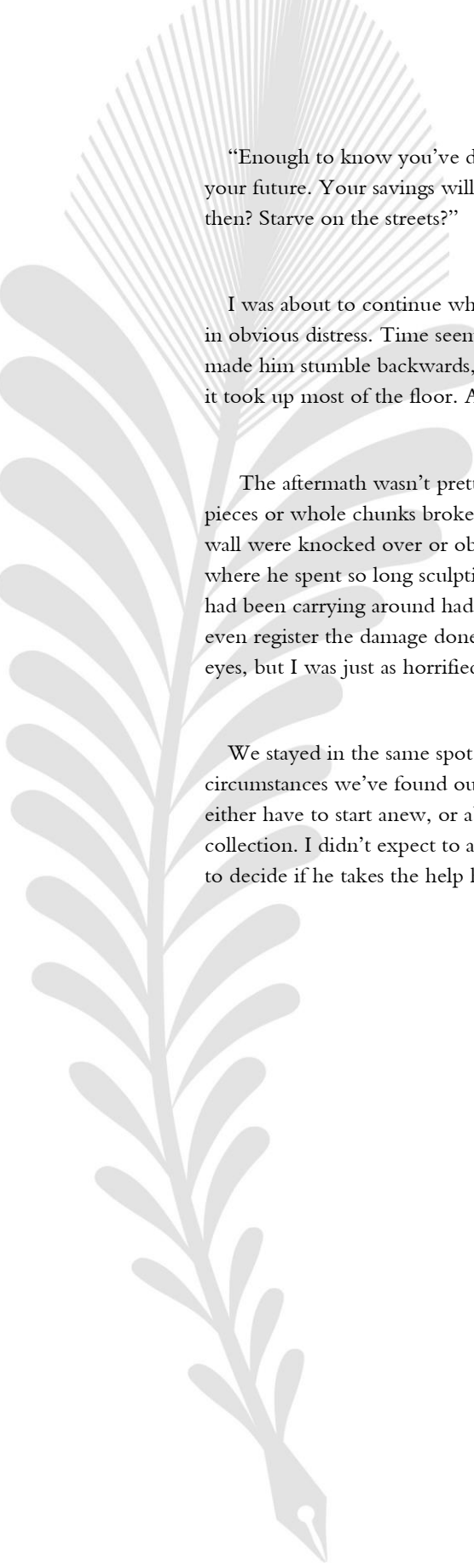
“What I’m trying to say is, I drove you to the point where you stopped caring and started yelling. We’re playing a game of stubbornness, and I’m pretty sure I had won right there and then. I didn’t expect you to come back.” He finally turned around and looked at me with a small, weary smile. I finally saw his face up close for the first time in a long while. He didn’t have bags under his eyes, but it seemed like all the energy in him had been drained out. The light that used to shine in his eyes had been lost long ago. “You don’t have to bother anymore. You’re trying to help, but I don’t need it. I’m my own person, and I’m the one who decides what to do with my own life. You don’t have to juggle two lives to handle anymore, I’ll be fine.”

He turned towards his city and picked up a clay warrior next to the wall, and stared at his creation, lost in thought. I was at a loss for words; he wanted me to hate him, wanted me to leave him alone for good. Did he honestly believe I’d give up on him just like that? I’ve spent too many hours worrying, trying to find ways to help him, and here he is, rejecting it all in a single blow. I felt my fists shaking, too worked up to hold back harsh words,

“You want to be disconnected from the world entirely, from everyone, from your friends? Stay here another year, another decade even, you say you’re your own person, but you clearly have no idea what’s good for you.” I clenched my fists, emotion overwhelming me once again. I grabbed him by his shirt, pulling him back up to look me in the eyes. “You deny you need help, and push away whoever tries to get close. To lose both your parents at such a young age is unbearable, but you can’t keep living this way, locked away as a slave to your sorrow and guilt. The first step you need to do is open up; let people in and tear down the walls you’ve built up these months.” He struggled against my grip, protesting in weak mumbles in attempt to brush off my words, but I hardened my clutch on him.

“You can’t get over grief in a day, but you’ve spent too long in solitude. Do you honestly think your parents would be proud of you now? To see their only child drop out of college from heartache and become a recluse?” Hearing those words, he snapped his head towards me, glaring daggers and visibly agitated.

“You don’t even know the full story,” he hissed behind clenched teeth.



“Enough to know you’ve drowned yourself in your history obsession in order to blind yourself from your future. Your savings will run out, and I can’t afford time to help you anymore. What will you do then? Starve on the streets?”

I was about to continue when he finally managed to wrench away from my grip; it was clear he was in obvious distress. Time seemed to slow down the next few moments; he pulled free but the force made him stumble backwards, which in turn caused him to trip over the model of the city, considering it took up most of the floor. And he fell, right on top of his creation.

The aftermath wasn’t pretty. The clay buildings were knocked over, some cracked, some with pieces or whole chunks broken off. The wall surrounding the city was struck just as bad; parts of the wall were knocked over or obliterated completely, the gates have had parts broken off, with the roofs where he spent so long sculpting each meticulous detail chipped off and ruined. Even the warrior he had been carrying around had his head broken clean off. He laid there in a state of shock; he couldn’t even register the damage done. He gawked at the city, and then turned to me, with hopelessness in his eyes, but I was just as horrified about the situation as he was.

We stayed in the same spot for what felt like hours as we stared at each other, unable to process the circumstances we’ve found ourselves in. He had lost his most personal treasures in his collection, he’d either have to start anew, or abandon his project, where he wouldn’t have the heart to even look at his collection. I didn’t expect to accomplish it like this, but the walls had been torn down; it was up to him to decide if he takes the help he needs or rebuild his old fortress back.

Down the Memory Lane

Shanghai Singapore International School, Immaneni, Karthik – 15

Hazel was typing furiously on her decrepit laptop. It was late and she felt a dull ache pulsating within her head, but she couldn't afford to stop. The publisher had been accommodating for the last three months but last night, he didn't mince his words.

"If I do not receive the script by Saturday, you can forget all about it!"

I'm too much of a perfectionist, she thought. She had written and re-written the script until *she* thought it was perfect.

It wasn't until the warning message flashed on the screen that she realized her battery was low. While rummaging through the jumble of papers and files on her desk, in a bid to find the charging cord of her 13-inch 'scrap-book', she swept most of them on the floor. Plugging in the cord, she tried to read through the script.

"I was walking through the narrow jagged street. Rows of houses with wrought iron gates, a hawker shouting out advertising his wares, the laughter of children running around ...it was a different world ..."

She rubbed her eyes. The weather reflected her mood. It had been raining since morning. The sky was invisible under a thick cloak of clouds. The patter of rain on the windowpane was drowned by the shrieking noise of the air conditioner, which pumped out lukewarm air ineffectually into the bitterly cold hotel room.

Her eyes fell on the dripping umbrella and her wet shoes by the door.

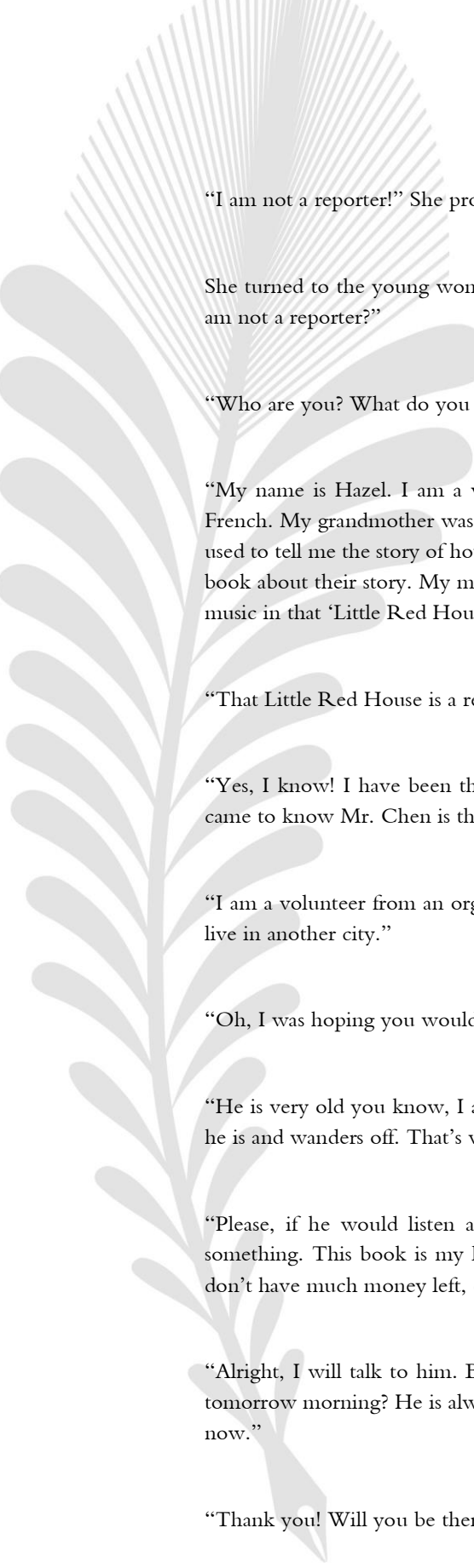
This morning she had been so optimistic about finishing her book. She had gone to interview Mr. Chen and found his house locked.

She waited till noon, hoping he would turn up. While she waited, she had a few steamed baozi at a stall nearby – it was all she could afford now. Eating at a western restaurant was out of the question. By the time Mr. Chen came to the door, it was evening.

Despite her pleas, Mr. Chen was disinclined to talk.

"Please, Mr. Chen, I just need you to tell me a few things from the past... I am writing a book..."

"No! I don't talk to reporters. You are all bad. You will write something, you will write lies, and I will get into trouble! Go away!" He said, getting red-faced.



“I am not a reporter!” She protested but it fell on deaf ears. He waved her away and went inside.

She turned to the young woman who had walked in just then. “Please, can you explain to him that I am not a reporter?”

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“My name is Hazel. I am a writer. My grandparents were living here in 1940. My grandfather was French. My grandmother was Chinese. They moved to France after my mother was born. My mother used to tell me the story of how they met and so many things about Shanghai. My dream was to write a book about their story. My mother knew only that my grandfather was a musician who used to record music in that ‘Little Red House’ ... and that my grandmother used to live here, in this building.”

“That Little Red House is a restaurant now.” said the young woman.

“Yes, I know! I have been there... no one knows anything. After a lot of research and questioning I came to know Mr. Chen is the only one who might know something. Are you his relative?”

“I am a volunteer from an organization which takes care of the elderly. My name is Lily. His children live in another city.”

“Oh, I was hoping you would help me to convince him...”

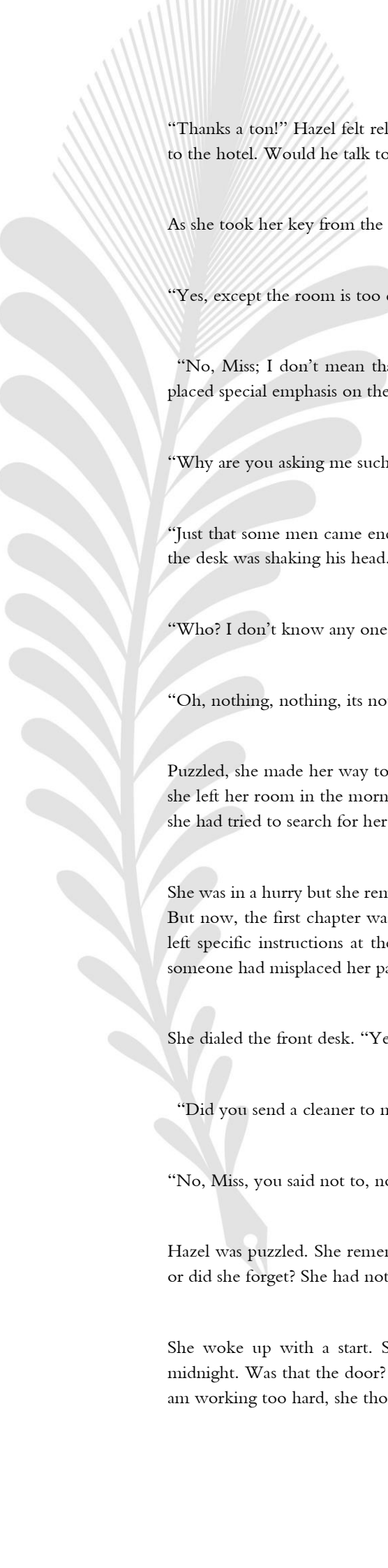
“He is very old you know, I am not sure he remembers anything...most of the times he forgets where he is and wanders off. That’s why I come to check, to make sure he is fine.”

“Please, if he would listen at all, I just want to ask a few questions. Maybe he might remember something. This book is my life’s work. I really need to complete it, and I don’t have much time. I don’t have much money left, either.” Hazel pleaded.

“Alright, I will talk to him. But it’s late now, he should eat his dinner. Why don’t you come back tomorrow morning? He is always in a better mood in the morning. I will explain your problem to him now.”

“Thank you! Will you be there tomorrow morning? He might feel comfortable with you around.”

“If you want, I can come over tomorrow. Here, take my number. Give me a call tomorrow morning. I will tell you whether he is willing to talk or not.”



“Thanks a ton!” Hazel felt relieved. But the shadow of doubt was lingering as she made her way back to the hotel. Would he talk tomorrow? If not, she was in real trouble.

As she took her key from the desk, the manager came to her. “Is everything alright, Miss?” he said.

“Yes, except the room is too cold.” She replied bluntly.

“No, Miss; I don’t mean that. I want to check with you if anything is amiss with your *work*.” He placed special emphasis on the word ‘work’.

“Why are you asking me such strange questions?” Hazel asked.

“Just that some men came enquiring after you left...” The man stopped in mid sentence. The clerk at the desk was shaking his head.

“Who? I don’t know any one here... what do you mean? What did they want?” Hazel asked.

“Oh, nothing, nothing, its not you, sorry my mistake.”

Puzzled, she made her way to her room. It took her a while to realize something was different. When she left her room in the morning, it was a mess. Most of her papers were scattered around the table, as she had tried to search for her charging cord.

She was in a hurry but she remembered well that the first few chapters were still in a folder on the table. But now, the first chapter was lying on the floor along with other papers. Hazel was furious. She had left specific instructions at the front desk that her room was not to be cleaned. She was scared that someone had misplaced her papers.

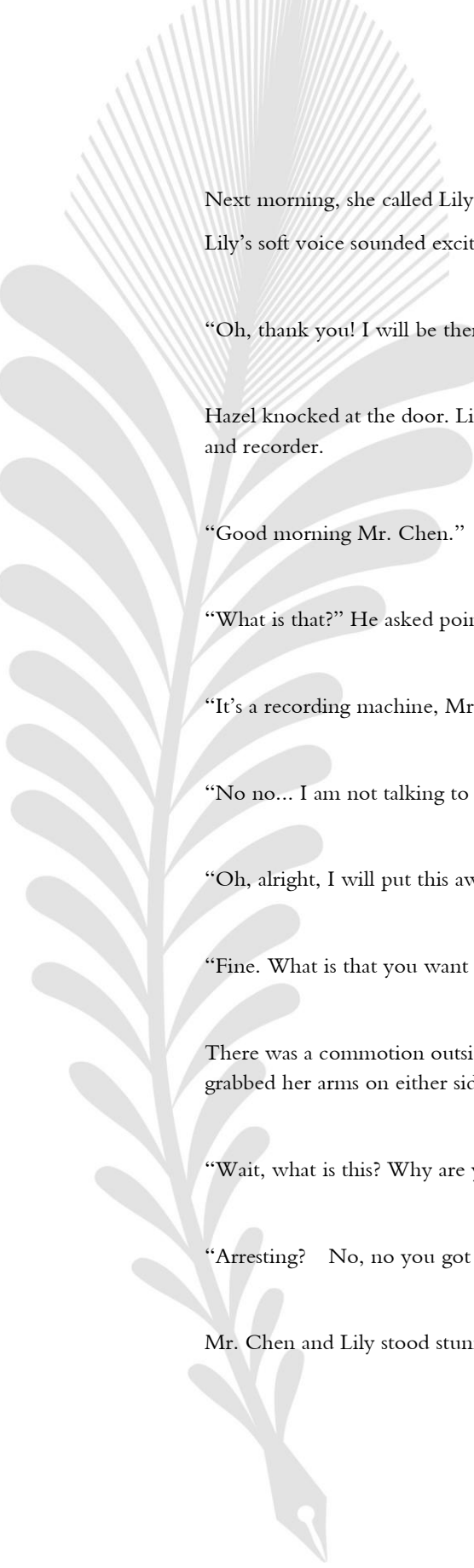
She dialed the front desk. “Yes, Miss?”

“Did you send a cleaner to my room?”

“No, Miss, you said not to, no one went into your room.”

Hazel was puzzled. She remembered well that the first chapter was still in the folder on the table – ... or did she forget? She had not slept for few days. Maybe her mind was playing tricks with her...

She woke up with a start. She must have nodded off in the chair while thinking ... It was past midnight. Was that the door? She walked to the door, opened it and looked out. No one was there. I am working too hard, she thought. Better catch a few hours of sleep. Then she went to bed.



Next morning, she called Lily. She felt her heart pounding as the phone rang on the other end.

Lily's soft voice sounded excited " Hello Hazel, I have good news. Mr. Chen says he will talk to you."

"Oh, thank you! I will be there in half an hour." Hazel felt giddy with relief.

Hazel knocked at the door. Lily opened the door with a smile. Hazel went in and took out her notepad and recorder.

"Good morning Mr. Chen."

"What is that?" He asked pointing to the recorder.

"It's a recording machine, Mr. Chen, to help me if I forgot to write something down."

"No no... I am not talking to any machine." he said distrustfully.

"Oh, alright, I will put this away. I will just make notes, is that ok with you?"

"Fine. What is that you want to ask?" Mr. Chen said.

There was a commotion outside the door. Three uniformed men burst into the house and two of them grabbed her arms on either side. The third one took out a pair of handcuffs. Hazel started to scream.

"Wait, what is this? Why are you arresting her?" Lily protested.

"Arresting? No, no you got it wrong... She has escaped from the Shanghai Mental Health Center!"

Mr. Chen and Lily stood stunned and speechless as they led Hazel away.



Fiction

Group 6

Shanghai Noodle Surprise

King George V School, Hoeflich, Alex – 13

Setting: Shanghai

Characters: Lok, Father, mother

Time: 1966

Conflict: A boy who wants to become a famous chef

In a very tiny and dirty kitchen made of old wood and iron roofing, 7 year old Lok was cooking was a family favorite noodle. This noodle has been a family secret recipe. His mother told him that the recipe has been with them for 100 years.

“You will be famous cook. And you will have your own restaurant Do not tell anyone the secret, remember this, son,” whispered Lok’s mother, who looks sickly and wearing a very old dress, liked she had this ever since.

“Yes, I know. I will keep that promise,” answered the son, as he puts the noodles into two big bowls, got chopsticks and gave them to his mother.

“Your father will be proud of you,” she said as a little tear fell.

After many years Lok is now 20 years old. His mother died sadly.

Lok opened a small noodle shop. It went well.

Many people went to his noodle shop. But there was a man who spread bad things about the shop. He said that Lok’s noodle was trash and badly made.

Lok said, “Who is this mad man?”

People said, ‘It was your father.’

He said, “My father is long time dead. I never saw him before.”

One day the man walked in the noodle shop and ordered noodles.

Lok gave the bowl to the man. The man tasted the soup he close his eyes and took another scoop.

“Where did you learn to make THIS soup?” the man asked.

Lok told the man that he got the recipe from his mother.

So the man asked what is his mother’s name, where he lives, what is his name, and his other relatives.

“You must be my son. I was in a war with Russia. Many people died.

Tales of Old Shanghai

King George V School, Kwok, Jonathan – 13

A long time ago in the old town of Shanghai, people lived and worked together harmoniously. They rarely fought and quarreled. The old town was quiet and peaceful. Lived there was an elderly Chinese couple. They were Grandpa Wu, a humble fisherman and Grandma Ling, a hard-working street vendor. They had a son and a grandson. But the son's family went out to the sea to hunt for fishes three years ago and never came back. The old couple, and the town people's way of life was very simple, until a group of foreigners came.

One morning, a man with a loud bell-ringing, was heard shouting. "Listen, listen, listen! A foreign ship is coming towards our town," he announced. He quickly gained the attention of the town people, including Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling, who were on the way to their work. "Everyone must stay at their houses," he added. The crowds on the streets got panic and rushed home. At home, the elderly couple talked about the coming of the ship. Grandma Ling asked, "Why is there a ship coming?" After a moment of thinking, Grandpa Wu walked towards the window and looked over the ocean. Then, he replied to his wife, "I do not know. I really don't know." He was worried and alarmed for he felt something unfortunate might happen to the old town.

Finally, the huge, foreign ship arrived at the port. A group of foreigners who dressed elegantly came out. Some ladies worn very fashionable clothes, with a hat on their head, while the gentlemen arrived in their formal black suits. The town people were told that some of them came to visit, and some came to stay.

"I find this place very nice," said Mr. Raleigh, a retired British general. "Absolutely right!" said Mr. Courbit, a French businessman. The group of foreigners walked towards the street and called for a taxi. Then, a weary, old Chinese driver came. "Where to?" he asked. "You bring us to the Palace Hotel," answered Mr. Raleigh.

Few months later, Mr. Raleigh decided to buy some lands in the south of Shanghai. The people who lived on the land were not happy about it. They confronted Mr. Raleigh, which later became a fight. Also, Mr. Courbit began to knock down old historical buildings and develop new tall buildings, bars and shopping malls near the waterfront of the old town. He even built western-style mansions and gardens in the west. "I find these mansions wonderful," said Mr. Lebedev, a white Russian who planned to settle in the old town. "I want to buy one," he added. Most of the rich foreigners in town bought mansions too. Because of these many foreigners, the old town became very crowded and there were many drunken people in the night time. The town people became more and more uncomfortable about the presence of many unfriendly foreigners.

One afternoon, a seven-year-old boy wandered around a busy street of the old town. He went to a restaurant and snuck inside it. His tummy growled as he had not eaten for two days. The young boy was so starved that he went searching for food in the garbage bin. Then all of a sudden, he heard a few heavy steps coming towards him and a loud voice shouting, "Go away! You filthy young boy!" The scared boy hurriedly ran away from the restaurant. Afraid that the furious restaurant owner might catch him, he ran as fast as he could.

Suddenly, a drunk man, holding a bottle of whisky, came out from the famous Maxim's Bar. The young boy bumped into him accidentally. The drunk man fell on the ground. The young boy helped the drunk man to stand. "Please forgive me Mister," he asked. The drunk man, instead of being grateful, pushed the young boy harshly.

“Don’t you have eyes!” he yelled. He hit the bottle of whisky on the young boy’s head. The boy’s poor head bled. A loud whistle was heard, everybody was stunned, the police officer came. Threatened by the policeman and angry town people, the evil foreigner fled and left the old town.

Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling passed by and tried to help the poor young boy. “Where are your parents?” asked Grandma Ling. The boy answered with sadness in his eyes, “My parents died because of the cholera disease a week ago. I have no home to go back to.” Grandpa Wu replied, “You are welcome to stay with us if you wish.” Grandma Ling echoed, “We will take good care of you.”

Finally, the young boy took the hands of Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling and they returned home. And they lived happily ever after.

Tales of Old Shanghai

King George V School, Pek, Maxx – 13

Old Shanghai lasted for just over 100 years from 1843 to 1949. There were many foreigners living in Old Shanghai. Some foreigners were French people, British and Americans. Some buildings built by the foreigners could still be found in Shanghai now. Most of the people living in Old Shanghai were Chinese, but it was not ruled by them. It was run by foreigners. The foreigners lived in their own world and they didn't need to talk to the Chinese. They thought they were better and more superior than the Chinese. The Chinese also live in their own world.

Old Tales of Shanghai

King George V School, Sommerville, Ethan – 13

Once upon a time in the city of Shanghai lived a boy called Ming who was from a very poor family. They lived in a hut on the outskirts of Shanghai near a paddy field. They were so poor that they could not afford to eat 3 meals a day.

Ming's parents decided to sell him to the one of the biggest restaurants in the city when he was 12 years old. When he arrived at the restaurant it smelt like nothing Ming had ever smelled before. He looked around at all the food there was and he could not believe it.

In the restaurant Ming had to clean dishes, tables and floors and advertise the restaurant. Having worked so hard and doing all his work, he did not earn anything. The owner treated him very badly and only gave him a bowl of rice once a day.

He slept in a tiny room that had rats and cockroaches running around on the floor.

Everyone who worked in the restaurant was disgusted at the sight of Ming as he was very smelly and had no clean clothes.

Since Ming has been treated so badly he started stealing food from the restaurant every night when everyone was asleep. Ming always dreamt about going back to his family with some money. One morning Ming's owner found some food crumbs on the floor which he knew were from his food. He then checked the fridge and found that all the food was gone.

The owner observed Ming for a few days and noticed that he was getting fatter and fatter and looked much healthier. He also noticed that Ming wasn't complaining about the food anymore and so the owner suspected that Ming was the one that had been stealing from him.

One rainy evening the mean owner kicked Ming out of the restaurant when they caught him stealing food. Ming ended up living on the streets and begging for money so he could buy food. This lasted a long time until one day a rich family helped him. They took him to Shanghai. The couple had wanted a son for many years. This couple treated him with so much love and kindness. Ming loved his new family but he still remembered his own parents and wanted to give them a good life just like his. He decided to ask his new family if his own parents could live with them. The kind couple said that they would buy them a house right next to theirs and would give them work so that they would be able to feed feed themselves.

A few weeks later Ming went to his old village to visit his parents and he told them the good news. Ming helped his parents pack their things and took a train to the new house. Ming's parents and his new family met at the new house and it was around Christmas time. So they had a magical Christmas together with lots of Ming's favorite chinese food and presents.

As time went by Ming studied hard and got a degree in business. He then started his own company in the big city of Shanghai. He focused his business on the food industry that grew very popular over time.

During this time Ming got married and had 5 beautiful children. Over the years Ming's family monopolised the food industry all over China that made them very rich.

A Special Ride at the Shanghai Tower

Korean International Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 11

Alan and Kate were two Americans from New York who loved to travel. Some of the countries they have been to include UK, Germany, Sweden, Korea and Japan. For Chinese New Year 2017, they decided to travel to Shanghai, China. When they got to Shanghai, they were happy because the weather was very sunny.

First, they checked in at the JW Marriott Hotel at Tomorrow Square. After checking in, they made their way to their first stop which was the Shanghai Tower. Alan and Kate were very excited to go because it was the second tallest building in the world. They were going up to the sky deck to meet Mario and Luigi. Mario and Luigi were their friends from Japan. They were going to celebrate Chinese New Year in Shanghai together.

They planned to meet on the 120th floor of the Shanghai Tower. While Alan and Kate were on their way up, suddenly the elevator went rocket fast!! Alan and Kate were surprised, worried and scared. Two seconds later, the voice of the elevator announced, “Kung Hei Fat Choy! Happy New Year of the Rooster! Hope you enjoyed the special ride! You are now on the sky deck, enjoy your visit!” Alan and Kate were more relaxed now and went to meet their friends Mario and Luigi.

The Return of the Clawtooth Beast

Korean International Springboard, Wai, Kaden – 10

Jack and Alexandra were two children who lived in Shanghai. They studied at the Shanghai Language Learning School. At school they learned many languages such as English, Arabic, Maori, Tagalog and Portuguese. Their school was near the famous Shanghai Bund.

On September 29th, 2030, they were going home after 12 hours of learning Latin. As they were near the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, they suddenly felt the ground shake violently followed by a deep rumbling sound. They then saw a 200 feet tall beast with big teeth and sharp claws, trying to get to them. The King Beast had come back for revenge. Back in 2028, Alexandra and Jack went on a journey to the Clawtooth Mountain, which was about an hour away from Shanghai. They heard that there were lots of emerald jewels there, and Alexandra loved emeralds. As they were hunting for these precious green jewels, they came across the King Beast. The beast was greedy and did not want to share any jewels with them. After a long fight, they pushed the beast off a cliff where red hot lava ran below. Alexandra and Jack thought the beast had died, so they took two emerald jewels and left Clawtooth Mountain for good.

Now back in Shanghai, Alexandra and Jack felt brave against the beast but they didn't have a plan, so they ran. When they reached the Oriental Pearl Tower they found their secret weapon, The Gravity Switch. There was a special way to turn it on. As the King Beast got closer to them, Jack shouted, "Solis! Solis!" which means sun in Latin. The Gravity Switch was officially turned on. The beast was then thrown up in the air and kept going until it ended up in the hot boiling sun.

Everyone cheered for Jack and Alexandra. After high fiving everyone by the bund, they went home to their Mom and Dad and shared their story.



Fiction

Group 7

Old Tale of New Shanghai

King George V School, Ashfield, Jamie – 14

In 1842 the British establish a concession which is a forced treaty with the Qing dynasty after they lost the opium war. The concessions are ruled by occupiers with no effect on Chinese law. The French, Japanese and Americans also did the same. The Taiping Rebellion Had Caused a lot of people to die. In the 1930s Shanghai is Asia's most important port. Western banking firm built set of houses which American and European traders traded tea and Indian opium. During that time you no need visa and passport to access. During WW2 shanghai has become a home to Jews fleeing Nazi Europe, over 2000 Jews arrived. In 1937 then the Japanese invaded Shanghai and bombed the city Jews of shanghai were forbidden to leave the city. Most of secession became Japanese. The Nationalist and Communist struggle against the Japanese in the Battle of Shanghai. The Japanese controlled Shanghai until Japan's defeat after WW2. The Allied Countries abandoned shanghai during the war and signed their territorial concessions to Chiang Kai Shek. In 1949 Mao's resistance army fought against the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War with Mao winning Resulted into Communist rule in China as the People's Republic of China, and few remaining foreigners left China. China was cut off from the rest of the world. In the 1950s to 1980s China was Struck By a huge Famine swept across the nation, huge factories are rising. The city became the largest contributor of tax revenue.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

King George V School, Sy, Bryan – 14

Last week, I went to Disneyland with my brother, Jared. We woke up early at 7 o'clock and took the MTR there. I was so excited for a fun day! Once we arrived, we had breakfast in a café. Afterwards, we went to see the Lion King show. I suggested to go on a roller coaster ride— Space Mountain, so we went to the queue and lined up for it. As we were waiting, we were both feeling very impatient because the queue was long and the weather was so hot! Finally it was my turn! I was excited, nervous and scared because I knew the ride would be scary and bumpy. We buckled up our seatbelts, and off we go!

In the dark Space Mountain, I could see thousands of stars and many planets. The ride was going very fast and it made me feel so dizzy. Suddenly, the planet— Uranus appeared in front of me, we then got sucked into a horrifying tunnel. It felt like we were going somewhere very far. The tunnel was going really fast! As we were free falling, I could see lots of colourful and shiny lights. We had no idea where we were going. We were both so terrified that we were screaming and crying at the same time. We were spinning in the tunnel and it felt like it was going on forever. I felt so woozy.

“Hey! Wake up Bryan!” cried Jared while he was tapping on my chest. I came back to consciousness. Everything around us looked unfamiliar and strange. I noticed that there was something different about the way people dressed. Women were wearing Chinese cheongsam, holding fans in their hands. Their hair was tied up as buns with beautiful flower hair pins. Some of them were wearing western dresses. On the other hand, men wore Hanfu — ancient Chinese clothing; western suits with suspenders and vintage circular glasses. It seemed like two worlds combined in one place, there was a mixture of westerners and Chinese people everywhere.

As we were walking along the streets, I could see rice stores and food stalls. There were tall western designed buildings with flags hanging outside of them. The Chinese temples were old and crowded, I could hear loud banging gong sounds. “Beepppp!” Someone honked at me from behind. It was a vintage car with big wheels behind me, so I got out of the way. I looked around and noticed that people were mostly travelling by trams and rickshaws!

Jared suggested, “Bryan! I’ve never been on a rickshaw before. Do you want to give it a try?” I immediately agreed, we then hailed one down and got on one. I decided to ask the guy who was pulling us on the rickshaw, “Where am I? What’s the date? Why am I here?” He replied, “Oh young man, you have no idea where you are, do you? We’re in the year of 1930 of Shanghai, also known as ‘The Paris of the East, New York of the West’. The reason why Shanghai got this name was because the city is divided between its European Western half and traditional Chinese half. The Europeans, British and Americans mainly used Shanghai as a platform for trade. Shanghai quickly became the main commercial centre of East Asia. Therefore, buildings like Shanghai club, Asia building and the HSBC building were constructed in British and American architectural style. Electricity and trams were then introduced due to the western influence. In terms of Art, Shanghai became home to three new art forms: Chinese cinema, Chinese popular music and Chinese animation. This makes Shanghai different and special compared to the rest of the cities in China!”

As we were passing along the crowded streets, we came across a Chinese opera stage where a female was performing with a loud voice. After a while, my eyes started to get heavy as I slowly fell asleep. “The Space Mountain is now over. Everyone please carefully get off the carriage now. Thank you!” the staff announced. I opened my eyes and found myself back in the Space Mountain. It felt so unreal, as if it was a dream. I felt nervous, scared and fascinated by my experience in old Shanghai. I looked over to Jared, only to find that he was still sleeping. I tapped on his shoulder to wake him up. “Wow! That was definitely the craziest ride I have ever been on!” shouted Jared. We both looked at each other with such disbelief.