



# Fiction

Group 1

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Holy Angels Canossian School, Fung, Ching Kiu - 9*

It was a warm afternoon and the sun was shining bright. Kim and I were walking along the river. We saw some workers dumping waste into the water. I yelled, ‘Stop it! It will harm marine life!’ The workers ignored us. They kept dumping the waste and left when they were done. Kim mumbled, ‘They can’t pollute the river even they want to build a bridge for us! We live here and we treasure the river!’

Suddenly, we found a perfectly polished bottle floating on the river. Kim picked it up carefully. There was a whistle and a note inside the bottle. The note said, ‘If you love the river, you may want to save it. Blow the whistle and you can help. K.R.’ ‘Who is K.R.?’ I asked. ‘I have no idea but it’s no harm to blow the whistle.’ Kim said.

I blew the whistle strongly and a high pitched sound was made. Splash! Two dolphins jumped out of the river and nodded their heads towards us. Kim and I exchanged looks, smiled, rode on the dolphins’ backs, held their fins and zoomed down under the water. In a minute, we arrived at the Underwater Palace. ‘Wow! What a magnificent palace under the water!’ we exclaimed. It was made entirely out of pearls and marbles. A giant crab wearing a crown and holding eight sceptres stood on the palace. ‘Welcome boys! I am the King of the River. You can call me Mr. Crabby.’

‘K.R. ... King of the River ...You are K.R.!’ I said. ‘Humans are building a bridge but they dump the waste into the river. They pollute the water. I have to punish them,’ the King said seriously. He took out a magical mirror. We could see the storm swirling and some boats flipping over. ‘Please forgive them!’ we begged. The King said, ‘You are good boys and care about the river. Take this pearl and tell the people not to pollute the river anymore. I will stop the storm then.’

We rode on the dolphins back and rushed to the water surface. I yelled to the people, ‘Look at this pearl. It is from the King of the River! The storm is a punishment. Stop polluting the river and the storm will stop.’ Kim held the pearl up and the storm finally stopped.

A year later, the bridge was built. People also built a temple near the river and kept the pearl in it. The King did not make any storms as he promised. Kim and I kept the whistle. Whenever we wanted to meet the dolphins, we blew the whistle. They would swim to the surface and play with us together.

His tale became widespread, and now the desert is named the Gobi Desert.

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Kingston International School, Shu, Lin Ho - 6*

Travis heard about Pearl River Delta. He wanted to see the big pearl. One day, he woke up early in the morning. He put on a cap and started the treasure hunt.

Travis flew up in the sky and opened his big eyes to look for the pearl. "Help me, help me!" cried out the small fish. Travis saw a heap of fish caught in some broken sticks. Travis pulled out the sticks. He saw many colorful fish. They have white pearls on their heads. "No, no, no, they are our bright eyes", said the fish.

Travis kept on flying to look for the big pearl. He flew to the farm and saw a mountain of white beads. "There are so many people dancing happily around the beads. These must be pearls", he thought. The baby pig said, "No, no, no, it's a big heap of rice".

"Moo, moo, are you looking for something white in color and precious?" asked the cow. Travis nodded his head and looked down. He saw a bottle full of milk. Travis thought it was a pearl.

"No!" all the chickens jumped up and shouted. "Please come and look behind us", they said. Travis found something round and hard. He saw hundreds of chickens lining up. "Jig, jig", they were singing while they were laying eggs. Travis found thousands of eggs. They looked like a long string of pearls. But the sister pig said, "These are nice eggs, not pearls". Travis was unhappy but he wanted to continue his journey to look for the pearl.

Travis flew and flew, he was getting tired. Suddenly, it rained. Travis flew faster and faster to hide himself in a tree. Now he was all wet. He was resting on a branch and nearly fell asleep. He smelled something good. A monkey was eating a banana, sitting next to him. He shared his fruit with Travis. The basket was full of fruits from the field. Those were bananas, blueberries, oranges, pears, apples and cherries. When they were eating fruits, the sun came out.

Monkey asked Travis, "What are you doing here?" Travis said, "I'm looking for the Pearl River Delta." "Look! It's the Pearl River in front of you!" said the Monkey. Travis had a peep. Know what he saw? He saw the Pearl River with glitters floating on the water! He was so surprised to see many streams, too. Travis asked, "Where is the big pearl?" Clever Monkey replied, "All the things you have seen are the treasure from the Pearl River Delta. They are as precious as a pearl!"

Travis laughed loudly, "Oh! All the friends I have met today, they are the treasure of the Delta. They are pearls." Then, he said goodbye to the Monkey. He flew happily back home where there were tall buildings. He thought these buildings were as precious as pearls, too. The sunset was very beautiful and Travis's journey was very exciting!

# The Race to the Pearl River Delta

*Korean International School, Ang, Ka Meng Joseph - 7*

Once upon a time, there were three brothers called Wang Xiao Wen, Wang Xiao Ming, and Wang Xiao Shang. One day, they decided to have a race to the Pearl River Delta. Each of them went on the three main rivers which are the Xi Jiang River, the Bei Jiang River, and the Dong Jiang River. Wan Xiao Ming went on the Bei Jiang River, Wan Xiao Shang went on the Xi Jiang River, and Wan Xiao Wen went on the Dong Jiang River. Then they started on the edge of each river. Ready Set Go!!!!!!!!!!!! Then the race began.

However, the rivers were too polluted with rubbish like cans, plastic bottles and food waste. That means their boats couldn't move very fast. The pollution smelt very bad and fishes couldn't live in the river. The fishermen were very sad and couldn't do their jobs. The three brothers felt really sorry for the fishermen, and wanted to help by cleaning the river up.

They cleaned the river by picking up the garbage and putting the rubbish into their boats before continuing the race. Their boats were special recycling boats so they used the garbage to generate power for the engine. The more rubbish they collected the faster their boats went.

After cleaning up the river, the marathon continued. About two hours into the race, Wan Xiao Wen was in the lead. Soon after, Wan Xiao Shang was catching up. But soon after, Wan Xiao Ming was far ahead in the race.

Guangzhou is the finish line of the race. The city is located on the southern tip of the Pearl River Delta. Guangzhou is the third largest Chinese city and has a population of 12.70 million people.

As they got closer to the finish line, they collected even more rubbish to generate even more power to make boats go even faster because the three brothers all wanted to get there first. The rivers behind them were very clean so they continued to clean the rivers to make their boats go as fast as they could to get them to the finishing line.

At the finishing line, there were many spectators cheering for the three brothers. It was a very close race between all of them but it was a tie. The spectators were also very because the Xi Jiang River, the Bei Jiang River and the Dong Jiang River were all cleaned up.

# Adventure in cities of Pearl River Delta

*Korean International School, Lim, Yat Long Julian - 6*

## Adventure in cities of Pearl River Delta

One day there was an earthquake in the sea near China that caused a tsunami to strike Guangzhou, Zhuhai and Hong Kong. Lots of people died in the tsunami, the cities drowned into the sea for 15 years and millions of people died and all the buildings were destroyed.

A little boy named Danny survived this terrible disaster. He lost his family during this disaster but met the Stampy family who was searching for their son who was also lost in the tsunami. Alexander is the father, Siera is the mother and David is their son. Their lost son is Daniel. They feel sad for Danny and decided to take care of him and search for their lost ones together.

Danny never stopped thinking of his family. He grew up learning about tsunamis and earthquakes and became a scientist. Danny decided to use his knowledge as a scientist and start to search for his family. He started to search where he was born which is in Zhuhai. Danny spent many months searching many places in Zhuhai and the Pearl River Delta. He went to Xianglu Bay in Zhuhai where there is a famous statue holding a big pearl and Windows of the World in Shenzhen where he saw many fake famous places like, Eiffel Tower, London's Tower Bridge, The Pyramids, Sydney Opera House and the Grand Canyon. He also went to Nanshe Village in Dongguan where he saw many old buildings and temples hundred of years old, Chimelong Amusement park in Guangzhou where he saw white tigers and lions, Macau where he saw St. Paul ruin which was built from 1602 to 1640 and was one of the largest Catholic churches in Asia at that time.

One day, Danny fell sick and couldn't search anymore. The Stampy Family was very worried and asked him to go home. Danny decided to continue searching another time. When he arrived home the Stampy family was so happy to see him and they hugged him really tight. Danny felt dizzy and fainted.

When he woke up, he was in the hospital. He saw the Stampy family when he opened

his eyes. But something was funny. He recognized the Stampy family, Alexander, Siera and David but he also saw something else. They are his lost family! Danny was their lost son Daniel! Danny is his nick name for Daniel. He couldn't believe it and cried for sooo long and they all hugged each other. His family was so happy that Danny finally remembered them. They told Danny later that he lost some of his memory after the tsunami. They tried to help him remember but he couldn't so they just waited and prayed. Today Danny finally remembers everything. Danny was so happy because he remembers everything and also because he knows that his family is always there to support him, they are patient, love him and help him when he is in trouble.

Danny was so tired and sick that he slept for 24 hours and he dream of going to so many places with the dragon. He went to Shenzhen, Dongguan, Guangzhou, Zhongshan, Macau and Hong Kong. Danny was still very sick when he woke up. He wanted to continue to search for his family but the Stampy family told Danny to go home to rest and continue searching later. They said they will support and help him until he finds his family. Danny decided to listen to them because he didn't want them to worry. He went to the airport and flew back home. When he arrived home the Stampy family was so happy to see him and they hugged him really tight. Danny felt dizzy and fainted.

When he woke up, he was in the hospital. He saw the Stampy family when he opened his eyes. But something was funny. He recognized the Stampy family, Alexander, Siera and David but he also saw something else. They are his lost family! His real father, real mother and real brother! Danny was their lost son Daniel! Danny is his nick name for Daniel. He couldn't believe it and cried for sooo long and they all hugged each other. His family was so happy that Danny finally remembered them. They told Danny later that he lost some of his memory after the tsunami. They tried to help him remember but he couldn't so they just waited and prayed. Today Danny finally remembers everything. Danny was so happy because he remembers everything and also because he knows that his family is always there to support him, they are patient, love him and help him when he is in trouble.

# New Tales of Pearl River Delta★

*Shatin Junior School, Ling, Saffron - 7*

★I'm not talking about the Pearl River Delta in South China. I'm talking about Pearl River Delta in Magic Land.

Once in Magic Land there was a river. And every week, behind the hills there would be a rainbow, mystical, spray, and fairies would try and get there before it ends because those fairies want to get splashed for luck.

But the Fairy Queen had decided the fairies shall no longer go there. She has something else in mind. She gathered the fairies in the town hall one day,

"Everyone, you shall no longer visit the lucky spray now, you shall visit Pearl River Delta instead..." She said in a mysterious tone.

Everyone feels distressed. What is the Queen thinking?

"Right, any questions?" The queen cried out. Before anyone can say anything...

"Good... You can all go now!!"

Soon the story had reached humans. Some 'author' had used the story as inspiration for their 'new book'. The fairies were worried about it. Some fairies came back from the river with news.

"Pearl River Delta is more amazing than the lucky spray!!!"

The other fairies started to murmur, then, one of them asked,

"Why is it more amazing than the lucky spray?"

"Well, it's because of the magic pearl flowers, of course." Diana replied.

Nobody has dared to steal a single pearl because the pearls have powers.

"The pearls power makes our powers too!!" cried Diana.

Then Diana ganged up with her best friends Aiko and Miko. Aiko and Miko are twins. Although they are twins, they have a lot of differences. For example Aiko likes gummy bears, and Miko likes ice cream.

They got to the river.

"W...What... is... going... on...??" stammered Aiko.

The pearls were gone from the flowers! Just then Miko found a glittery trail,

"Look!" cried Miko. Diana and Aiko followed her gaze; they all looked more closely at the trail.

"Wait... It's not glitter, it's oil!!" Diana got in front, and Aiko and Miko to stand behind her.

Then she hopped on a lily pad. They all hopped on the last lily pad and got on land. Then they found a tightly tied bag, and it was full. They realized it was the pearls so they decided to take them to the Queen.

They hurried back with the bag of pearls to the Queen's palace.

And after hearing their story, the Queen finally spilled the beans.

"Humans had been stealing our magic away from the lucky spray," She whispered. "That is why I've moved the magic to the pearls in the Pearl River Delta. I did not know they would find out about the pearls too."

"Thank you for retrieving our magic pearls."

# Revenge of the River Goddess

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Tang, Audrey - 9*

“Tian Tian, what’s happening? Tell me! Please!” I stared in shock at my best friend Tian Tian, who was very ill.

Tian Tian gasped for air. “Humans and pollution.....” she stuttered.

“You are NOT dying on me!” I said firmly. Tears streamed from my eyes, but I didn’t care. I had to save my best friend.

I watched, grief-stricken, as Tian Tian’s breathing became ragged. This could not be happening! Here was my best friend, dying right in front of my eyes. “Help me,” she groaned, and she didn’t move.

Suddenly, my misery turned to rage. I just had to punish those cruel humans. For years, we, the Chinese White Dolphins, have been living among the sea plants and swimming among the clear and gentle waves in the Pearl River. The Delta region used to have many trees and flowers. Everywhere I looked, I saw green. The ponds and lakes shimmered and the air was fresh. In the distance was a village where the villagers worked together to fish, farm and hunt. But now, all the beauty of nature had been replaced by factories, apartments and buildings. The air which was once fresh is now smelly, smoggy and polluted. The crystal water is now murky. How gross! Now many of my companions have died of sickness and were facing the brutal fate of extinction!

Now I knew what I had to do for the good of all the White Dolphins. Take revenge! I swam towards the River Goddess’ palace and asked her to help me.

This was an important mission, so I bravely stepped forward and said, “Your Highness, humans have been dumping sewage and industrial waste into the rivers for decades and many of us have died because of this pollution. We see no way out and we need your help. Help us please!”

The River Goddess studied me intently with those sea-green eyes of hers. Finally, she gave in. “Alright!” she sighed in exasperation. “Just for you, I’m going to be sending a message along with a chest full of treasure. If humans swear to stop polluting the river, I shall give them treasure. But if they do not .....

A shadow passed over her face. I decided this wasn’t the best time to push her.

Meanwhile, in the world of the humans, word spread quickly that if they stopped spoiling the rivers, they would have loads of treasure! So they promised not to pollute anymore. As the river became cleaner, Tian Tian regained her strength and rejoined our school!

However, after a while, the humans forgot their promise and sadly started polluting the river again. The River Goddess was furious! She left her palace and went to the humans. The humans were terrified at the sight of her. They tried to fight her, but she raised her hand in a “Stop” gesture. She then cursed the land by sending floods occasionally. That way, the people would always be reminded of their promise to love and respect Nature.

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Ing, Lauren Francesca - 8

Jimmy was revising for his Geography test, trying to memorise all the cities in the Pearl River Delta. ‘Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen...snore...’ he murmured, falling asleep. However, soon a dream began to form in his head...

He was digging around his messy bedroom, and under the bed covers, he found an unusual digital watch! He randomly pressed a red button and mysteriously, he realised he had landed in 1975 Hong Kong! He was in a farmer’s field.

A farmer looked up astonishedly, asking him in Cantonese, “How did you get here? I didn’t see you here earlier.”

Jimmy grinned. ‘I’m Jimmy, from the Year 2015. I have come in my time machine to visit the past.’ he replied. ‘What’s your name?’

‘I am Chi.’ the farmer said warily.

They had a short conversation. Chi finally said, ‘Didn’t you say you’re from the future? If you are, I’d like you to take me there.’

‘Okay! But first you have to shave off your beard, and cut that long, shaggy hair,’ Jimmy said, pointing at his hairy features. ‘If you don’t, people in the future will instantly recognise you as someone from the past,’ Jimmy said.

‘What!?’ Chi exclaimed, shocked.

Jimmy sighed. He decided to carry on. ‘Besides, you need to give yourself a new identity. Haven’t you noticed how different my name is compared to yours? People in the future all have English names,’ he told Chi.

Chi rolled his eyes.

Jimmy smiled. ‘So you’ll be Simon, okay?’ he said in a matter-of-fact way.

When Jimmy had finished dealing with his appearance, they took the Time Machine back to 2015. In a flash, they had arrived.

Chi was fascinated by all the tall buildings and fancy cars, but kept coughing due to the polluted air, so Jimmy went into Mak’s supermarket to buy him a drink.

‘What’s this place, Jimmy?’ Chi asked, looking around curiously.

‘Huh? Oh, this is a supermarket. It’s basically a superstore that sells food and household items,’ Jimmy explained.

‘I think this is a great idea! I want to go back to the past to start one of my own! Can I go back to the past now, Jimmy?’ Chi said excitedly.

‘Yes, but this time go by yourself! I’ll see you next time!’ Jimmy replied.

Suddenly, Jimmy woke up from his dream, realising he had been sleeping for an hour already, and he still hadn’t studied for the Geography test! ‘Oh no!’ he said worriedly.

Picking up his textbook, he continued to read ‘The Pearl River Delta has undergone massive economic development in recent decades...’

A week later, Jimmy and his mum went to Mak’s supermarket to buy food. Jimmy saw a poster on the wall, explaining the history of the supermarket. It read:

*“The founder of Mak’s supermarket was Mr. Simon Mak Chi Hon. Because of his hard work and dedication, there are now 26 branches of Mak’s supermarket across the Pearl River Delta.”*

# The Old Fisherman and the Giant Grouper

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sze, Pak He Hayden - 7*

Once upon a time, an old fisherman lived in Hong Kong. He sailed the Pearl River Delta catching fish and selling them to the market. He made money this way to support his family.

One day, he was fishing at Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong.

He used some freshly baked bread as fish bait. He started fishing. He waited and waited until the sun went down. Suddenly, the fishing rod shook. The old fisherman pulled hard. He saw a beautiful grouper biting the fish bait.

However, the grouper wiggled and wriggled and shook free from the hook. The poor old fisherman watched as the grouper swam away with his tasty bread towards Macau.

The next day, the old fisherman followed the grouper to Inner Harbour in Macau. He used some fresh apples as fish bait this time. He hooked a slice of fresh apple to the fishing hook and used it as the fish bait. He started fishing. He waited and waited until the sun went down. All of a sudden, the fishing rod shook. The old fisherman pulled hard. He saw the same beautiful grouper biting the fish bait. However, the grouper wiggled and wriggled and shook free from the hook again. The poor old fisherman watched as the grouper swam away with the slice of tasty apple towards Guangzhou.

On the third day, the old fisherman chased the grouper straight into the port of Guangzhou. He used some ripe and sweet corn as fish bait this time. He hooked a piece of sweet corn to the fishing hook and used it as the fish bait. He started fishing. He was determined to catch the beautiful grouper this time. He waited and waited until the sun went down. Again, all of a sudden, the fishing rod shook. The old fisherman stood up and pulled hard and firm on the fishing rod. The grouper wiggled and wriggled and shook and shook, but this time, it was not able to escape. The old fisherman pulled the giant grouper up and smiled to himself finally.

The old fisherman was about to put the giant grouper into his fishing bucket, but then he saw something in the water. Swimming around his boat were three other giant groupers. One was about the size of the giant grouper he caught, and the other two were little ones. The old fisherman realised it was the family of the grouper. He looked at the giant grouper again and after a while, he released the fish back into the water. The family of groupers swam away happily, with the piece of sweet corn.

Afterwards, the old fisherman returned to Hong Kong. He went home and greeted his wife and two little kids. That night, they had some tasty bread, fresh apples and ripe and sweet corn for dinner. They were very happy, especially the old fisherman. He hoped that he would see the grouper family again.



Fiction  
Group 2

# Tossing The Rope

*Bradbury School, Ahn, Jay Hugh - 10*

All I do all day is look for clams. I'm very good at it, an expert. As far as I can remember I've always scoured for clams and that's all we ate.

"I wish more people lived on this island" I mumbled to myself. Mom and dad say I should be thankful towards our ancestors who found this clam rich island. I'm getting sick of eating the same thing every day.

"Dinner time!" I dragged myself over to my parents

"Ming Xia!!" I knew that warning tone.

I took my plate and topped it with clams. "Clam salad again?!" I groaned. Father always told me the importance of clams. I couldn't help but wonder why food on the other island smells so wonderful over there at the other islands but not here? I'm sure they eat something that tastes as delicious as it smells. My dad taught me that there are countless tiny islands in this area. Each island has one animal or produce unique to the island. I once I saw a white bird that can't fly that sings every morning and wakes everyone up.

I had a wonderful dream. Maybe the boy on the island to the north is sick of eating that wonderful smelling bird too. There was only one way to find out. I waited until the boy could see that I was throwing something important at him. I stuffed a clam in a leaf and threw it as hard as I can towards the island. It didn't reach him right away but drifted ashore. He looked at me then opened the parcel. He looked confused so I did a gesture of putting the clam in my mouth. He put it in his mouth and hollered in delight. He ran to his hut and emerged with something. He picked a leaf from his tree. He threw it to me and I caught it. I opened it up. The great smell enveloped me in a second.

"Father, mother!" They emerged furious for I'm not helping them to harvest clams. Before they could scold me I took out the piece of whatever it was and shoved it in their mouths. They squealed with excitement. Mother's eyes filled up with tears and father exclaimed that this must be the chicken he's only heard of from elders. Whatever it was, was exploding with flavour. The juice was running out of my mouth and the scrumptious meat was tinted with flavour. I ran back to the island and kept throwing clams just as I did earlier

hoping he would send more of the delicious meat. I learned that sharing benefits me!

The other islands were too far so Dad helped me to throw clam leaves. The neighbours to the west sent us a large parcel filled with large leaves I've never seen before. I carefully opened the package and to my great surprise there was a bundle of plant I've never seen. It came with writing on it. I didn't understand but the drawings showed a man putting the plant in the ground and watering it.

"Well at least we ought to give it a try?" We planted it near our pond and waited, day after day. Dad suggested eating the vegetables instead of planting them but I insisted and begged to continue waiting. What was once one corn cob became 5 then 10 we decided it was time to bite into it. We hurriedly pulled away the green bits and gazed at the pure caramel yellow corn. We took a bite out of it each. It burst in my mouth. The corn tasted so sweet!

Trading between islands was prospering. Everyone started trading what they had and never knew what they will get in return. It was quite common to see parcels floating in the water. Eventually with all the ropes connecting the islands I came up with a crazy idea to bring the islands closer. I gave everyone a strip of corn stalk and I asked that one everyone pull at the same time. Some say I was crazy. Everyone pulled so hard that the ground shook and I could feel the ground move underneath us. Inch by inch the separate islands were connecting. The sand rose. Waves brewed and the people shivered against the onslaught of quakes. Shadows appeared and shadows to figures finally figures to faces. Their cheery and smiling faces were very comforting to see. By now the little boy I shared my clams with was now a young teenager. One of those flightless birds sauntered over to our side of the island and a muddy pink thing came nosing in our clams and started gobbling it up. A once separated delta was now united as Hong Kong/XiangGang, the city of scrumptious scent.

Years had passed before I returned to the beach that started everything. I looked around the different areas picturing how things were before all the islands united to Hong Kong. I chuckled as I sighted the old fashioned huts and the decorated clam shells. Sharing truly connected us like never before. I am proud that my children and their children can enjoy this great city.

"Grandpa! Grandpa!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"Can you tell us how you connected the Pearl River Delta!?"

"Of course."

"All I did all day is look for clams..."

# The Pearl of China

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Ma, Sin Ching Alexa - 9*

Once upon a time in China, there were two sisters who loved each other dearly. The elder sister was called Huo and the younger sister was called Shui. They were the spirits of the Fire and the Water respectively.

There had been rumours of Shui becoming the Ruler of All Spirits. Huo was furious about that. Having her younger sister as the Ruler of All Spirits? No! Her mind was coming up with a plot to kill Shui so that she would be the Ruler. She was never the kind and generous Huo again, never again.

Shui's only enemy was Ri, the spirit of the Sun. Huo hoped to befriend her to get more power. "Why on earth would Huo want to befriend me? I'm her sister's enemy!" thought Ri in doubt. But when Huo told Ri about her plot to kill Shui, Ri agreed to help.

In the bamboo forest, Shui was singing happily and didn't know Huo and Ri had been spying on her all along. She saw an injured snow leopard struggling nearby and went there to see what was happening. Using her new healing powers, she helped the snow leopard recover. Meanwhile, Ri and Huo were hiding behind a clump of bushes, with a gold Lightning Dragon and a silver Thunder Dragon by their sides. "Her power has now increased to healing! I think there isn't much time left before she is crowned as Ruler!" whispered Huo, and Ri nodded. They climbed up their dragons and flew back to Ri's Palace of Gold to discuss their plan to kill Shui.

Midnight came. Strong winds blew. Shui was woken up by beams of red light flashing in the distance. They were coming towards her! She was petrified. She ordered the army of green Jade Dragons and blue Water Dragons to protect her and her Palace of Crystal. Shui's Water Dragons summoned a powerful wave of water against the beams of red light. The light was drowned out. Shui was relieved and thought she had succeeded in driving them away. Suddenly, a huge army of Lightning Dragons and Thunder Dragons launched an attack from the sky. A Lightning Dragon grabbed Shui with its claws and took her to the Palace of Gold.

In the Palace of Gold, the Lightning Dragon brought Huo and Ri the unconscious Shui. When Shui woke up, she saw Huo dressed in a gown of evil fire.

“What has brought you to the darkness and evil? You have betrayed me and ruined our name as spirits! Why did you do this to me?” asked Shui feebly.

“I heard that you will be crowned the Ruler of All Spirits. I am and you’re not!” sneered Huo. “Dragon! Bring the prisoner to the deepest dungeon in the palace and send her to her death when the sun rises!” ordered Huo and Ri in unison. The Lightning Dragon took Shui and threw her into a dungeon.

In the dungeon late at night, Shui was devastated. Just as she was weeping, her tears fell onto the floor and from them sprouted leaves! The plant grew and grew, reached the top and cracked the roof of the dungeon. Shui climbed up the plant and escaped. She immediately ran through the gates of the palace and whistled for her Jade Dragon to come. She sat on the Jade Dragon’s back and escaped to Hong Kong.

Unfortunately, the noise alerted one of Ri’s Thunder Dragons. The Thunder Dragon secretly followed the runaway prisoner. It then flew back and reported to Huo and Ri. Huo and Ri were so shocked to learn that Shui had escaped. They commanded an army of Lightning Dragons and Thunder Dragons to hunt Shui down.

Shui arrived in Hong Kong and thought that she was safe. “Thanks, buddy. You saved my life!” exclaimed Shui to her Jade Dragon. As she reached out her hand to pat her dragon, “BOOM!”, a thundering noise echoed through the darkness and the earth began to tremble. The sky was lit up. Shui saw a brief outline of the shadows of Huo and Ri leading an army of dragons. Shui was absolutely frightened.

“I now challenge you to a battle of Chinese chess. The loser will be killed on this sandy plain and the winner will be the Ruler of All Spirits,” shouted Ri as she stepped forward. Shui hesitated but she had no choice. “I swear to Yue, spirit of the Moon and the Mother of all things, that I will accept this challenge!” declared Shui solemnly. The battle of Chinese chess began. Ri defeated Shui’s chess soldiers, one after one. At last, Ri defeated Shui’s chess general and cried “Checkmate!” with glee.

The trial began. Shui’s Jade Dragon was taken before Huo and Ri. It was given a flame-like brand on its wings and all dragons of Shui’s army then became Huo and Ri’s slaves. After that, Ri pointed a finger at Shui and cast a spell on her.

Fire Dragons! Show your power!  
Let Shui die on this sandy plain!  
Let her melt into a water flower!  
No more enemies and no more pain!

As the spell was cast, Shui began to melt. “Huo...my dear sister...a dying spirit does not lie...revert to your kind self...” cried Shui with her last breath. Shui collapsed and numerous streams of water flowed out of her body. Instead of melting into a water flower, Shui turned into a crystal clear river. When Shui vanished, the river stretched from Guandong to Hong Kong and Macau.

Yue saw everything from the sky. She was enraged. She shone her moonlight on Ri and transformed her into a wolf. Ri ran away in shame. As for Huo, Yue turned her into a pearl-coloured dragon and it dived into the river which was once Shui.

Today, the river is called Pearl River. If you look closely, you might see a pearl dragon in its depths!

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Diocesan Preparatory School, Chan, Beatrice - 11*

Jarred trudged through the thick slimy mud of the Pearl River Delta as he filmed the bubbly, foamy water rushing along beside him. His employer had sent him here for no reason but to film the river. He had no choice but to obey. After all, he was a reporter. And reporters are well known for their strange jobs.

He sat down for a moment, catching his breath and enjoying the little amount of scenery beside him. If only the people had not polluted the environment so badly!

Suddenly, Jarred saw that the water in the river had risen to form a large mountain and was rising before his very eyes. Pulling out his needle-sharp dagger, a present from his wife at home should anything go wrong, he jumped to his feet, surveying the mound of water cautiously.

In that moment, a huge dragon exploded out of the river. It was as long as a freight train, “and probably as heavy too,” Jarred wondered as he gazed up at the beast. It had a deer’s horns, and huge, swiveling eyes that could spot prey from a hundred miles away. But what kind of gigantic prey could wake the dragon from a hundred-year slumber? The answer was, as the dragon fixed his swiveling gaze onto Jarred, “Me.” he realised, “I’m the prey.”

For years the dragon had slept underwater, with no desire to catch prey, for it had grown accustomed to eating the fish underwater.

Now, with the dragon towering over Jarred, he made a quick, life-or-death decision. He ran towards the village behind him, to try to get safety and help. The dragon watched Jarred’s process with amusement. When Jarred was halfway there, panting for breath, the dragon rose into the air with ease, hovering just below the clouds, and quickly caught up with Jarred.

Jarred was halfway to the village when the dragon roared loudly behind him. Looking back, Jarred saw that the dragon had jumped into the air and was catching up to him. He dashed to the village, shouting for help. But none came. With a start, he realised he was running into a ghost town.

Jarred scampered into an old, run-down house. He paused for breath while the dragon floating outside, hissing in annoyance. He recognised that for once, he had done the right

thing. By running into this until-recently abandoned ghost town, the scent of the old villagers masked his own scent. He watched the dragon sniffing around and smiled to himself smugly. He was feeling extremely proud of himself until the dragon apparently got fed up of sniffing around and decided to use a more destructive way of looking for Jarred; he whisked his tail around and smashed the house beside the house Jarred was hiding in into a thousand splinters.

Jarred cursed and dashed out of the abandoned house as the dragon's tail whipped around and smashed into the house where he had been staying in just a few seconds ago. The dragon snarled and whipped around to face him. Jarred looked around for a random object he could use to annoy the monster. Suddenly, Jarred remembered his camera. He fumbled around for his camera while the dragon slowly hovered nearer and nearer.

The dragon slowly shambled closer. It wasn't worried, for now the human was searching in its bag for some weapon that didn't exist, because if it did exist, the human would have used it by now. And the dagger could not harm the dragon, because it could only be used in short-range. No, the human was defenceless. The dragon took a deep breath and dived.

Jarred found the camera. Not a moment too soon. The dragon had started diving down towards Jarred, baring its teeth. Its hot breath was blasting onto Jarred's skin when he had only taken his camera out.

The dragon was nearly touching the human now. "Soon," he giggled to himself, "very soon I shall be able to taste human meat again." The human took out a tiny black box. "What is that?" the dragon wondered, "Never mind, it will taste just as fine." the dragon assured himself. That was just before the seemingly harmless black box started flashing painfully bright lights.

Jarred smiled. The camera was working! He hadn't expected it to work so well. The dragon was becoming disoriented, looping and twirling in crazy circles to avoid the unbearable light. It landed in the middle of a pile of rubble of an abandoned house and spoke pleadingly to Jarred, "Mercy! I'll do whatever you ask if you stop the black box from flashing!"

Now, no one knows exactly how a dragon sounds and if they even speak at all, except those who have heard a dragon speak, and even seeing one without being eaten is rare enough. But Jarred heard it speak and he describes it "as hearing thunder talk".

Jarred stopped snapping pictures. He spoke, "If you never eat humans again, then I will stop taking pictures. But if you don't..." And Jarred lifted up his camera.

"Yes! Yes! I'll do anything you ask, so long as your kind doesn't point that thing at me again! "And with this the dragon dove into the water and disappeared from sight.

After getting back home, Jarred retired from being a reporter because of unknown reasons. He now is an author and one of his best-selling books is called 'My Pet Dragon', although no one knows how he got the idea.

# The Tale of Xiao Hua

*Discovery Mind Primary School, Willeter, Freja - 10*

During the reign of the terrible and cruel emperor Genghis Khan lived a wealthy merchant called Loa Wang. Loa Wang had three beautiful daughters; the oldest daughter was called Xiao Wang, she was extremely intelligent; the middle sister was called Xiao Hong, she as breathtakingly beautiful and could sing like an angel; the youngest was called Xiao Hua, she wasn't good at anything. Most of the time she was sad, miserable and jealous. One night a man that was working for Genghis Khan quietly sneaked into Loa Wang's home and stole Xiao Hua. He put her in a brown bag. Since the man was rushing he accidentally dropped the bag into the rockpools! Xiao Hua slowly died. The next morning Xiao Hua's spirit slowly awakened. Her spirit rose up from the water but as she rose her spirit started to faded – she was evaporating! Eight hundred and fifteen years later and airport was built over Xiao Hua's rockpools, Xiao Hua wasn't too happy about this.

Fast forward to the present day.

“Woohoo!” I shouted, I was so excited to be doing a lion dance in front of the government! It had taken about thirty minutes on the bus to get to the airport. All of a sudden a black smudge whizzed past the window, I couldn't make out what it was so I stopped thinking about it. When we finally got there I jumped off the bus and into the line. We went to the library so we could change, get ready and line up. It was time to go on stage, I felt the butterflies in my tummy starting to flutter around. When I got on stage I didn't feel so good, the butterflies in my tummy weren't fluttering around, they were punching me.

The show had started, it was going great so far. All of a sudden I saw the black smudge again but it didn't seem like a black smudge anymore it seemed more like the figure of a person. I couldn't see I anymore, I think it was just my imagination. Just then a black flower fell on the lions but then thousands more came until you could barely see the lions carry more, I crept up to the piles of black flowers and poked them. “Roar!” I saw a swoosh of a yellow tail in one pile, I ran as fast as I could and screamed “lions, real lions are in those piles!” no one believed me until both lions sprung out of the piles. Everyone ran like crazy to find the nearest exits. I didn't want anyone to get hurt so I screamed out “Yoohoo!” to the lions.

Both of the lions landed and were now chasing me. In the corner of my eye I saw an exit. I shot straight towards it. Just in time I warned into the doors and sprinted outside. I stopped dead in my tracks, the hairs on the back of my neck were standing up, I turned slowly, my heart was pounding but instead of real lions they were costume lions. I have never seen the black smudge since.

## Zhou's Ithaca

*Dulwich College Beijing, Lu, Michael - 8*

With a swoosh, the Ao De Xi pulled out of the harbor. All around the boat, azure diamonds glistened from the mirror like surface of the sea. Seagulls screeched and wailed overhead.

“Home! Home we go!” roared the high-spirited crew. The wind slapped against their weathered faces as they rowed away from the coast of Malaysia. As the mainland grew smaller and smaller the sailors’ spirits soared.

The sailors of the Ao De Xi were all from the Pearl River Delta, the most famous hometown of oversea Chinese. After ten years of rough work, they were finally on their way home. Zhou, the captain, was a strong man who had glossy black hair, a pair of calloused hands and big feet. Listening to the rowdy laughter of his crew, he could already feel his wife’s warm embrace and hear his children’s laughter. He could not wait to return to his hometown.

Soon, Malaysia melted into the horizon. All that the sailors could see was the sea – the clear blue sea that surrounded the boat.

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The wind was fair, and the Ao De Xi traveled smoothly. In a few days, they glided gracefully on to an island. When they tumbled on the shore, they found weeds scattered on the brown dull sand, and a huge impenetrable forest bordering the island. At the edge of the forest, there was a pale column of smoke drifting from a mysterious cave.

Approaching the cave cautiously, the crew saw a tall man. He had a sharp nose, dark straight hair, and a sorcerer’s cloak. It flowed behind him, shrouding him in secrets and sorcery. He greeted them warmly, “Welcome to Opiumland!” The man flicked his hand. Immediately, a magnificent gold table encrusted with rubies and diamonds appeared.

On it was all the food you could imagine! Tender fat beef resting on a wreath of fresh flowers, juicy green vegetables, and freshly picked grapes in dozens ...

After the meal, the man took out some pipes and handed them out, signaling sailors to imitate him. He inhaled from his pipe and puffed. Some sailors followed, entranced by the mystifying movements. Soon, those sailors’ heads lolled to one side and as if someone had struck them, they fell to their knees. Their bodies inflated, turning into a sickening shade of pink. Their noses transformed into snouts, snorts and grunts filled the air.

The evil man cackled, “Why, enjoy yourselves! This is opium, fools!” Zhou and the remaining sailors yelped and sprinted away, falling onto each other as they ran to safety. As

soon as they reached their boat, everyone rushed to their seats and rowed away. Away from their pig friends, the opium, and the island itself.

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In a flash, one month had passed. The Ao De Xi traveled slowly against opposing winds. One day, the lookout suddenly cried, “Look! An island!” Everyone’s heads turned to see a small island with lush green palm trees and white sand. With the blink of an eye, the Ao De Xi docked near the shore. Everyone whooped and rushed out, throwing himself onto the soft sand. It was paradise. When they got up, they saw an old lady strolling towards them. She had long wavy hair that fell around her willowy figure in an elegant braid, and her small feet resembled a blooming lotus. A halo of light veiled her delicate face. She spoke in a soothing voice, “My name is Feng Po, and this is Dimsumland. Do you wish to come to my house?”

Zhou replied, “Why, of course! I’m sure my men would!”

They arrived at a huge mansion with glass windows, and a gold door. Everyone gaped at it, amazed and stupefied. Feng Po led them in. Inside, it was even more beautiful. Delicate tablecloths were spread neatly on tables; lavish sofas lined the walls; mahogany chairs surrounded the tables; and china vases sat on marble stools. She then led the crew to her kitchen where a chef was rolling dough. Feng Po said, “I’m going to show you all how to make dim sum. I invented it.”

Feng Po took the chef’s place at the kitchen counter. Spellbound, the crew watched her experienced hands to shape the dough, and then delicious dumplings and buns came to life under her soft touch. After dim sum was steamed, Zhou and his crew devoured one dish of the juicy delicacy after another, not wanting to stop.

The next morning, Zhou awoke to find Feng Po bending over him, “Here, this is a bag with the opposing winds that will slow you down, seal it and never let anyone open it!”

A week later, with the help of perfect wind, the sailors could already see the faint outline of the Pearl River Delta. Craning their necks to get a better view of their homeland, the sailors zealously discussed their plans for the future. However, a greedy sailor spread a rumor that Feng Po’s bag contained gold and jewels. Some sailors waited till Zhou took a nap, then stealthily approached it and ripped it apart. Instantly, all the bad winds blew and blew, blasting the poor battered boat’s dragon masthead into the sea. The sky turned grey and rumbling thunder pierced their ears. Suddenly, the mast broke under a bolt of lightning. Zhou grabbed the broken mast and held on tight. He saw the rest of the sailors disappear into the merciless sea. After the wind died down, the tide washed Zhou ashore. He kissed the sand.

He had left the Pearl River Delta for exactly twenty years.

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Years later, Zhou and his wife opened a dim sum restaurant called the Ao De Xi to remember his journey. With the touch of a mortal, dim sum was even more delicious. He also told everyone that opium was deadly. This is why the Pearl River Delta is famous for its dim sum and why its citizens fought so hard during the Opium War.

# The Pink Dolphin Protest

*German Swiss International Primary School, Cheng, Edgar - 9*

Joyfully, I flipped my tail. My friend Bob had just sent me an invitation to his birthday party. And Bob has the best parties.

Last year, he got the Rays (the most famous merman band) to perform at his party. The year before, he had a wild celebration at the Pink Dolphin Playhouse, a massive place with strobe lights, a jungle gym, with an electronic gadget every ten inches. We also got to make masks. I made one of those weird two-legged humans that smell like sweat.

I was psyched. I swam in a circle, then propelled myself up to the surface and did a dive. Being a pink dolphin has its perks, even if we don't have those things that humans have at the end of their arms. I think they're called hands.

I paddled quickly back home. It was just a small cave, nothing fancy, but I was proud of it. I loved how the makeshift porch was set into the stone, and the elaborate way that the rocks were positioned to make a pattern, but still look natural and organic. I'd crafted the door using a slab of rock and seaweed.

I scribbled 'Bob's birthday' in my planner. Then I swam up to the attic to do a little bit of cleaning.

As I pushed junk into the sunken trash can, something caught my eye. I swept the dust off with my tail, and examined it.

Tears welled in my eyes. It was a framed painting (we paint using octopus ink, coloured with trash that humans toss into our oceans) of my mom and dad. They'd died two years ago, when a boulder crushed them both, but nobody knew why the boulder had fallen in the first place. The king couldn't appoint guardians, so I'd lived at an orphanage for a year. But I'd run swam away so many times, he finally agreed to let me live on my own.

I sadly pushed the painting into the small pile of items that I wanted to keep.

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Eventually, the day of Bob's birthday arrived. I attached his present (the book he'd

wanted for months) to my tail with seaweed. Then I raced through the water at top speed.

Halfway through, I noticed a large crowd of pink dolphins to my left. They held signs that said Keep our river whole”” or They’ll annihilate us! Do something!” The king himself was there, a determined but weary expression on his face.

Bob and his brother Ian were there. Bob looked indignant and angry about something, and he kept scowling at the crowd. Ian was calming him, but even he looked concerned. “What’s going on?” I enquired.

Bob replied, his flippers on his hips. “Two and a half years ago, the humans started to build a bridge across the Pearl River Delta. Now they’re almost finished, and most of the pink dolphins want the king to do something!”

“He’s just cross that his party is cancelled,” Ian explained. “That’s why he’s so grumpy.”

Meanwhile, I was frantically thinking about the consequences of the bridge being built. It would split the Pearl River Delta in half! It would mean no more visits to Bob’s place, no more trips to the Pink Dolphin Playhouse. And it would also mean no more mourning over the loss of my parents at their graves. I couldn’t stand that, even if it meant no school. Less freedom, our joyful world disrupted by the construction of mankind, a model of wood and steel ruining our perfect river. I couldn’t let that happen!

A cold thought began to form in my mind; a thought that might solve the mystery of how my parents died. The humans were bound to send boulders tumbling down, with their hammers and wooden planks. They must have crushed my parents!

My vision went red with anger. My hatred directed at the humans charged me with adrenaline, and I shot through the water like a bullet.

“Wait! Where are you going?” Ian cried.

“I’m going to obliterate this bridge.” I didn’t recognize my voice. It was full with sorrow, hatred and anger. It wasn’t fair! Humans couldn’t do whatever they wanted to do! They already had the whole world in their hands! But they wanted more!

I spotted the bridge, but as I zoomed up close, I just gaped in shock

The bridge was a massive construction of delicate wooden planks and columns of steel. Wire looped through holes, holding the bridge together. I could see a thin layer of rock, glass, and many other materials I didn’t recognize.

“It’s magnificent,” I gasped. I felt bad at having to destroy the bridge, but I’d already made a solemn oath.

I spied a hole large enough for a pink dolphin to slip through. I compressed my body, and pushed through the layer of seaweed that surrounded the hole. I swam smoothly through the tunnel, avoiding jagged rocks. Pink dolphins are very flexible, so it was relatively easy.

I swam until I entered a cavern. There was a wall of wood blocking the tunnel. I channeled all my energy and rammed into the wood again and again.

Suddenly, I heard a number of clicks. Bob and Ian burst into the cavern, along with all the other pink dolphins!

Together, as a team, we slammed into the wood, over and over, until a creak was heard.

The wood splintered into dust, and it caused all the other poles and parts of the bridge to collapse. We were safe in the cavern but we could see it very clearly. Glass smashing, metal groaning, wood splintering--it was beautiful. Then it was all done, and all the dolphins cheered. The noise was deafening.

# The Dolphins of the Pearl River Delta

*German Swiss International Primary School, Cheong, Warren - 9*

Stars were twinkling dimly above the still, dark waters of the Pearl River Delta and most of its inhabitants were going to bed. My brother and I were listening sleepily to our father's deep voice as he told us a bedtime story, but instead of relaxing, we were all finding it harder and harder to breathe.

"Dad..." I whispered in a panic. My father gave me a sour-faced look.

"Go to sleep, son," he said sternly.

"But haven't you noticed how difficult it's becoming to breathe?" I asked nervously.

"Well, yes, but I didn't want to alarm you. Let's swim to your grandfather and ask if he knows what the problem is. After all, he is the oldest and wisest dolphin in our pod."

We found Grandfather floating almost motionless at the surface of the river. We could hear his snores clearly as we approached. My grandfather has lived in the Pearl River Delta all of his life. As the leader of our pod, he is both brave and well-respected. He is full of stories about his own boyhood - a golden age when there were thousands of Chinese White Dolphins like us living in these waters. As we got closer he opened both of his eyes and smiled broadly at us.

"Good evening, grandsons. Why aren't you both asleep?"

"We want to ask you a question that can't wait until morning," my brother replied.

"What can you be so desperate to know at this time of night?" my grandfather enquired.

"Why are we finding it so hard to breathe, Grandfather? Our lungs aren't filling up properly and we keep having to come up to the surface. It's very uncomfortable and we're frightened," I said.

"I'll answer that question later. It has been worrying me too," my grandfather responded.

"When I was a dolphin of your age, the water - though it was muddy - was always clean. There weren't as many boats on the Pearl River Delta and there were many dolphins my age to play with. We could hear each other talking clearly, even that is hard now that there are so

many boats on this river.

“As I grew up, the villages that lined the banks of the river turned into towns and then cities. The fields became factories. These cities and factories started polluting our river all the way from Hong Kong, past Zhuhai, Macau and Shenzhen and up to Guangzhou, the water was dirtied with sewage, chemicals and rubbish. This has all been very harmful to us dolphins. Soon we started dying one after the other, and fewer and fewer babies were born. It has been heartbreaking for me to watch this happen.

When you two were born, there were only a handful of young dolphins for you to play with; when I was young, I had dozens of friends. Our lives have become harder and harder and I worry all the time about the future.”

“How can we make the Pearl River Delta clean again, Grandfather?” I asked anxiously.

“Well, we need the humans to realise the damage they are doing to us. We need their help to clean up the river,” my grandfather replied.

“Are the humans awake at this time of night?” my brother said.

“I’m afraid not, we shall have to wait until the morning.”

“Will we be extinct by then, Grandfather?” my brother said, shaking with fear.

“No! Not by morning,” my grandfather assured him, “but we must clean the river as soon as possible because we are all in real danger.”

“Is it just us who are in trouble, grandfather?” I asked.

“No, it’s all of the creatures who call the Pearl River Delta home,” he warned. “Now, off to bed you two, we’ll hatch a plan together in the morning.”

As we swam back to our part of the river, the water was quiet and calm. My brother and I started floating quietly and I closed one eye to go to sleep. All around me I saw hundreds of dolphins, young and old, schools of happy fish and other river creatures swimming excitedly. I could hear dolphins chattering clearly and the sound of a few fishing boats safe in the distance. I felt content knowing that the cities and factories around us were no longer harming us, and I felt the clean water swirling all around me. When I came up to the surface to breathe, I smelt flowers and grass along the riverbank again, and the air was no longer polluted. It was even safe enough for us to swim down and visit our relatives in Shenzhen, Macau, Zhuhai and Hong Kong. Living in the Pearl River Delta was even better than when my grandfather was young!

Suddenly I heard a very familiar voice talking to me: “Wake up! Wake up!” it said. Both my eyes fluttered open and I saw my brother swimming beside me. The sky above me was bright, but I was struggling to breathe.

“I had such a wonderful dream!” I said to my brother. “Oh, how I wish it could come true.”

“Well let’s swim quickly to the surface then,” he urged. “Grandfather says he’s got a plan.”

We powered off with energy and enthusiasm and reached the surface in seconds. We were filled with hope and excitement about how we could make the Pearl River Delta a safe home for dolphins and other river creatures again; with the help of the humans, perhaps we can.

## Saving June

*German Swiss International Primary School, Lau, Justin - 9*

Moonlight spilled into the room, basking Rose's bed in a silver haze. She glanced at the clock beside her nightstand. It was past midnight. Frustrated, she threw her legs over the bed and made her way to the deck. The cold of the night seeped through her nightgown as she stood alone, shivering, the wind whipping her black hair against her face. Rose sighed, it was going to be a long night. Just then, a distant whimper broke the silence. Rose's breath caught. She should be the only one around.

Rose whirled around, her gaze flitting across the empty deck.

"Rose! Come here! Come here!"

Someone was beckoning her.

"Who is it?" Rose whispered.

"Rose, come here!"

Rose followed the voice hesitantly. Glancing around, she slowly went down the winding staircase and through a corridor, growing increasingly skittish as the lamp flickers, her shadow looming in the narrow hallway in the eerie silence. The voice stopped as Rose came to a wooden door. Rose put her hand on the door, unsure of what to do. She had never seen this part of the ship before. Taking a deep breath, she pushed open the door, and it slowly creaked open. She stepped into the room hesitantly, and the door shut with a loud bang, melting into the walls. Rose blinked in disbelief. The door was gone. Suddenly, a gust of wind swirled towards her from the corner, surrounding her and whirled her around the room. Rose tried to grab on to something in a panic but there was nothing but thin air. She started to scream but there was a blinding flash of white light, and she was sucked into the void.

Then all was still.

Rose found herself standing on a river bank. Behind her were dozens of cottages, but all the lights had been extinguished. Before her, hundreds of red lanterns adorned a ship in the middle of the river, illuminated against the dark of the night. She heard the sound of laughter and music floating across the river, of people dancing and shouting in joy.

"Happy Birthday, June!"

“May you live a prosperous life!”

Rose saw a young woman in a red cheongsam walking towards the edge of the ship, away from the raucous crowd. She sat down, her feet dangling over the side.

For the first time, Rose was able to see the woman’s face, and she realised with a start she had seen this face countless times in her mother’s photobook--the woman was June, Rose’s grandmother. June married into one of the wealthiest families in the Pearl River Delta when she was only seventeen years old. The other concubines, jealous of her beauty, bullied her everyday. June soon fell into depression and committed suicide on her twenty-fourth birthday, drowning in the Pearl River after leaping off the deck from the family’s ship. Could it be? Rose looked around at the celebration on the ship as realisation dawned, she had travelled back in time, to the day her grandmother died. But why?

Rose squinted at June, who was still sitting on the ship, unmoving against the river. Just then, another woman, the second concubine, Louisa! Louisa crept towards June, and, as quick as lightning, pushed June into the river. Rose hands flew to her mouth and screamed for help, but she was too far away from the ship. There was no one left in the village, they had all gone to celebrate June’s birthday. She watched in horror as June struggled for a few moments, gasping for breath, and sank. She had drowned.

Rose’s heart was pounding. Her mother was wrong. It was not a suicide, June was murdered. But the whirl of wind started again, bringing Rose back to the small room, to reality. No, No! Not now! She had to go back! She must somehow find a way to rewrite history. She fell onto her knees and prayed fervently for the wind to take her back. This time, she would stop Louisa.

As she prayed, the gust of wind started again. Rose let out a breath she hadn’t even realised she was holding, and waited for the journey.

Then all was still.

Rose landed at the same spot with a thud, and saw the ship gliding on the river surface. Rose scanned the crowd desperately and finally saw the familiar flash of red among the sea of people. But where was Louisa? Alarmed, Rose found her emerging from one of the corners, creeping towards June with a menacing smile. She was running out of time. Rose dove into the water, swimming as fast as she could to the ship. Her arms were like propellers, her feet a whirling blur, and every second felt like an eternity. After what seems like forever, she felt the edge of the ship, and threw herself on board.

June looked up in alarm, but there was no time for explanations. She pushed June to the other end of the deck and scrambled to her feet.

“No!”

A woman’s shrill cry pierced the night and Rose saw a furious Louisa rocketing towards her. Terrified, Rose sprinted around but there was nowhere to hide. Louisa reached into her pocket and drew out a knife, snarling, her eyes crazed and bloodshot. Just when she was about to lunge at Rose, she slipped on a puddle of water and went hurtling through the sky, landing in the river with a sickening plop.

Rose staggered to her feet and looked for June. She was curled up in the corner, mouth agape with shock. Rose began to explain, but just when she opened her mouth, the wind appeared again, bringing her back home.

Exhausted, Rose clambered to her bedroom and fell into a deep slumber. The next day, Rose woke up to the sound of firecrackers. She walked out, puzzled, and asked her parents what was happening.

“Didn’t you realise? It’s Grandma June’s 80th Birthday today!”

# Little Sparrow and the Dolphin

*German Swiss International Primary School, Tin, Jocelyn - 10*

I awoke to the sound of seagulls crying and the lapping of the waves at my feet. I looked about in puzzlement and I realized that I was on a shore. As I gazed at the shimmering waters of the sea, I saw a dolphin leaping out from the water. There, it was Xiao Bai Quan, and my memory, like bubbles, began to surface slowly.

I was travelling on a small fishing junk with Uncle Lin and his family, who promised Papa to take me to Hong Kong to find my aunt. Our journey had started smoothly but overnight the sea turned into a dangerous temptress; our boat had sailed into a monsoon storm. The waves were attacking our boat just as a shark does at a helpless fish. A wall of water, towering and black, crept up behind me and threw me into the water. I was sinking in a dark, bottomless sea. I kept telling myself, I must not die. I must live to see my family again. The last thing I remembered was there was something slicing slowly through the water towards me.

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I am called Jiang Xiao Yan, my friends call me Xiao Yan Zi, Little Sparrow. I lived with my family in a small fishing village on one of the estuaries of the Pearl River, so small that you can't even see it on your maps. My Papa was a humble fisherman and Mama looked after me and my little sister at home.

For children like us who lived close to the river, it was like paradise. We had many adventures on it and off it. We fished in it, swum in it, played in it and sailed along it. On some days when I didn't have school, Papa would take me with him to fish.

I remember it was last fall that I first met Xiao Bai Quan while I went fishing with Papa in the sea, just beyond the Pearl River. She was a Chinese White Dolphin who was about two months old. Though November had just passed, it was a chilly day and we were the only fishermen braving the harsh wind that morning. As Papa steered the boat in the dim light, I noticed that one of the fish traps that had been left behind by some other fisherman, was

moving against the direction of the wind. I asked Papa to steer the boat slowly toward the frantic movements and we found a baby female dolphin gasping for breath. A rope from the trap was wrapped tightly around both her mouth and tail.

I felt so bad for the poor thing that I asked Papa if we could help. Papa said we needed to free her head first so that she could raise her blowhole and breathe properly. I talked to her gently, assuring her that she would be helped, while Papa used his fishing knife to cut the dolphin free. The little dolphin was released, however she did not leave. She kept circling us as if she wanted to say thank you.

From a distance, I noticed that she had been tied so tightly and for such a long time that the rope had bruised her snout and left a deep white ring mark around it, which is how her name came to me. Yet I had never imagined that I would ever see her again.

The following summer, the fighting between China and Japan worsened and escalated to become a full-scale war. At first Papa remained optimistic that our little known fishing village would not be affected. Nevertheless, after we heard for the first time the dull rumble of distant bombing, Papa seemed to lose the confident smile on his face. As bad news came pouring in, there was no school any more, and over the next few weeks, many fled the village and Papa, started making plans for us.

One day before dawn, Mama woke me up early and told me we had to leave. She was carrying my little sister on her back, while Papa had our possessions bundled up in cloth and tied around his shoulders. We were barely out of the village when we heard the drone of the bombers again, but much closer to us. The third bomb fell and hit one of the long deserted houses. Papa yelled “Brace! Brace!” and he threw himself on top of us. The next thing I knew there were broken timber and fragments that used to be walls and ceilings, all around us. When I asked Papa if it was all over there came no answer. Suddenly I felt a warm ooze dripping down my face. I used my hand to wipe it off, and as I looked at it and realized it was Papa’s blood.

Uncle Lin, our neighbor, heard the commotion and hurried over to help. It turned out Papa was hurt both on the leg and on the head and was simply too weak to carry on the journey. Papa and Uncle Lin exchanged some soft, almost inaudible whispers and Uncle Lin nodded firmly. Papa beckoned me over and told me to follow Uncle Lin to Hong Kong to find my aunt, and they would join me as soon as Papa was well enough to travel again. I protested but I knew by the look on his face that he allowed no arguments. Mama sewed my aunt’s address on my undershirt and I bid them farewell.

★ ★ ★

The sea kept rolling and rolling but the sinking had stopped. I could feel something carrying me. I realized that I was on the back of a dolphin which looked oddly familiar – Xiao Bai Quan, the dolphin with a white ring mark around her snout which I had once saved had come to save me.

“Xiao Yan Zi, you survived! We’re in Hong Kong!” Uncle Lin cried as he came running over.

# New Tales From the Pearl River Delta

*Glenealy School, DeBlank, Anjeli - 10*

**M**y name is Wanderer and I was born in a factory. I always wondered why I was called this but never got the chance to ask. My mother died soon after I was born and my father had left us. The only memory I had left of them was a chain with their pictures on it. I was taken in and homed by a kind lady named Xiang. We lived in a small village in the Pearl River Delta. The factory I was born in was called 珍珠产业 (Zhen Zhu Chan Ye), which meant Pearl Industries. Xiang didn't have enough money to educate me so most of the time I just stayed home and helped with household chores. The years went by and I am now a boy of 12 years old. Every boy when they turn 12 must get a job in the factories or find work. Of course I chose to work at the Pearl Industries. I got the job and was really looking forward to my first day but deep inside I didn't want to leave the comfort of my home, the safe environment and my dear Xiang.

The light through the window shone brightly on my face. Today was my first day at work. I cleaned up then ate some mouldy bread from the cupboard for breakfast. I walked to the factory alone and got lost a few times. When I finally arrived at the factory I was greeted by a friendly looking man but I was wrong. He shouted at me saying "Why are you late!" I muttered that I got lost but he didn't care. Then the man shouted "Kahn, help this new boy". A tall man with brown shaggy hair came up to me. He smiled and gestured to me to follow him. We went through the factory till we reached the very back. "This is what we call the art center. We make paintings, vases and pots." Kahn said. He showed me what was already made and it was all so beautiful. Tapestries and paintings hung on the walls and blue china vases filled the room floor. I asked if Kahn could show me how to make a tapestry, and he happily agreed. There was a loom in the corner and we sat down next to it. He guided me through all the steps. I was eager to give it a go but failed miserably. I didn't want to give up so I kept trying and at last succeeded but was not able to finish in time as the sun was starting to set. I finished up and slowly walked back home exhausted.

The next day I continued my tapestry and finished it. It was small but bright and colourful. Later, Khan taught me pottery. It was pretty messy but I loved the feeling of clay in my hands and most of all painting the pots. After lunch I decided to explore the tapestries. They were all unique. There was one with a dragon on it and another with a majestic eagle. Then one caught my eye. It was one of a boy and his father in front of a temple. The strange thing was the boy looked exactly like me! The face of the father had faded and couldn't be seen. I put the tapestry in my bag and took it home. I asked Xiang where the temple was and she said it was the next village. I wanted to visit as something inside told me that the faded face could be my father's. That night I packed a bag with some bread and the tapestry. I crept outside and started to walk to the next village. It was a long road and my worn out feet needed rest. I sat down and drifted to sleep.

In the morning I woke and saw a truck passing by. I stuck out my hand and asked for a ride to the next village and he helped me hop into the back of the truck. I took out a piece of bread, settled down and enjoyed the breath-taking views and somehow missed home.

I woke to the sound of people shouting and foul smells. I soon realized I was in a market. Still having hope, I started asking the people passing by where the temple was. I followed the directions and walked up the road then met a fork point. I looked at one point then the other. In the distance I could see the temple and ran as fast as I could to it. I slowed down and stopped. In front of me was the stunning temple.

It was a replica of the temple in the tapestry. I walked up to the temple, my body trembling. I was cold, tired and hungry. I sat down and started to pray. I looked at my chain and at the picture of my father. I held it close to my heart and began to cry. As I looked up I saw a man looking down at me. His face resembled the face of my father. I couldn't believe my eyes. Was this my father? What is he doing here? So many questions flooded my mind and I felt dizzy. I showed him my chain and asked if he was my father. Then he started to cry. "You look exactly like your brother". He took me into his arms and hugged me tightly. I told him how much I missed him and asked why he left. He said, "I never wanted to leave but had no choice. Your brother was caught stealing. He used to take goods from the factories and sell them himself for money. The government took him away and I went to help but it was too late. They had already..." he stopped. I gave him a big hug and we cried together. Then he asked me my name, I said "Wanderer, and that's how I got here".

# Luólán and The Pearl of Sacrifice

*Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Tsui, Iris - 11*

Luólán looked at her ill mother, before softly closing the door. She wanted to be there for her, but she was determined to find a way to save her mother from death. She had heard from villagers the only way to cure people from drinking polluted water was to visit Mazu's Temple. The goddesses would heal the sick there. Considering that she lived in Nanhai, just north of the Pearl River Delta, it would take approximately one hundred days.

For thirty days Luólán marched on, her body was on the verge of a breaking point, suffering from dehydration and exhaustion. Yet, she would not cave in. On the thirty-first day, she admitted defeat. She then slept for a day, not waking up until she felt a wet nose being pushed in her face.

There in front of her, stood a donkey. He looked at her innocently, before turning away. "I'll just have to make do with you then." She lifted herself onto his back. He raised his head instantly. "HiiiiiiYa!!!!!!!" Luólán yelled, giving him an almighty jab in the ribs. He took off at a gallop.

Due to the amount of speed the unnamed donkey possessed, they arrived at the temple. As she slid off his back she noticed an elderly woman with eerie blueish-green horns. She approached her cautiously. "What are you looking for, child?" She spoke gently, and Luólán felt immediately comforted. "My mother is on her deathbed, and I heard that goddesses can cure the dying, so I have come in search of an antidote." The old woman pulled a long silver flute out of thin air. "Take this flute," she said. "When you play it by the Pearl River Delta, a pink dolphin will appear. He can save you from dying even when you are about to take your last breath. Be careful and cautious," she spoke before singing.

When you're desperate  
With no cure  
He will ensure  
That you get what you're looking for  
But that  
Comes at a cost

Be aware that you'll have lost  
 Something much bigger

Luólángraciously accepted the flute and jumped on the donkey's back. She galloped to the Pearl River, still reeling in fear from the song.

The exhausted pair finally made it to the Pearl River Delta, and Luólán placed the flute by her lips. An eerie lilting tune came out. A pink form appeared. "I have come for an antidote for my dying mother." The dolphin nodded. "I will help you, but you must retrieve The Pearl of Sacrifice, guardian of the river, from the dragon who stole it from my protection. You would also need this to help you." A bright glow of light emanated from the waters. A sword appeared, floating up in front of her. Luólán took the sword, then in an instant, a magical glow surrounded them. The sword teleported them!

They arrived at a dark cave. Its wet grey rocks glistened in the sunlight, but no light entered the cave. Luólán took the gleaming sword and entered, only to find a ferocious beast staring down at her. Luólán raced around the dragon and saw the pearl gleaming. She glanced at the dragon, then ran forwards and seized the pearl. The massive red monster shrieked in rage and lunged at her. Water entered the cave and went up to her ankles. As it became darker, Luólán covered in a small alcove, she could only hope that he didn't spot her. As the dragon turned away, Luólán saw her chance.

She lunged forward, sword held high. The sword sank into its flesh, and the dragon let out a bloodcurdling scream. Then, it turned to her and healed itself. The dragon laughed "You'll have to get a better weapon to get rid of me!" As soon as it finished, it lunged. Luólán managed to stick the tip of the sword into the dragon's shoulder, but as she did so, noticed a fang of the dragon's sinking into her arm. She wrenched out the fang. The searing pain was ignored as she stared at the dragon.

"Please allow me to say a few words before you kill me... Ever since you took the pearl away, things have changed in this river. People have become selfish. Each day they throw their waste into the river. It's killing the dolphins. They cannot live in the polluted water and soon all of them will be wiped out. If that pearl is in their protection, as it was before, the people who once loved the river will love it again. If the only way to bring it back is to kill me, please do so. I'm just asking you to return the pearl." She paused as the cave and the dragon faded away, and blackness took over.

As Luólán slowly bled to death, the dragon watched with tears in his eyes. "I've never known someone to risk lives for others." Then he muttered a few ancient words and slowly but surely, the wound began to heal. The unconscious girl opened her eyes and sat up groggily. "I thought I was supposed to be dead..." She trailed off. The dragon shook his head and sympathetically said, "I have healed you. Take this pearl back to the dolphins. Hurry!"

Luólán jumped to her feet and grabbed the pearl. Running outside, she spotted the donkey and rushed up to it, swiftly mounting. They galloped up the riverbank and reached the dolphin's area. She quickly played the tune on the flute, and the pink dolphin appeared. The dolphin slid its head above the surface and gazed at Luólán. "I have brought you the Pearl of Sacrifice." She spoke hurriedly. The dolphin was quiet. Then it spoke softly, "Your act of sacrifice, love and courage had truly moved the dragon. Now, the antidote I have promised you..." The dolphin gently tapped the pearl. A silvery essence started swirling around it, before floating off. The dolphin conjured a bottle and caught the essence, before it threw the bottle onto the ground. "Give it to your mother. Make her drink it and she will be well." And with a swish of its tail it was gone.

# Doomed

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Curtis, Angelina - 10*

My name is Zhou, and I am a thief. I live in a hut on Peaceful Road, (which is not peaceful at all) near the bank of the Pearl River in Guangzhou, the pollution machine of the whole country. The pollution suffocates you, and then squeezes tighter and tighter like a python until you can't breathe.

I live in a shantytown in the old part of the city, down river from the dye factory, which pumps out its waste chemicals into the water, changing the river from murky green, to violent red, to sickly yellow.

Swimming is not recommended in the Pearl River.

I haven't always lived in the city. I lived in the countryside with my parents, until I was about 10, when my Mum died.

My Dad went to the city with me to earn his fortune, and then he said, "I'm just going to a meeting. I'm going to come back in about 10 minutes."

Those were the last words I ever heard from him.

I never did find out what happened to him

Did he get arrested?

Did he get run over?

Did he get lost?

These are questions, which will never get answered.

But sometimes, just sometimes, I wonder if he is a rich man in Hong Kong, like the Grand Fellow in The Goldfish.

It might be that, because he always talked about Hong Kong, and how he wanted to go there.

The Goldfish is a grand house about 30 minutes down the road. It's called The Goldfish because, on top of the gate, there is a giant goldfish statue.

The Goldfish is huge, and people tell me that inside the house they shave with champagne!

Hong Kong, the land of opportunity.

Hong Kong, the land where the streets are paved with gold.

Hong Kong, the land that I would love to go.

Oh! I forgot to mention my best (and only) friend, Xi, keeps me company.

I told him about my plan about going to Hong Kong by fishing boat.

My plan was to ask a snakehead to smuggle us over to Hong Kong. The snakehead was going to illegally get us over to Hong Kong, but it would cost RMB 2,000 and we had about RMB 100.

So we still needed money.

And to get money, we needed to steal.

The best place to steal is The Goldfish.

"Let's nick something from the from The Goldfish. You know, the usual plan. You lead

then into an alley pretending to sell him something, and punch them in the face, and then steal everything off them. If that fails, I'll cover ,” I say.

“Okay.” agreed Xi, “You got a bike and weapons?”

“Yeah” I say, showing him the black bike with 2 seats, and giving him his dagger with a beautiful carved handle, and I get out my dagger as well.

“Okay,” Xi says, “Lets get to it.”

I hop on the front of the bike, and Xi hops on the back. I am pedaling across the road; when Xi suddenly leans forward and yells in my ear, “Faster!”

I look behind me and see a group of motorcycles racing toward us across the intersection.

“The Orgena Boys!” I yell, pedaling harder, and veering right towards an alleyway. It smelled really bad, had loads of (really gross and inappropriate) graffiti scrawled all over the wall but it would have to do for now.

The Orgena Boys are the most notorious gang in Guangzhou. Not only are we on their so-called “territory”, which they hate, but I also owe them money.

Before I know it, Broken Tooth (the leader of the Orgena boys) skids in front of our bike and yells, “When are you repaying that debt? LOSER!”

“When pigs start flying,” I yell back.

“I take that as an insult,” Broken Tooth yells. “And an insult declares a fight.”

Broken Tooth jumps off his motorbike, signaling the rest of his gang (Killer, Gambler, Rat and Joker) to come with him.

I step off my bike with Xi.

Even though I seem fearless on the outside, I am feeling really terrified, because first of all, we're outnumbered and second of all, we are fighting the most ruthless gang of all time.

Broken Tooth grabs my shirt lifts me until my toes are barely touching the ground and says slowly “Listen punk. If you don't give me the money right now, I will kill you”

I scream, “Put me down! I've got it! I've got it!”

Broken Tooth slowly puts me down, and holds his hand out.

“Give it to me ... NOW!” Broken Tooth demands.

“You want it?” I ask, digging my hand deeply in my pocket, my fingers gripping the hand of my dagger. I pull out my dagger and I stab him in the stomach.

“You've got it! ” I yell.

There is a moment of silence.

Broken Tooth looks down at his stomach, seeing the dagger stuck in his stomach. He pulls it out, gasping, “You stabbed me. NOBODY STABS BROKEN TOOTH!!!”

Broken Tooth eyes were red with fury, and his head was steaming. He brandished the dagger in

front of my heart.

“Night Night! Sleep tight” Broken Tooth says smirking.

Suddenly, the sound of police sirens filled the air. We hear a voice, shouting through a megaphone, “DROP YOUR WEAPON KID OR WE WILL SHOOT!”

But Broken Tooth doesn't stop.

The policemen fired a shot into the air, to prove that he was not kidding.

Broken Tooth got into the car with defeat, and the police cars start driving into the distance.

The Orgena Boys, XI and I jump on our bikes, and start pedaling off into the distance.

Well, what can I say?

I don't think I'll be hearing Broken Tooth anytime soon.

# The Guardian of the Pearl River Delta

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Halford, Christopher - 10*

I ran down a narrow alleyway in Shenzhen. The time - unknown, the day - unknown, and the date - unknown. Since the mysterious letter nothing made sense. The letter, the letter that I wish that I hadn't read.

I'm Jack Skarr. The letter sent me on a mission to find the professor, though I'm regretting it now.

I left my family worried. I didn't tell them I was going, didn't tell them where I was heading.

I sat down, took a break, let the sweat on my face dry. It had covered my face for two days, or at least that was how long I thought I'd been traveling for.

I then heard a familiar noise, the unique splash of water. At home we lived by the sea, the seashore of Hong Kong, one of the most amazing places I know.

We would fish for hours on the beach, and my dad would always tell me the same story of when he caught a gigantic, voluminous fish. He would always end saying "But it's getting harder to catch fish as the years go by."

A loud, energetic humming emerged as the ground seemed to shake. I looked to see what happened. There was nothing, nothing but a little house.

I went to observe what had happened and knocked on the door.

Suddenly, the old door opened revealing an old man in a lab coat.

"Come in," the man said. "I've been expecting you." He offered me a cup of tea.

"Thank you," I replied.

"I have something to show you," he said. That was when it hit me.

"Were you the one who sent me the letter?" He nodded his head. "You know me?"

"It was long ago, but I am your grandfather." Suddenly, a million thoughts shot into to my head. My father, hints about a family secret, my mother hushing him to silence.

The strange humming sound resumed. The Earth seemed to tremble. "We need to be quick," he said as he pulled my arm and pushed me into a strange portal structure.

"We're running out of time. Remember to be done by exactly 24 hours. It's now 11:00pm." He pulled a lever. A motionless scene began and I blacked out.

I woke up, left and right, all I could see was an empty landscape. I stood up, rubbed my eyes and searched for any sight of life.

I heard the sound of footsteps and leapt into a pile of leaves.

"What is it?" a voice said.

"I don't know?" another replied. "Probably nothing."

I stayed hidden, not daring to make a move. But there was a light, gleaming so bright, it

blinded my eyes.

I started to crawl towards it. I poked my head through a little hole to see millions of clay soldiers standing there motionlessly.

Suddenly, the floor collapsed and I fell at least 3 meters hitting a hard, solid ground.

I got up and brushed the dirt of my clothes.

“You!” I didn’t turn round. “ Show yourself”

Slowly I turned and found myself staring at a soldier. “Follow me”, he said and led me towards a grand piece of architecture.

He brought me inside a room and threw me on the floor in front of a very well clad man.

“Bow before your Emperor!”, he said. “What are you doing? Trying to escape? Trying to avoid going to the upcoming war? Do you know what this means?”

I shook my head.

”Death!”

Two soldiers held my arms and carried me into a room. One of the warriors took out a sword.

The other soldier forced me on my knees, as the other one sharpened his sword to the point. There was a big red stain on the floor. Blood?

He walked slowly up to me with an eerie expression carrying his sharp blade over his shoulder.

He swung it fast. Without skipping a beat I ducked, and the iron blade got stuck in the plain grey walls.

I charged for the door. I twisted the handle but the door was locked. I tried pushing the door but it was hopeless.

The soldiers chased after me. There was no chance of survival. Or was there?

I looked at my watch to see what time it was. It was 10:59. When I looked up again, the scene had changed. Just darkness.

A beam of light got in my eyes and blinded me. I blinked and saw the familiar surroundings of my grandfather’s living room.

My grandfather sat on the sofa, his eyes facing the horizon.

“You’re back,” he seemed delighted. “Did you do it?”

Did I do what, what was he asking me? What should I say?

With hesitation, I slowly nodded my head.

“Wonderful. Come, let’s sit down,” he said. I sat down and looked out the window. To my surprise I could see mist forming over the Pearl River Delta. Over the horizon an army of shadows appeared.

I rubbed my eyes to make sure I wasn’t imagining it, but it was still there. It was the terracotta army.

The professor caught me looking out the window and said, ”It’s a beautiful view, isn’t it?” Then he noticed, what was happening. His smile slowly disappeared. “What have you done?”

I shrugged. “Do you know, what’s happening?”

He grabbed my arm and looked into my eyes. “There’s something I need to tell you. The Pearl River Delta holds a magic that can only be controlled by people with our blood. I’m too old to do it now but you can still do it. Go out there and touch the water with your hands.”

I ran outside and splashed my hands in the water.

The water reacted by sending drops of water everywhere in an enormous splash. As a huge wave smashed down on the shore, the warriors disappeared.

From that day I became the guardian of the Pearl River Delta.

# The Magic Locket of the Pearl River Delta

*HKUGA Primary School, Shek, Tso Yee Chloe - 11*

## **One**

Bella was strolling in the silent park just beside her house. It was six o' clock in the morning, and she rarely got a chance to relax because her brother, Martin, could never stop bothering her. Martin never woke before ten in the morning and after he woke, both her parents spent their time fussing over him anyway.

Bella sighed and settled herself on one of the hard wooden benches in her favourite corner of the park. It was secluded and surrounded by lots of bushes. She sat there and stared at her pretty locket, her 10th birthday present from her mother. It was oval-shaped and there were two tiny Chinese white dolphins inscribed in it. The chain was fine silver, and her mother had said anxiously that day, "Always take care of this, and never lose it. It was your great-great grandmother's, you know." It was the family treasure, and legend was that it was magical. Bella had never brought herself to believe it. Suddenly, the locket glowed eerily blue. Bella blinked and opened it to see graceful writing inside saying, "Come with me". She screamed as the blue light spread everywhere and sucked her inside.

## **Two**

Bella found herself on a disgusting, rubbish-strewn river bank with looming factories, streaming polluted air out of them. The river itself was brown and nothing seemed to survive in it. The locket in Bella's hand was becoming warmer and warmer, until some kind of force pushed her into the repugnant river.

Bella stood up and shook the water off her. She looked around to find a sparkling river with joyful dolphins swimming that looked like the ones on her locket. There were emerald-green trees on the banks and little village huts, but no factories. She turned around to see a small girl wearing old villager clothes.

"Who are YOU?" they shrieked at the same time.

"I'm Ling, and would you mind...Ooh!" Her eye caught Bella's locket and inspected it seriously.

"Er...my name's Bella..." Her voice trailed off as Ling prised off the locket from Bella's hand and said in awe, "Why would you have this locket? According to legend, it's magical. Anyway, where are you from? I've never seen you before."

"I don't know how I got here, but I'm sure it was the locket! I was in the park downstairs and..." Bella told Ling what had happened. She didn't know why, but she felt that she could trust her.

When she finished, Ling said, "I'm certain too. The locket is really powerful according to my father. It can summon people to places when it wants. Usually it does this when something is happening to the Pearl River Delta...I mean, here."

“This is the Pearl River Delta? But this’s the stinky river I landed beside! I thought it was full of pollution?” A suspicious feeling arose in Bella. “Is this the past?”

“What past?” asked Ling. “The River has always been the same.”

Bella now saw that the Ling’s clothes were old-fashioned and worn, and the huts were quite aged. She suspected that the locket had brought her there in the past, but what did it want her to do?

### Three

Bella and Ling sat in a dingy room in Ling’s hut. She had brought Bella there to talk about her plans to get home. Her parents had gone fishing by the river so they could talk safely.

“I think the locket wants you to do something for the river,” said Ling thoughtfully. “If you solve its problem, then it’ll bring you back home. Perhaps that’s the reason it brought you here in the first place.”

“Like... pollution?” suggested Bella. “Or endangered animals in the river?”

Ling frowned, tiny wrinkles appearing on her forehead. Then she shouted, “I get it! Yesterday’s newspaper said something about people wanting to build factories here. My father said that these factory owners are never responsible and they hide sewer pipes, so they can secretly release chemicals. I bet that the locket wants you to save the river. Do you know that the river covers lots of places in China? It could seriously harm these places.”

“But how? I’m not a superhero or magician.....oh. I could try using the locket...” said Bella in an uncertain tone.

Ling had already put on her muddy shoes and rushed out of the door. Bella sighed and followed. This kid sure is decisive, she thought.

### Four

Bella and Ling stood at the edge of the Pearl River, and Ling was gazing up at Bella with such intensity that Bella felt slightly nervous.

“Okay, here goes...”

Click! Bella, shielding her eyes from the blue light, unlatched the locket.

The blue light spread everywhere, forming a glittering net of protection over the Pearl River Delta. People gasped as they saw this phenomenon. In just five minutes, hundreds and thousands of people gathered around the riverside to see lots of glittering blue dust float down to the ground.

Meanwhile, the boss of the factory and the staff were brainwashed. They forgot everything about their factory. The boss murmured, “I think I’ve gone crazy,” and began to wander while swaying his body like a leaf falling down a tree. Witnessing such a sight brought fear to the staff and all of them promptly left the building.

Bella knew that it was time to leave, and she said to Ling, “Just one more thing. Don’t tell anyone about this, okay?”

“Okay.” Ling promised.

They exchanged farewells, and Bella opened the locket once more, then she disappeared.

### Five

Bella was back home and was once glad to see Marty. She avoided her parents and entered her room, then promptly Googled ‘pearl river delta’ on her laptop. All the information she found were about the “clean and stunning river of China” and Bella let out a sigh of relief. She would keep this amazing secret forever and ever.

## “RAGS TO RICHES?”

*ISF Academy, Kwok, Kleio – 10*

Earth to Lady Sophie. What did I just say?” sneered a mocking voice in the background. “Oh! Miss Lavinia!” Sophie jumped so high that her glasses slipped off her nose and clattered to the floor. “I beg your pardon, what did you say?”

Her classmates snickered at her little blunder. “Detention! Stand at the back of the room.” The teacher commanded, fixing her icy blue eyes on Sophie. Everyone – except for Sophie – collapsed into a fit of giggles. “But, Miss Lavinia...” She stammered, weakly protesting. Her failed attempt just gave an excuse for her classmates to laugh harder. She felt her face turn beet red as she scurried to the back. At least she could have some peace there. She hunched up and her mind drifted back to the three boys...

While reading the newspaper yesterday, one particular article caught her eye. It was about three little boys. They lived in a poor village in the hills of Zhaoqing, in the western part of the Pearl River Delta. The boys’ parents had passed away long ago. They had to depend on their grandmother, a disabled and half blind elderly woman. Their house was rickety. When a typhoon hit Zhaoqing, their dilapidated house collapsed.

She always presumed the Pearl River Delta to be rich and prosperous. Back in the old days, the Mainland side might be lagging behind, but now... not really. The media is flooded with news of its successful enterprises and flashy gossips of its billionaires. Her cousins overseas envied her life, saying that she was so lucky. What she simply didn’t understand was the number of poor villages and poor people. She thought the Pearl River Delta was paradise. Maybe it wasn’t the case.

The image of the three boys, huddled together, shivering from the rain, cold and hunger haunted her. The article had got her thinking. Wasn’t the Pearl River Delta supposed to be... marvellous? Wasn’t it the home to some of the most vibrant cities in China? She herself was living proof. Sophie lived in a decent spacious flat in Hong Kong. She went to the best schools. She had an abundance of toys and books. She ate the best food and wore high quality clothes. What she desired, she could have.

Her mum was no help. Her answer was short and brisk. “Sophie, you are very lucky.

Treasure it. We work hard. We have lots of savings. We have a good life.” She paused to blow her painted nails. “Nice?” Seeing Sophie’s expression, her mother added, “Sophie, sorry! Some people are not so lucky. They are poor. This is how things are. The world is big, and you have to rely on yourself.” Just then, the phone rang. Her mum rushed over and pressed it to her ear. “Sorry, honey. Talk to you later.” Their conversation came to an abrupt end. Sophie gnashed her teeth and drifted upstairs, depressed. No answer! Seems like she had to delay her quest – yet again.

Sophie longed for an answer. She wanted to help, and she wanted to know why something like that could happen. She searched frantically. She asked everyone in sight.

She knew better than to ask her classmates. They gave her the “are you nuts?” look. She was sure they wanted to say, “What on earth are you talking about?” but they didn’t want to offend her. When she stormed away, they would roll their eyes and make rude faces and gestures at her. She dared not ask her teachers. They already disliked her enough, and she didn’t want to get on their wrong side. They would probably say, “That is irrelevant. Focus on your assignments and lessons. If only you had such passion and energy in my class...” Then they would promptly pretend she wasn’t there.

Suddenly, the bell rang. Once again, Sophie was jolted out of her thoughts.

“Class dismissed.” Sophie was heading towards the door when a sharp voice cut in. “Sophie Wong. I would like to have a private word with you.” Sophie numbly stumbled to the front. Her classmates barely suppressed their laughter. Miss Lavinia stared at the spectators with her cold blue eyes. “Why are you still here? Leave. I said I wanted a private chat with Sophie. I suppose you all know understand English. Go.”

The class hurriedly broke up. In no time, the classroom was deserted except for the two of them. Miss Lavinia’s voice broke the silence. “Sit. You have been distracted for days. You were my star pupil. But now... what is on your mind?” Sophie’s face grew hot and she dropped her gaze.

“Tell me, Sophie.” Miss Lavinia’s voice was surprisingly gentle. Everything tumbled out of Sophie’s mouth. She told Miss Lavinia everything, from the start to the end. Miss Lavinia rested her chin on her hands and took a sip of coffee.

“Sophie, you have raised an interesting question. Every place has its history. Everything has its reason. The Pearl River Delta is no exception. We have to accept that. Everywhere is the same. Some people are lucky but some are not. We should try to help, but we should not blame ourselves for other people’s misfortune. You have a good heart. If you really want to help, you have to first make yourself useful. Study hard. When you grow up, you can help them to acquire skills. You can also help by providing them opportunities to make a better living.”

Sophie thanked Miss Lavinia. When she reached the classroom door, the teacher called, “Sophie, have faith. The boys can make it. Pearl River Delta is a place of hope and the people here are tough. I’m sure, in time to come, they can turn their misfortune into fortune.”

# The Pearl River Delta

*Quarry Bay School, Lo, Tate - 8*

I was just lying down on the sofa when the news came on, they have discovered something in the Pearl River. I was so excited I jumped up and sat upright almost immediately. The news continued about a special creature living in the river. I thought this was too much excitement and maybe I could go to the Pearl River and explore. Plus, I really want to find out more about the creature.

I started packing up right away and finish packing just in time for dinner. I said that I had a big announcement, "I will not be here for two nights and three days because I will be off to the southern part of China to explore the Pearl River Delta and the creature living in it." My family started asking questions at once. I calmed them down and quickly finished my supper. After that I booked the train to Guangzhou and went to bed. I needed a very good sleep and besides it was going to be a long day tomorrow.

The next morning, I woke up, headed down to breakfast and set off to the train station. I gave my ticket to the conductor and hopped on the train. I sat down and how sleepy I felt! So, I took a long nap.....

"Next station, Guangzhou."

"xia yi zhan, Guangzhou."

"下一站, 廣州。"

I woke up with a start, it was time to get off. I grabbed my bag and waited for the train to stop. Two minutes later, I got off the train and walked out of the train station. Suddenly, I stopped. I didn't even know where I was! I went to the information and asked, "Excuse me, do you know where we are?" "We are in Guangzhou, Guangzhou is one of the biggest city in the Pearl River Delta, is there anything else I can help you with?" the information officer said politely. "No, thanks for your help." I said. As I went back out doors, I started walking down the pavement.

Half an hour later, I realized that I didn't know where the Pearl River was. I rushed up to a person and asked, "Do you know where the Pearl River is?"

"The Pearl River? It's about half an hour away. You will have to take the MTR that costs

\$5. Really cheap.” said the man.

“Please, show me where it is.” I said, astonished by the cheapness.

“Very well, The MTR is right around the corner. You get off after 8 stops. Then, you go out at exit C and walk until you see a sign that says the Pearl River. Got it?” explained the man.

“Yes, thank you for the information.” I said excitedly. I said bye and headed off.

In the MTR, I was waiting for a train when I forgot whether it was 8 stops or 9. I was sure it was 8 so I got off at 8 stops. I found exit C and went out. My feet were so tired I was dragging my feet as I walked and FINALLY I saw the sign. I was happy but too tired to even pull a smile. It was quite polluted in Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta. But, I walked until I saw a bit of blue.

I was so happy I’d finally found the River and had a little energy to make a smile. I continued walking until the River was clear blue and stopped to sit down on a nearby bench. How tired I was! I sat and looked at the beautiful view of the River. I booked a hotel on my phone and sat for a while, admiring the view of the River.

It was getting dark so as I turned to leave, I thought I heard a splashing noise. No way, I told myself could it be the secret creature living deep in the River. I will find out the answer tomorrow. I turned back and started walking to my hotel.

After I settled down, I found out there was a famous restaurant. I chose a spot next to the window and gazed at the glorious view of the River. After dinner, I walked back tiredly to the hotel. As soon as my head touched the pillow, I drifted to sleep.....

The next morning, I got up, and dressed for my next adventure. I went to the River and realized you could go on a private raft on the River! I was delighted, I immediately ordered one and hopped on it at once.

Halfway through the River, I thought I heard the same splashing sound as the night before! When I looked behind me, I saw beautiful dolphins swimming and splashing around. They were a little pink and a little grey. I thought they were the most amazing things in life. When they saw me, they quickly swam towards me and said, "Hi-

“you can talk!” I stammered, shocked.

“Yes we can, we are the special creatures in the River, the Chinese white dolphins. You must never say a word about us. We all trust you.” said one dolphin.

“Wow!” I sat there with my jaw open wide and realized I should go back to the port.

“Dear dolphins, I must go now, will see you... tomorrow.” I whispered.

“Great! There's a boat that goes around the river and tours you at 8:00 am tomorrow, please come if you can.” One dolphin said.

“Sure!” I was so excited for tomorrow.

The next morning at 8:00am, I took the tour boat and whispered, “Dolphins! Dolphins! Where are you?” There was a splash and I knew it meant, we’re here!

It was another great adventure!

Save the dolphins, water pollution and overfishing are killing the dolphins.

They are becoming endangered.

Only very few are lucky enough to survive.

I can’t bear to see the population decreasing so fast.

Chinese white dolphins need your help!

# How the Pearl River Delta Got Its Name

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Hsu, Arthur - 11*

There was once a large mystical temple on Baiyun Mountain. Inside the temple, there were three legendary treasures: the Diamond of Power, the Emerald of Flight, and the Pearl of life. If anyone had their hands on all three treasures, they would be unstoppable. The treasures were so dangerous that it got sealed away inside the temple, guarded by four gods: Hinyong, Janpi, Lijiang and Wukon. These gods protected the ancient treasures for 3000 years, and stopped whoever that tried to get their hands on the treasures.

But after these long years, the god Wukon grew greedy and said to the others, “Why are we guarding these treasures anyway? We have the power to unlock the seal, we can take the gems and rule the world! Then there wouldn’t be any need to keep on guarding them!” “What? No, we cannot do that! That will destroy the balance the world is in!” the others answered angrily. “Go according the legacy! We shall protect and serve the frail humans in continued silence!” No matter how Wukon tried to persuade the others, he could not get them to go along with their plan. One night, he decided to do it himself. “We’ll see who tells who what to do after this!” Wukon thought. “Let’s see those annoying others try to stop me!” He went to the highest floor, where the seal was engraved on the wall and pressed his hand against the seal. The seal glowed crimson and slid open. Inside, the gems sparkled and Wukon marveled at the twinkling trinkets in front of him. Then he heard a voice. He turned around. “What are you doing? Are you out of your mind?” It was Lijiang. The other two gods walked in. “You have broken your covenant! You will be severely punished, Wukon!” There was a big fight, but of course, Wukon was no match for the other three and he was banished from the Baiyun temple and sent to an underground prison.

Peace returned to the temple and many years passed. The three remaining gods continued to protect the gems. But little did they know that evil was lurking around the corner once again. It was Wukon. He had found a small hole in the dense wall of the prison, and used his power to slowly expand the hole, until years later, he could finally squeeze through it and

escape. He was now planning revenge on the other three gods by returning to the temple and taking the items he so desired years ago. “I WILL get my hands on those gems!” Wukon vowed. He went back to the Baiyun temple. Through a crack in the wall, he saw his former partners standing guard.

The sight of his past comrades enraged Wukon. He took out his magical scepter and blasted a hole in the wall. The others heard the loud noise and turned around. “Who are you? Reveal yourself!” Janpi said. “After all these years, we meet again.” said Wukon as he stepped out from the cloud of debris, “you don’t recognize me?”

“Wukon?” said Lijiang. “But you are supposed to be trapped in the underground prison! How did you get out?”

“That doesn’t matter! All that matters is you’ll have to kindly step aside to let me advance!”

The three gods stood in front of him and said, “Never!” “Then I’ll just have to get past you!” snarled Wukon. He blasted a bolt of lightning straight at Hinyong and sent him flying. Janpi threw fire at Wukon, but nimbly dodged it. They battled for a long time, and the three gods were tired from their 3000-year-long constant vigilance. Eventually, they fell one by one. “Ha! The gems are finally mine!” said Wukon as he walked past their bodies lying on the floor. He pressed his hand to the seal once again, and it opened.

Wukon reached for the Diamond of Power and pressed it into his torso. His body gleamed an electric blue and a small diamond emerged on his forehead. Then the Emerald of Flight was similarly absorbed and Wukon floated over his fallen foes, crackling with crimson energy. The evil god was about to take the final gem when the three fallen gods cried “No!” They directed the final remaining smidgen of power they had left at Wukon and fell silent forever. The bolt hit Wukon and he disintegrated on impact. The Pearl of Life was blasted high into the air. For a moment, it hung in the air, shimmering and shining. Then it fell and plummeted down the mountain into a river.

A deep warm note resonated throughout the valley and there was a brilliant flash of white light. When it faded, the river that the pearl landed into glimmered and bubbled with life. The land around the riverbank became rich and fertile, attracting more and more people to build up societies around the legendary river with boundless liveliness. People built statues to remember and worship the gods for their bravery and named the area “The Pearl River Delta.”

That is how the Pearl River Delta got its name.

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Yew Chung International School HK Primary, Lau, Erin - 9*

The Pearl River was once a clean, serene and picturesque haven. This is a place where I called my humble abode - a home sweet home indeed. I was born in a small cave, rugged but peaceful. It was also a safe habitat which everybody loved and cared for each other. We were like families. We still are. I spent my pastime playing with my friends and sometimes protecting myself from my foes. I loved to hold onto this special place like a little child cuddling its favourite teddy bear. Every week, we had to throw out the rubbish to keep our home clean. We also had a secret place where we kept all the ancient treasures which were left behind from famous explorers including Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus. Nobody knew exactly where it was hidden. We left no chance for anybody to steal it. That's how we kept it safe. Everything was calm and peaceful until one day a young man came along to embark on his passion for fishing.

Oh! Please excuse me for not introducing myself properly.

Hello everyone, my name is Granny Ivy and I am very old, like a fossil. I can't tell you how ancient I am because my brain lost track of many fond memories. You might think that I must be some kind of a peculiar creature. Sorry to disappoint you but I am only a legendary Mandarin fish like any other in this river. But in my opinion, I still think that I am very special and unique.

I have a sad but hopeful story to tell - a story of my life spanning from a long time ago until now. My friends including other legendary fishes that lived or live in this old Pearl River Delta know my story too.

Many years ago a young man named Dusty came to this river and started fishing for fun. It must be the beauty of this river that caught his attention. He wanted to take some of us back after his fishing expedition. Gradually, the Pearl River Delta had become a popular fishing site for many.

We were flabbergasted and petrified because of what they were doing to us! Not only did they want to fish us, cook us, then sell us but they started building ill-smelling factories to allow the effluence pollute the sea and destroy our home sweet home. Consequently, many

of our lives and well-beings were snatched away. The destiny of our peaceful haven had been altered since then just like a little child crying for days and nights for losing its favourite teddy bear. In addition, they now want to build a tunnel stretching from one part of China to the other because this river flows through various places such as : Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen and Dongguan. If this is truly implemented, our home will be destroyed and diminished... Humans cannot fathom the consequences of what they are doing to this precious river. Eventually, someone will have to pay for it.

After the announcement of the destructive news, we decided to hold a meeting. We needed to find a solution to fight against this tunnel. After many heated discussions, we concluded that in two weeks time on (WIFC) World International Factory Connection Day, we would paint our fins yellow; make our voices heard; put up banners and slogans:

Come together for solidarity!

Fishes power!

Support us!

Let's unite and fight!

We need your help!

Join hands with us!

Make a difference!

We would swim up to the water surface and go around this river writing words of protest on the boats. Also, when we arrive at each city, we would persuade other people and fishes to join hands and fight against building the tunnel; otherwise, our family and friends will be gone forever!! All of the creatures know about the peril and the sharks and whales are going to help protect us from danger. We have faith that we will make it and hope that our plan will be successful.

We need people as well as other fishes to come together to fight for our rights to survive.

This story will go on and on because the conflict between man-made developments and environment protection never ceases. It is our hope that one day, we can find a way to strike the balance between us and live in harmony with each other.

See you there!



# Fiction

Group 3

# The Winter Rains

*Chinese International School, Lai, Charlotte - 13*

The summer sun shone brightly, warming the earth. Beneath the heavens, was the pinnacle of the breathtaking Eagle Cliff. The gem-like rocks and towering cliffs overshadowed the majestic Pearl River, winding to the east. Yet when the water reached the village of Yumin, it became inky and murky, filled with waste.

On the edge of Eagle Cliff, stood the exquisite Lo-shen, the Chinese goddess of rivers. She swayed her bouncy, glossy hair in the wind. Shimmering in the sun, her Sapphire blue dress and her golden shawl blew gently in the summer breeze. Her diamond headpiece shone brightly. Yet her eyes were red and swollen, with little streams pouring out of them. Drops of salty water rolled down her cheeks into the polluted, garbage-filled water below.

Crying sorrowfully, she gasped, “My river, my beautiful river. What have those horrid humans done to you?”

Wiping away her tears, Lo-shen considered what she should do. “Should I go and talk to the people? No, they won’t listen... but I’m a goddess! I can say whatever I want, and the people should listen,” she thought to herself. “I’ll just go talk to them.” She then gathered her servants, and a gust of wind swept her off her feet, bringing her to Yumin.

In the village Lo-shen approached a man. Seeing Lo-shen, one of the most powerful goddess walking over to him, his face became pale and he trembled.

Lo-shen said to him, “I am Lo-shen, goddess of rivers. I am here to speak to your chieftain.”

Heart pounding wildly, the man pointed his trembling finger at the Buddhist temple. There, she found the chieftain sitting at a table daydreaming. “What a scruffy fellow,” she thought. Suddenly, from the corner of her eye, she saw a box full of rubbish. On the box was written, “to be dumped in river.” Lo-shen was furious.

As the chieftain looked up from his table, he saw a pair of icy, cold eyes glaring at him and nostrils flaring. A stunning woman with her hands in fists, bent over him, scowling at him.

“Chinese Ghost month has past ages ago. Get out of that costume and get back to work!”

the chieftain yelled, thinking Lo-shen was one of the commoners from the village.

Lo-shen shouted impatiently, "I am Lo-shen, the goddess of rivers. Not a commoner!"

Still not believing her, the chieftain cheekily quipped, "Of course your highness, and I am the Jade Emperor, so you must bow down to me, peasant. Now enough of this drama and get back to work!"

The goddess calmly pointed her finger at the chieftain. Before he could react, he was drenched in river water from head to toe.

Realizing his mistake, he stuttered, "Oh, of course, you are our beautiful goddess. How are you this fine morning?"

Pointing at the box of garbage, she demanded, "What do you have against my river? Why are you and your people polluting my rivers? Do you have any idea how hard I work to make them flow smoothly? Water is a valuable resource. All life depends on water for survival, including you. This rubbish you are dumping will kill all aquatic life. If polluted, my streams will be contaminated and will not be potable. Do you understand?"

The chieftain was speechless after hearing what Lo-shen said.

He slowly came back to his senses and responded respectfully, "Of course your majesty, I completely understand." He bowed down low to the goddess. "I will immediately inform the people."

"I would really appreciate that," Lo-shen declared.

Swaying her golden shawl briskly, she disappeared into thin air.

As soon as Lo-shen left, the chieftain snorted and muttered to himself, "Oh that high and mighty goddess, just barging in here and ordering us around. I don't care what she says. Who is concerned about her and her stupid rivers? I am not. I'm in charge around here, not her."

He then continued daydreaming.

That night, the people silently came again carrying tons of trash. Bucket by bucket, they dumped into the water reeking piles of food, shards of broken glass and used paper. Instead of flowing smoothly, the water became choppy and turbulent.

The next day, when Lo-shen went to check on the Pearl River, her eyes widened with horror as hot steam poured out of her ears like waterfalls.

Raising her voice, she declared, "That man, he lied to me! My poor, contaminated river. I will tell Fu-Hsing."

She proceeded up alone to the Eagle Cliff where all the other gods lived and found Fu-Hsing, the God of Happiness, resting after the whole day of making people happy. As she started telling him the whole story, tears trickled down her bright red cheeks.

He responded by jubilantly saying, "Look at the positive side. It's only one tiny river. Not a big deal. Just relax and be happy."

Poor Lo-shen looked to the ground and thought, "It's pointless talking to him. He's always so cheerful and has never quite understood how much rivers mean to me." Tired and frustrated, she plopped down on the cold stony ground and started wailing, while Fu-Hsing merrily kept talking.

The following day when she looked down at the Pearl River, not only did she see her river piled up with trash, she also saw fish and seagull corpses floating on the surface of the water, as the pollution had killed them. She cried and cried. As waterfalls of tears poured out of her eyes, the liquid dropped down into the valley below, forming a river. As Lo-shen wept, the water level slowly rose more and more.

Many days passed. Gushing down the mountain was a huge cascade of water. The valley was already full of water, but Lo-Shen was still wailing. She continued crying and the river

overflowed. Water burst into the village, terrifying people who fled for their lives. Yet, the water still kept coming until everything was wet and everyone was soaked from head to toe. The news quickly reached Fu-Hsing who went to find Lo-Shen to tell her how much damage she had done.

“Lo-Shen, you have to stop crying. You are putting people in danger,” Fu-Hsing sighed as he pointed to the flooded village.

The moment Lo-shen heard him, she stopped crying and looked towards the village.

“What! How did that happen?” she gasped in horror.

Fu-Hsing explained, “You have been crying non stop for a few days now. Your tears drizzled down into the valley and formed a river, which overflowed and flooded the village below.”

“Oh no!” exclaimed Lo-shen.

Lo-shen went down to the village to talk to the people. Everyone was on wooden rafts and boats. It was a total disaster. When they saw Lo-shen, they started scolding her.

“This wicked lady! She caused this to happen to us,” the villagers told each other, pointing their fingers angrily at the goddess.

One, staring straight into Lo-shen’s eyes, snapped, “Why did you do this to us?”

“You have been polluting my river. Water is a very valuable resource and we should treasure it. I am surprised your brilliant chief did not tell you this,” Lo-shen responded sarcastically.

“Who does she think she is? She cannot criticize our chief!” the villagers muttered to one another.

“Now stop this!” Lo-shen exclaimed in anger. “I shall still help you, but you must have a punishment!” She gazed to the sky and at a snap of her fingers, Lo-shen sent the water in the village into the sky where it became water vapour.

They now knew what Lo-shen was capable of and were too scared to pollute her rivers ever again. The second the water was gone, they immediately went on their knees and begged Lo-shen for forgiveness. Some younger ones even started to sob.

Finally, the chief stood up and pleaded with the Goddess, “This is mainly my fault, and I am very sorry Lo-shen. I should have listened to you. We will stop polluting the river. Please do not punish us more.”

Lo-shen pitied them, but what they did was wrong, so she softened up a bit and responded, “You will be punished, but only once a year.”

Before anyone could argue with Lo-shen, she and her servants were gone. No one knew what the punishment was or when it would occur, so they just had to be prepared for anything.

The next winter, when the sun was shining brightly in the sky, Lo-shen decided it was time to punish the people for polluting her river. She sent storms and typhoons to the village, trenching it with water in between the months of June and September. Even till nowadays, Lo-shen still remembers to punish the people, sending tempestuous storms, which soak everyone and everything in the region.

## Wrath of the Black Turtle

*Chinese International School, Sun, Andrew - 13*

In the powder blue sky, the scorching golden yellow sun hung like a red lantern, discharging heat waves that struck the lone man like a rock. In the distance, he could see Mount Baiyun surrounded by luminous clouds. He was familiar with this part of the Pearl River as he had sailed past it thousands of times before. The algae water had a tinge of emerald green in it, leaving the steaming river with a turquoise colour. There on his boat he sat, gazing at the radiant sun's reflection. As drops of sweat trickled down his back, he pondering his sad fate, for it had been many months since he had been able to catch enough fish to feed his family. Running his gnarled hands through his damp dark beard, he fervently gasped. "Ai ya! I am surely a poor fisherman for if I return empty handed, my family will starve."

Suddenly he saw a black object dart across the river leaving a trail of river spume. Startled, Bo Hai gasped in amazement. No! it couldn't be! A fish? Throwing the net gracefully across the patch of river that was distilled by the creature, he strained eagerly over the edge of the boat. The net landed right on top of the creature. He deftly pulled back the net and gasped in amazement. Skimming above the water, its ebony black shell gleaming in the sun, was a sacred black turtle. Bo Hai's hands trembled as he tugged in his miraculous catch and deposited it in the bottom of the boat. He then exclaimed in awe. Crawling in front of Bo Hai was the turtle of the mythical god Gong Gong, the turtle of longevity, the most gorgeous thing in the world.

"My my, you are a beauty! You will bring me many riches!" remarked Bo Hai as he carefully put the turtle into a bucket of water. "The wealthy people of Beijing will pay greatly for you, for they foolishly believe that whoever possesses you, fate will not allow to die and for you will bring them immortality."

His hands trembled in glee as he rapidly pulled up the sails and pointed the boat's nose towards home. However, not even five minutes had passed before he felt a gust of wind howling around his head, saw lightning flaring across the sky, and heard the thunder growling around his ears. Then came the rain. It wasn't like any storm he had seen before. It was tempestuous, catastrophic, cataclysmic, and most of all frightening. It was like the storm and

river were playing with him.

“Oh, my how unlucky am I? I catch the grand turtle only for us both to die!” the terrified man wailed.

Waves crashed down upon the boat, filling the bottom rapidly with salty river water. As the boat tipped dangerously sideways, Bo Hai grabbed a bucket and bent down to bale the water out of the boat. Suddenly, he saw his father’s reflection in the water.

“Oh my God!” Bo Hai blurted out.

The reflection remained silent, the eyes piercing deep into Bo Hai’s heart.

“Could it be? No! It couldn’t” Bo Hai’s head shook in bewilderment. His father had been dead for fifteen years and Bo Hai didn’t believe in ghosts, not like those asinine people in the villages along the Pearl river, who prayed to everything, including chairs. Looking back at the reflection, the shocked fisherman saw a face with beady eyes, which bored through his head like a bullet. Its beetling brows shot straight up in the air, its thick-lipped mouth scowled while the jaws clenched like a fist.

Suddenly, he remembered his father’s words to him as an apprentice fisherman. “Respect the gods especially Gong Gong as he is god of water and can decide your fate. Do not be foolish and proud my arrogant son!”

Bo Hai shook his head. Surely his imagination was getting the better of him. Had his father not been dead for fifteen years? He saw the turtle’s eyes darting back and forth from the Pearl River Delta to Bo Hai. Those deadly black eyes... could it be? Could his dad not have been so foolish?

Looking back at the reflection, Bo Hai could swear he saw his dad shrug and then there was nothing – just a sloshing pool of water.

Bo Hai thought quickly, “Could it be the turtle causing all this trouble? We will never have a chance to get out of the storm alive. But, if I return the turtle to the river, I may survive.”

Bo Hai quickly made up a decision that he would throw the turtle back. Getting up, Bo Hai tried to steady himself as massive waves hit the boat. He stumbled towards the bucket where the turtle was. As the boat lurched in the waves, he slammed his head into the mast and swore. Rubbing his bruised forehead, he inched closer to the bucket until it was right beneath him – with the sacred turtle in full view. Picking the black tortoise up, he took one last glance at the creature and chucked it off the boat.

Abruptly, the clouds started to separate, allowing streams of sunlight to shine upon his boat. A light breeze brewed as the milky clouds, fluffy and soft, danced across the azure sky. The mountains in the distance appeared again lush and green. The glimmering river seemed to smile warmly at Bo Hai as he stared at the shiny ebony shell padding away towards the horizon.

Bo Hai shook his head in disbelief. Turning the mast around, he sailed back to the golden idyllic beach where he docked his boat with the other creaking barges. Listening to pebbles crunch under his buckling sandals, he shuffled towards his home empty handed but relieved.

As the sun sank under the horizon of the Pearl River Delta, Bo Hai took out all his father’s belongings that he had buried under the bed when his father passed away. Quietly, he separated the statues that his dad used to bow to, from the old man’s clothes and shoes. He then carefully brushed the dust off the statues using a goose feather. Placing the statues on a wooden shelf near the window, he put the statue of the turtle in the middle. As he bowed down to them, he was sure out of the corner of his eye, he could see the turtle smile.

# Dragon Ascent

*Chinese International School, Yung, William - 13*

The incandescent sun gleamed vividly in the clear cobalt sky. Glistening in the warm sunlight, the peak of Mt Baiyun was encircled by white wispy clouds and the summit was completely shrouded in mist. Luminescent sun rays manifested hues of crimson, gold and amber which danced on the waves at the base of the cliff. Swishing gracefully, rolling waves curled onto the precipitous ebony rocks surrounding the coast. In the shallow waters of the shoreline, gnarly mangrove roots twisted and intertwined beneath the clear tranquil Pearl River.

A tantalising summer breeze blew across the water, rustling the clothing of a young fisherman sitting on a small wooden rowboat. Dressed in crimson, the young fisherman perched on the wooden helm holding out his bamboo fishing rod. His black eyes scanned the water examining the calm river for any fish. Leaning on the side of the boat, he cast his rod out towards the sea. He had been named the greatest fisherman in his town and was extremely proud of this achievement. After having devoted countless hours over many years, he was confident in the art of fishing. “What tasty treats am I going to catch today?” he said to himself. Straightening his body and crossing his legs, he patiently waited.

Suddenly, a cataclysmic pull erupted from the depths of the river. The young fisherman pulled back as a surge of bewilderment and trepidation struck him. He apprehensively thought to himself, what fish could be this strong? As he furiously pulled and jerked, the row boat drifted a few meters. He paused for a moment without losing his tenacious grip. Catching his breath, he felt perspiration drip from his head. As the boat propelled forward, the fisherman staggered trying to regain balance. Another vigorous tug exploded from the river and the fisherman flipped over the side, plunging into the Pearl River. Engulfed in the piercing cold water, the fisherman held onto the rod with all the strength he can muster. Splashes discharged from every inch of the Pearl Delta river as the young fisherman was dragged, his mouth gaping open. Then the roaring water suddenly ceased, and the white froth evaporating into thin air. The fisherman struggled against the waves to get back on the boat. In one hand he clutched the edge of the boat and in the other hand he held the fishing rod with an iron

grip as he pulled himself back on board.

Having sat back down, he saw something that almost made him fall back off in shock. There at the end of his rod glistening in the morning sun was Shen Long, the most famed Chinese sea dragon. With the hook lodged firmly in his mouth, he vociferated tumultuously as saliva emitted from his mouth. The dragon's extensive serpent like body was covered with satiny emerald scales. Its elongated face had two savage horns growing on his forehead and on his chin were chalky white whiskers swaying in the sunshine. Sharp intimidating teeth protruded from its mouth as its forked tongue darted in the sunlight. Shen Long tilted his head back and shrieked raucously.

Suddenly dark menacing clouds hovered over the Pearl River Delta. Colossal rain droplets began to bombard the tiny boat, causing it to sway wildly from side to side. Thunder boomed in the distance. Gasping in alarm, the fisherman reached for the sails to head the boat home, only to hear a loud crack above his head.

“What in the name of the Gods is that?” he gasped.

“You, young man.... What do you think you are doing with my catch?” a voice reverberated. As a large ship emerged from the crest of a wave a dark figure appeared onboard, standing with hands on his hips and a sinister smile on his face. Cocking his head back to the sky, the figure belted out a minacious laugh.

Staring across the five feet of ocean that separated his boat from the ominous ship, the fisherman felt his heart quake with fear. He pulled with all his might on his sails and turned the boat around hoping to flee, only to be met by massive wave that seized his boat and threw it head long into the pirate ship.

What happened next was a blur for the poor fisherman, but suffice to say, within less than five minutes, he was on the deck of the pirate boat with his legs bound with shackles.

The fisherman groaned in pain and agony as he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes but quickly shielded his face from the intense beams piercing through the crevices between the wooden boards above.

“In the name of the Gods, where am I?” the fisherman exclaimed in horror. Below his feet, he saw an emerald rug with scale like texture. Suddenly it began to move, the scales flexing in a spiral as a familiar ferocious face appeared in front of him. Trembling in fear, the fisherman tried to crawl away but he felt the tug of the shackles restricting his movements. A behemoth of a creature appeared in front of the petrified fisherman, “O the great Shen Long please have mercy!” the fisherman cried.

Petrified he knelt before the dragon, praying fervently under his breath. Studying the fisherman's intimidated eyes intently, Shen Long swayed its sinuous body.

“Young mortal, do you not fear the wrath of the omnipotent Shen Long? The universe can be demolished in my wake. Have you no sense?” Shen Long snapped, his eyes flashed in fury as his tail whipped, crashing against the narrow walls. The fisherman was mesmerised by the eloquent stern voice of Shen Long.

“I didn't capture you. It was the pirates!” the fisherman exclaimed. “You got stuck on my rod by accident!” The fisherman paused for a moment. “We are both prisoners. See, my ankles are bound!”

The clamorous metal clattered as he shook the shackles.

The intense vermilion rays discharging from Shen Long's eyes evaporated, and his muscles relaxed in an apparent sudden burst of realisation. The once furiously thrashing tail slowed into a gentle sway. A wave of silence washed over Shen Long and the fisherman.

The fisherman quietly whispered an audacious plan to the mighty Shen Long. “First I

will attack one of the pirates as they bring us out of the ship. Then you will fly up in the air and fly away as I slow them down.”

The confidence and vehemence in the fisherman's voice reverberated across the small room. Shen Long gazed at the fisherman.

“Please Shen Long, believe in me. I can’t let these pirates do any harm to you,” the fisherman said ardently, clenching his fists as he talked. “I cannot let them continue with this! I will save the mighty Shen Long.”

Suddenly the sound of boots clattering on the bare wooden floor. There was no time to waste. As the doors slammed open, a pirate stepped in. He opened his mouth to speak but was quickly interrupted by a blistering uppercut thrown by the fisherman. The pirate stumbled backward overwhelmed by the sudden outburst of pain. But soon two other pirates pinned the poor fisherman to the ground. “What have I got myself into?” the fisherman moaned, his heart palpitating rapidly. Bracing himself against the incoming pirates, the fisherman begged for mercy. But then just as the fisherman was about to give up, a pillar of scorching fire burst past him. The pirates fell back in pain and lay on the ground unable to contain their shock. A burst of light exploded in the room, as Shen Long reared up on his hind legs, roaring thunderously. Gazing in horror at Shen Long, the pirates trembled, their faces ashen as they crawled out of the room. The fisherman’s shackles quickly melted in Shen Long’s fierce flames. Soon, it was just the fisherman and Shen Long in the room. Silence fell as they looked at each other.

“Well, come young mortal,” Shen Long said as he gestured to his back. The fisherman sat on Shen Long’s back, and as he placed his hands on the emerald scales which glistened in the dim light, the dragon rose off the ground and flew out of the room. In no time at all, they arrived at the beach, where the dragon dropped the fisherman off.

The young fisherman collapsed on the beach. Gazing at the idyllic Pearl Delta River, he watched Shen Long climb high into the whirly clouds then plunge down into the serene Pearl Delta River. As the fisherman sat up, he saw a streak of fire in the corner of his eye.

“Gods do not need the help of pesky mortals.” echoed the dragon’s voice, as the creature soared over the Pearl River Delta and into the distance.

# An Unwanted Honour

*Discovery College (Primary), Anderson, Jennifer - 12*

“Run for your lives!” Kang shouted. “The Pearl River is flooding! Everyone to your homes!” It was too late. Xue had been sitting on the shore when he was engulfed by a huge wave from the river.

“Help!” He cried.

Xue felt something pulling him towards the shore. It was Zhong! Zhong had bitten the back of Xue’s shirt and pulled him from the water. Dripping, they ran to the fortuneteller’s red house with its 8 stone dragons guarding the roof. The house had a chipped fence that he and Zhong could climb. Xue let Zhong run in front of him, making sure he didn’t fall. They reached the roof, exhausted. Xue patted Zhong’s head. It was raining, but Xue and Zhong didn’t mind. They lay, staring at the stormy sky, while the villages ran back to their homes, trying to escape the flood of the Pearl River.

Zhong was Xue’s best friend. He never argued, but always followed Xue. Xue had been left on a wealthy family’s doorstep as a baby. They had called him Xue, because his skin was naturally white as snow. The family took care of him, but when their own children were born, they neglected him, so Xue ran away. At the age of 14, Xue had found Zhong as a puppy, abandoned by an animal trader, because he was a runt. Xue took care of him, and after a few years, Zhong grew up to be a strong and loyal dog. That was what his name meant. Loyalty. Slowly, the exhausted duo fell asleep.

“Is he alive?” Xue woke to a man’s hand poking his face. He had been carried off the roof and laid on the dusty village floor.

“I’m alive! Stop poking me!”

“Why were you on Sang’s roof? Why was there a dog with you? Who are you?” The man’s face started turning red. “Did you steal anything?”

“Stop it Kang! Can’t you see he’s scared?” There was a young woman beside him.

”I didn’t steal anything!”

“Be quiet. They are coming...” The fortune teller was standing in the corner. His eyes clouded. He started talking in a scratchy, deep voice.

“As the river of pearl storms the banks,

Mortals shall distress,

But there is no fear because,

A flurry of snow and loyalty,

Will prevail the pearl storm,

And fight fire with fire ”

He collapsed.

“Father! Are you all right?” the woman crouched down.

Kang looked at Xue. “What is your name?”

“Xue”

“Xue as in snow?”

“Yes...”

Kang exchanged glances with the woman. “Li Hua, he’s...”

“What am I?” He thought for a minute. It made sense. Zhong whimpered.

“No. You people are insane! I don’t save people!”

Xue sprinted away. Zhong followed. Li Hua stared at her father’s sleeping face. “What are we going to do?”

Xue had run to the expanding Pearl River. The villagers had started calling it the Pearl Sea, for it really was flooding as big as a lake now. He walked along the shore. Zhong bolted in front of him, and stopped, then started to dig. When Xue caught up to him, he had unearthed an oyster shell. Xue knelt down and opened the shell. There was a huge pearl, the size of his fist. Carefully, he held the oyster shell without touching the pearl; he followed Zhong to the riverbank. Zhong jumped around in the water, and he seemed to want Xue to get in the water. Then he yelped. Xue checked his paws. There was a bloody gash where a tile from the village that had fallen in the water. “Curse the river!” Xue swore. If there was one thing he cared more about than himself, it was Zhong. Zhong nosed the oyster shell. Xue opened it again to throw the pearl in the river.

“Stop!” He turned his head. It was the fortuneteller. “Don’t touch it!” It was too late. Xue and Zhong had touched the pearl at the same time. It started shining, as bright as the sun, and everything went white.

Clutching the pearl, Xue looked around. He and Zhong seemed to be standing on clouds. In front of him, a hole appeared in the clouds. He could see the Pearl River, and the fortuneteller at the river. Where he and Zhong had been standing minutes before was a shining white light. It seemed to be vaporizing the Pearl River. Slowly, the flooded river was receding. The hole in the clouds disappeared. A woman appeared in front of Xue. “Greetings, young one. I am Lo Shen, goddess of rivers. You have been rewarded, , for your life of hardships. You shall be the pearl, forever more. You shall rule under my guidance. But don’t worry, loyalty, will also forever be at your side.”

Xue and Zhong were back on earth. Well, more like, on water. They had been transformed. He was wearing rich, expensive robes. They were a deep blue, with fish, waves, gems, and storms embroidered on them. He had a staff in one hand. It had the same pearl in it that Zhong had found on the beach; instead it was a brilliant dark blue. Xue felt taller, cleaner and stronger. Zhong was next to him. His fur shone like it had been washed every day for years, and he wasn’t limping, with his wound healed. Xue realized that they were glowing. A soft golden glow outlined their bodies. They were standing on a huge wave, which was solid under their feet. The villagers were all at the bank of the river. They were cheering, every single one of them. The Pearl River had been shrunk to its normal size again. That was what the prophecy meant. Xue had fought the Pearl River with a pearl. Lo Shen appeared again. “Greetings again. I name you, the Xue Shui, God of The Pearl River. Your faithful friend shall forever be Zhong, the dog god of loyalty. You two shall, for the rest of time, control the Pearl River.” And the wave disappeared, and Xue Shui and Zhong fell into the river, never, to live on land again.

I guess we will never know if they were happy with their destiny. Who knows, Xue Shui’s vengeance may be flooding the river again, to show that he was not happy. But I know one thing. They are angry with the gods, as all Zhong and Xue wanted was a simple, happy life with a family. Zhong is still as loyal as can be, chasing fish, creating storms, but they are only happy together. What we have done, polluting the river and building factories have only made them even angrier. They are waiting for their vengeance on the gods. Be aware my friends, the Pearl River Delta!

# The Fresh Start

*HKMA David Li Kwok Po College, Kaur Saran, Sarneet - 14*

“Where are we going, father? You still haven’t told me yet.” Li-Hua whispered to the man walking beside her. They had been travelling for days on end, but her father still wouldn’t tell her where they were travelling to.

He looked up at her and smiled. He seemed to age a little bit more every day ever since her mother passed. The lines on his forehead had got deeper and his cheeks were sinking into his skull. He was tired. She could see it in his eyes, but he still refused to get onto the horse Li-Hua was sitting on.

“We’re almost there.” He told her. Li-Hua sighed. He still wouldn’t tell her. He was a bit stubborn like that sometimes, so when he, despite her grandmother’s protests, suddenly decided to pack their bags and leave Anhui, she wasn’t entirely surprised.

Li-Hua wasn’t completely sure how much time had passed, but when her father said that they had reached their destination, Li-Hua was glad. All the travelling made her feel exhausted, despite that fact that she had been sitting the entire time.

“Where are we?” Li-Hua asked again, hoping that this time her father would be able to give her a satisfactory reply. He replied by picking her up from the horse in one swift motion and setting her on the ground.

“Can’t you feel the ocean breeze? Can’t you smell the salt in the air?” her father said, laughing. It took Li-Hua a few seconds to figure it out, but when she did, her eyes widened in delight.

“Canton?” she said, her mouth forming a smile. When her father nodded, Li-Hua squealed. Her mother was from Canton, so she had heard all about this place. She had heard about the port, filled with ships carrying cargo from places far, far away and she had heard about the fair-skinned people who owned them. She heard about the exotic spices and the finest silk that was traded here, but what excited her most was the sea. She had never seen the sea before, but from what her mother told her, it was in the most beautiful blue colour and stretched as far and as wide as her eyes could see.

“What are we doing here, father?” Li-Hua asked. As excited as she was to be here, she

didn't see the point as her mother's parents had died years ago and they had no relations here whatsoever.

"I thought we needed a fresh start, didn't you? Plus, the trade here is booming, so I brought all the tea I could harvest back in Anhui. We could be happier here, my blossom. We could have a new life." Her father looked at her, as if he was waiting for a sign of her approval. Her father was a tea grower, and Li-Hua knew that the price he was getting for his tea back in An-Hui was barely enough to keep them going.

Li-Hua smiled. "You're right." She said. "Mother always talked about the sea. Can we go see it?" she asked, after a short pause.

Her father gave a little chuckle. "Come on, my blossom. Let's go to the port."

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John Matteson was tired, but he tried not to show it as his daughter chatted enthusiastically. Months ago, he owned one of the wealthiest British merchant firms, and now, after the Jiaqing Emperor had put a ban on his most profitable trade, opium, he was at the risk of losing everything.

That's why he was now in Canton. He had arrived here a couple of hours ago, and now was walking along the Canton port with his daughter. He had a smile on his face, but he was panicking, trying to think of a way to save his company from falling into ruin.

"What can I do?" John thought to himself. He rubbed his temples, hoping a solution would just come to him. He needed the money he got by selling opium to keep his company afloat, but there was no way he could do that without the Jiaqing Emperor finding out and arresting him and shutting down his firm. What would happen to his family then? What would happen to him?

"Maybe, if I could get someone else to traffic the opium for me, then I would be safe and my firm wouldn't shut down." He thought. It was not a bad idea, but there was no way he'd be able to find someone who'd do that. No one would put themselves in danger like that, even if he paid the person handsomely. Not unless they were desperate enough...

How hard could it be to find someone desperate? He looked around. He knew the harbour was full of rich traders, because after all, Canton was a thriving trading hub. However, as he looked among the crowds of people, he spotted one man in particular. The young man looked tired, as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. He was trying so very hard to sell his tea to passersby, but no one seemed particularly interested.

John was very interested. Not in the man's tea, but in the man's desperation. Maybe there was a chance he could save his company after all.

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It had been 6 months since Long-Wei had accepted the proposal given to him by the Englishman, John Matteson. It had been 4 since he could finally afford a real home for himself and his daughter, Li-Hua, instead of the usual dingy guesthouses they stayed in, and it had been 2 since he had stopped questioning his decision to accept the proposal. With the proposal, he also had to accept that he could be caught by the Canton authorities, and that he could be taken away from his daughter forever.

At the moment, Long-Wei was happy. He was alone at his home, sipping tea and reading

the newspaper. Li-Hua wasn't home with him; she was instead with Rosa, John's daughter, playing. Rosa and Li-Hua had become good friends ever since John and Long-Wei had started working together.

Everything was peaceful, and Long-Wei was enjoying the peace. He was enjoying the silence and, he was-

In a split-second, everything changed for Long-Wei. From the second he had read the words in the newspaper, he knew his fears were becoming reality. They knew. They knew what he had done-and was doing-and they would come for him.

In the past few months, there had been no news relating to opium trafficking in the Canton. No news implying that the Jiaqing Emperor was aware of the trafficking he was involved in. That's why he had stopped worrying, that's why he thought he was safe.

Suddenly, there was a knock on his door, and Long-Wei felt his heart beating faster, and his eyes watering. They were here. They would take him away, and he wouldn't even get to say goodbye to his blossom.

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"Father, Father, I'm home!" Li-Hua said, as she rushed through the door of her home. It was already very dark outside, so Li-Hua knew she was later than usual.

"I hope you haven't started dinner without-" Li-Hua stopped talking. Why was her home so quiet? Where was Father?

Li-Hua started searching her entire home, and by the end of her search, her eyes started to water. Where could he have gone?

Suddenly, Li-Hua sensed a presence behind her; she turned around to see her neighbor, an old woman called Yanyu, standing at the door.

"Where's my father?" Li-Hua asked Yanyu.

"Li-Hua, your father told me to look after you." Yanyu said, ignoring Li-Hua's question.

"Where's my father?" Li-Hua repeated, her eyes filling with tears.

The old woman took a deep breath. "Li-Hua, he's...gone. Your father's gone."

When she said that, Li-Hua couldn't handle it any longer. Tears flowed on her face and she could feel herself shaking.

Yanyu embraced Li-Hua. She could almost feel the little girl's pain and confusion. "Don't worry, Li-Hua. It's going to be okay. It'll all be okay."

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John Matteson stared at the sea. It had been a couple of days since he had left Canton, and the Pearl River Delta was now no longer visible. He looked at the solemn little girl who was standing a few feet away from him. She was also staring at the sea. She had been doing the same thing for days.

When Long Wei got arrested, John Matteson immediately decided to flee, but as he was boarding his ship with his daughter, he remembered Long Wei's little girl and guilt filled him. He was the reason her father was gone, so he felt as if it was his responsibility to make it right.

Hence, he made a decision to take her in, to take her away from everything and to give her a fresh start, but now, as he stood and stared at the sea with the solemn little girl, he wondered if it was the right one.

# How the Pearl River Delta Got Its Name

*HKMA David Li Kwok Po College, Limbu, Iksa - 14*

If you go to Guangdong Province in China, you are most likely to hear about the Pearl River Delta and see its beauty. The tale of the Pearl River is long forgotten but its ambience still surrounds the place. So if you buy some steamed pork buns and a pack of jasmine tea leaves and present them to the elderly living in the area, they may ask you to stay for a cup of tea and tell you a tale. A tale about a fight between an Emperor and a Dragon, a tale about a saddened Mother Dragon, a tale which is now known as the tale of How the Pearl River Delta got its name.

Long, long ago in China, the Mother of all dragons was left alone after her husband had passed away and all her children had grown up. She was disheartened as she was lonely and had no one to look after. The river, now known as the Pearl River, which was once clear as crystal and fresh as the morning, was bitter and murky because of the Mother Dragon's tears. This became a big problem among the villagers. They needed fresh, clean water to drink and plant their crops; without fresh, clean water they couldn't run their households properly. One of them suggested informing the Emperor. All of the others agreed and so they went to the Palace.

"Our mighty emperor! Please help us!" cried the villagers. "What is it that I may help my people with?" asked the Emperor. "It's the Mother Dragon, Your Majesty." answered one old woman. The Emperor grew a little worried. "What's wrong with the Mother Dragon?" he asked curiously. "She keeps on crying! Our once fresh and clear river is now murky and bitter!" they answered one by one. The Emperor was confused and wondered why the Mother Dragon was crying. He looked at the villagers. "May I know why she is so disheartened?" A villager spoke up, "Your Highness, after her husband passed away and all her children left, she has been lonely." The Emperor saw the opportunity and smiled. "Well then, seems like she just needs something to look after and keep busy." He looked at one of his trusted guards and ordered, "Bring out the marvellous pearl - it'll finally be of some use."

Out came a huge, beautiful pearl. It was so huge that it almost touched the palace ceiling and was white and smooth. All it needed was some more cleaning and it would be perfect. It wasn't like the Emperor hadn't tried. Once he ordered all his warriors to clean it but because of its size, it was impossible to reach the top. Only a large creature could do it, someone like the Mother Dragon. The Emperor praised himself for his plan. Once the Dragon finished taking care of the pearl, he would ask his guards to secretly steal it from her when she was asleep. The villagers, amazed by the Emperor's kindness, bowed down to him. Little did they know of his plan.

The Mother Dragon was more than pleased with the pearl. She worked hard to bring out its true beauty. Every day, she cleaned it with clear seawater, then toned it with fresh water and finally dried it and wrapped it up with seaweed. The more the pearl shone, the more the Emperor grew impatient. After years of waiting, the pearl was finally ready. Its glow radiated throughout half of China and reached the Palace windows.

When the Emperor saw the light shining through his window, he knew it was time. The Emperor instructed his guards, "At night, go to the Mother Dragon and make sure she's asleep. When you're sure, carefully and silently steal it from her."

The guards hesitated because after all it was the Mother Dragon they were talking about. But they still followed their Majesty's orders and went ahead.

When night fell, the guards saw the Mother Dragon wrapped around the Pearl, peacefully sleeping. With much difficulty, they found a way to roll the Pearl out of the warmth of the Dragon and place it in their wagon. They took it to the Palace. The Emperor was pleased with their hard work gave them each a string of gold.

When morning came, a loud cry was heard throughout China. It was the Mother Dragon "NO! IT CAN'T LEAVE ME! FIRST MY HUSBAND, THEN MY CHILDREN AND NOW THIS! WHO HAS DARED TO STEAL MY PEARL!" The Emperor heard it and got more and more worried. He asked his guards to lock the pearl up in the darkest chamber they had as he was scared that the Pearl's glow might give the Mother Dragon hints of its whereabouts.

But alas, the glow of the Pearl was too mighty. The Dragon followed the light. But was surprised. The closer she got to the Palace, the stronger the glow got. She understood at once, that the Emperor himself and stolen it. She went in and faced the Emperor. "May I know what exactly is glowing so brightly from inside your chambers? Is it just me or does it remind you of the glow that my precious pearl had?" The Emperor boldly told her the truth. "The Pearl was never and will never be your property. It was mine from the beginning, I just lent it to you to end your sadness and you talk with me in this way?" The Dragon roared in rage. She went right in to the chambers, breaking down the doors and took the Pearl. The Emperor ordered his guards to follow the Dragon and take it back from her.

The Dragon knew she wasn't safe with her Pearl here on Earth and decided to fly to Heaven. But while she was flying, she couldn't carry the Pearl properly as it was too heavy and she dropped it instead in the river of Heaven. The Wiseman in Heaven decided to leave it there and make peace between the Dragon and the Emperor. Thus, the Pearl is what we see in the sky every night and is now known as the Moon.

On the other hand, the Emperor didn't know that the Dragon had run away to Heaven. Every night the river would carry the Pearl's reflection and so the Emperor misunderstood and thought that the Pearl had fallen in the river. As the Emperor had so dearly loved the Pearl, he decided to name the place, the Pearl River.

So that, folks, is the tale of how Pearl River got its name.

## The Seminar at the Pearl River Delta

*HKUGA College, Tse, Hiu Yan Jodie - 13*

“What’s taking you so long, dad?” I asked.

“Just a second...Done!” Dad’s voice echoed around the room.

Dad walked out of the bathroom, he looked peculiar, something was definitely wrong.

“Just trimmed my hair, do I look good?” Dad said proudly.

I almost laughed, but I held back and said, “you look amazing!” He actually looked like a potato.

He never bothered cutting his hair, but we were going to a seminar, so he did something exceptional. I swung my duffel bag on my back. It felt like a ton of rubbish was piled over my back.

“What have you put inside, dad? It wasn’t so heavy when I packed it,” I groaned under the weight.

“Nothing special, just a few exercise books,” Dad winked.

I stumbled to the front door, unable to even respond to my dad, then I walked out.

“Have you brought everything with you, Bill?” Dad asked.

“Yes,” I croaked.

“Are you sure?” Dad asked in suspicion.

“Yes!” I yelled.

Dad smiled.

It’s about time to tell you something about me, or this whole story would be meaningless.

As you can see, my dad was really annoying, as if he was my mother. However, believe it or not, he was both my mum and dad. My mum died in a car accident when I was three, so I didn’t really remember her. Dad told me she had a warm smile, which was the only thing I remembered. I didn’t think I actually missed her, for my dad was as annoying as a mother, but I would like her to be here with us, if I had a choice. Anyway, my dad was an ecologist. This was probably the worst job I’ve ever heard. He went to national parks and places which had

been polluted to do research. He didn't tell me this, but I figured out his most important job was to clear rubbish. It was no different from the job of garbage cleaner, he just got a more professional title. Today, we were going to attend this seminar about pollution, and a whole bunch of ecologists from all over the world would be going to a polluted place, Pearl River Delta.

Back to where we started. We talked little during our walk to the bus stop. Dad and I just caught the bus, and we were going to the airport. I slumped into a seat and fell asleep within seconds. The next time I woke up, we were at the airport. After a scrumptious meal, we checked in our luggage and boarded the plane. I slept again, and after waking up for a delicious meal on the airplane, I slept again! My dad woke me up two hours later, pointing at the window. We arrived at our destination! How I hoped I was a koala, eating and sleeping for the whole day. Sometimes, I wondered why we humans were the intelligent species. Take koalas as an example, they know how to enjoy their time, they were smart. Anyway, we disembarked from the plane and took our luggage, and then we got on a bus and headed off to the Pearl River Delta.

The Pearl River Delta was in China, formed by three major rivers, Xi Jiang, Bei Jiang, and Dong Jiang. Pearl River Delta was actually two deltas, separated by the core branch of the Pearl River. I didn't know why they combined these two deltas into one. I only knew that its network covered nine prefectures, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Macau, Huizhou, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, Zhuhai and Foshan. Also, the water of Pearl River Delta flowed to the South China Sea. I usually failed my geography exams, but I knew so much about this polluted river, probably because my brain was polluted too!

When we arrived, I didn't see why this was a polluted place. There were a lot of buildings and factories near the coast, making it like an organized place. There were even trees planted near the coast. Seriously, I would be willing to live there, so what was the problem with it? I wanted to ask my dad what this prank was all about. Suddenly, I saw something very shocking. I wanted to vomit, right into the ocean, which would be nothing compared to the greasy patch of oil in the ocean. I didn't know how to calculate it using fractions, but I was sure the percentage of clean water was a lot less than the amount of greasy oil.

“What is this?” I asked with disgust.

“This thing that looks like...” Dad was explaining when suddenly his watch's alarm rang.

“Oh no, it is time for the meeting. Let's go to the conference room first. You can listen to what the other ecologists say,” Dad panted as he stumbled to the building at the far end of the street.

As if that would cheer me up, I thought. I've attended these meetings a thousand times, and it always satisfied me. I could sit comfortably at the back of the seat and sleep because ecologists were as boring as teachers. After a few years of research, I found out teachers and ecologists were born to be boring. However, ecologists were slightly more boring than teachers, which upgraded them to be the most boring creature in the world. Sleeping at the back of the conference room didn't work after all, as my dad found out the last time and insisted that I sat beside him.

We went into the conference room, and not long after we sat down, the meeting began. I sat down, trying to keep my eyes open. It worked in the first fifteen minutes as an ecologist was able to answer the question I just asked my dad.

The ecologist said something like this, “After a few series of research, we found that this serious water pollution is caused by the factories which dump lot of harmful chemicals into Pearl River Delta nearby...” I was starting to get bored, my eyesight was getting blurry, and I

fell asleep.

I woke up with a start, sweat dripped down my forehead to my bright red cheeks. I dreamed of myself swimming in Pearl River Delta, cooling down from the unbearable heat. I decided to walk around this stinky place to know more about it. Besides, I wanted to get out of this conference room. I sneaked out of the room to the exit, grabbing my bag, and ran towards the dam. I took a set of equipment out, laying them on the floor. My dad gave me this as birthday present when I was seven. I used them to measure the level of pollution of the water and the surrounding air. After analyzing the water, I found that there were really a lot of harmful chemicals, for instance, heavy metals and toxic pollutants. I remembered one of the speakers with a flat nose and chubby cheeks said that not only Pearl River Delta, but 70% of China's rivers, lakes, and even reservoirs were affected by water pollution, a major environmental problem. I looked at my watch; it was 5:45, and almost the end of the meeting! I rushed to the building, jumped three steps a time on the stairs, dashed for the door, and ... I just made it! The meeting hasn't ended, and a thin ecologist was standing in the middle of the conference room. Wait a second, my dad? He looked smart in his suit, talking about how to prevent pollution. "Protecting the environment is everyone's responsibilities. We not only talk, we act. My son always says my job is a garbage cleaner. He's not wrong! All of us should clean the garbage in Hong Kong, and make it an environmentally friendly city!" There was silence, suddenly, everyone was standing up, clapping their hands vigorously. I stood there in awe. Funny how people's views changed when they thought differently. My dad's haircut didn't look that ugly, he looked smart and tidy.

I was standing there daydreaming, my dad saw me. "Why are you panting?" Dad asked, probably puzzled.

"I just ran back from the washroom, don't want to miss anything interesting and meaningful. It is wonderful!" I tried to sound exciting, I was still dumbstruck by my dad's lecture.

After a tour around Pearl River Delta, Dad and I took the bus to the airport and boarded the plane. On the plane, I told dad I would never be an ecologist, but I would like to make inventions to help reduce water pollution.

"But this means you will be an ecologist. I thought you don't want to be one?" Dad asked in a mysterious voice.

"No, it's not. Only inventors do these things, ecologists merely clean up the polluted areas. Now, don't say anything else, or I'll probably change my mind," I said.

Dad pretended to be annoyed when he heard that ecologists only dealt with rubbish, but I swore I saw him smile.

# The Case of The Spotty Faced Husband

*Hong Kong International School, Chan, Melanie - 12*

I sat nibbling my pork chop rice as Ma cleared the table in our compact flat in Hong Kong, one of the densest cities in the Pearl River Delta. As I sneakily wrapped some of my food with my napkin, Popo’s eyes followed every single movement I made. Popo is my maternal grandmother who is visiting for a fortnight over the Chinese New Year holiday. She is very observant of her grandchildren’s behavior, but she seldom criticizes us.

“Mei! Are you wasting food again?” Ma questioned. “You know we shouldn’t waste any food.”

I sighed. Eating seems like such a painless task, but in truth it is like going on a mission to consume the moon.

“I know, Ma. I’m genuinely filled to the brim.”

“Ha! Full as a whale inflated with air. Hurry up and finish it or no screen-time.”

“Has she finished yet?” My younger sister asked. “Brother and I gulped our share down.”

“Do not tease your older sister, Yin. Go play with your brother, Yu,” Ma ordered. “Mei, you will end up marrying a man with a face as spotty as your bowl. Look at the rice that is dotted all over your bowl!”

I groaned. Ma always says that to me when I don’t polish all the food off my bowl. I think I’ve heard that saying a trillion times by now!

“You always say that! You know that won’t really happen because I would choose a handsome guy to marry,” I argued.

Popo laughed. “Your Ma hasn’t told you about the curse?”

“What curse? There can’t really be a story about that!”

“Why, ‘The Curse of the Spotty Faced Husband’ of course!” exclaimed Popo.

The room fell silent as we tried to register what Popo had just said. Finally Popo explained.

“The story originated in Auhu, a small village in the Pearl River Delta where I grew up.

This tale was told to me by my mother, and it was told to her by her mother.”

### **Curse Of The Spotty Faced Husband**

“Long ago, in the small village of Auhu, lived a young lady named Ying Hua. She was as beautiful as the Cherry Blossom, but also spoiled because she was the village chief’s only child. She was wasteful, didn’t care about others, and was unappreciative of the luxuries that her parents gave her. She took everything for granted. On top of that, she had a bad habit of wasting food by leaving bits of rice at the bottom of her bowl. One day an old beggar came to her house to beg for food but Ying Hua turned him away, claiming that they didn’t have any food to spare. However, he saw that there were lots of half-eaten food remaining on the dining table. The beggar was furious to learn that Ying Hua would rather waste food than to share it with the hungry. He warned her about a curse that would turn the leftover rice in her bowl into the spots on her future husband’s face. Ying Hua didn’t believe that would happen to her because she was rich and beautiful . . . surely she would marry someone rich and handsome.

When Ying Hua was at an age for marriage her parents selected a young and handsome gentleman from the next village to be her groom.

‘So much for that curse!’ Ying Hua thought.

However, on his way to pick up his bride on the wedding day, the groom was attacked by a hive of bees and fell off his horse. Strangely, he wasn’t injured anywhere except for his face. He did not want to scare his bride, so he covered his face with a scarf and told her that he had a terrible cough, and didn’t want to pass any germs to her. It wasn’t until the day after the wedding ceremony that Ying Hua found out that her husband’s face was covered with lots of tiny spots...just like the rice that was left in her bowl.

‘The curse is true!’

Word of the curse spread like wildfire. Mothers would warn their daughters and their neighbor’s daughters of ‘The Curse Of The Spotty Faced Husband’.”

Silence filled the room until finally Ma shattered it. “So much for the cock and bull story, huh?”

“I still think that the story is a bit exaggerated though,” I giggled. “It can’t be that bad to marry a husband with as many spots as a leopard. Look at Ba, he doesn’t look too bad.”

“It isn’t about the spots, it’s about wasting food.” Ma remarked. “That’s why you should not waste food.”

Popo laughed. “I remember you did the same thing! You were just as naughty as your daughter.”

We all laughed as Ma’s face turned red as a beet.

“I would be clearing the dishes after dinner and your Ma would still be sitting there eating her rice! I had to leave her to clear her own dishes because I had to leave for my night shift work .”

We all laughed again.

“This is supposed to be about wasting food, not about me!” Ma complained.

“If we run out of food we can buy more at the supermarket!” argued Yin.

Popo’s eyes darkened, and we shrunk back into our seats as Popo shared her experience with us.

“Having food is a blessing and we should be thankful. Don’t take things for granted. I had never been to or seen a supermarket when I was a child. When I was your age everybody in our village was malnourished. Famine had hit China. My Third Brother had died of starvation when he was eight years old, and my Eldest Brother got very sick from eating tree

bark and raw leaves because there wasn't anything else to eat. We were lucky if we could find sweet potatoes and yam leaves to eat. We had no food. Our kitchen only had a stone fire pit for cooking, a broom, and a wok hanging on the wall."

"But why didn't you eat the food you harvested? Your Ba was a farmer!"

"It is true that we harvested crops, but the crops were given to the government and to get rice, we had to collect our rations from the communal kitchen. That's how it goes in Communist China. We didn't have enough food to eat and we didn't get new clothes to wear. During that time we needed coupons to get cloth, oil, and salt. One cloth coupon would only be enough to mend our Ba's pants for work."

"Why didn't you go buy clothes from the department store?" I asked.

Popo chuckled and replied, "There were no department stores in my village."

"Oh. I'm glad Hong Kong was never like that."

"Actually, there were many starving people in Hong Kong during that time as well," Ma said. "Many villages in the Pearl River Delta, including Hong Kong, were farmland because it is the most fertile part of China. The soil is rich because it contains silt that has washed up from the large river network around the coast, making it the perfect farmland."

I laughed. "It is ironic that people in the fertile land of the Pearl River Delta had undergone famine."

Popo nodded. "During the Great Leap Forward people were forced to increase steel production, so fewer people farmed. Nowadays most of the land has been turned into big cities, so there are less farmlands around."

I giggled. "That's silly."

Popo frowned. "This is not a laughing matter. Back in my day people starved to death. Did we think it was funny? I think not."

We became still and quiet after hearing that. So many lives gone, and so many could have been saved with the amount of food we waste every day. After I thought about it for a while, I decided that maybe I could improve my eating habits. Perhaps I could even support a charity that feeds the hungry.

"I think you should go finish your meal now Mei," Ma resumed.

Yin and Yu laughed and rolled on the carpet. "Too late!" Yu hooted. "We fed it to Ah-Wang!"

Ma, Popo, and I swirled around to see that our puppy has licked all of our bowls until they were spotless.

"Well," Ma chortles, "Ah-Wang won't get a spotty faced husband!"

# Diary

*Island School, Oliver, Jack - 13*

Dear Diary:

Today I'm going to explain my life to you. Just imagine. You have just met me. I am nothing to you. I am a collection of cells with unique genes and you judge me as a book by its cover. I have a dirty appearance. I look poor, unintelligent and sad. Well, you'd be right about some of those assumptions, and for some of them? You'd be wrong. But that's not important. What's important is that I'm only twelve, but I've heard stories about life, and I've heard that it's short. So I think to myself: "Why not live it as it is?" Because all forms of life are beautiful, no matter appearance or opinion. Everyone's different. And that's what I've come to accept.

Acceptance is better than rejection. And Acceptance doesn't come to someone naturally, like most things do. It has to be superficial, artificial, even. Man-made! Something has to convince you that life is better than you think it is. Regardless if that 'something' is another human being, or in my case, a river.

As a worker on a small field in a small unknown area in China, my best trait is that I have a smart eye. Well, at least that's what dad calls it. Well, called it. My dad's dead, but I live with my mum. Saul lives next to me, who is my best friend. My name's Chan. Did I mention that? Probably not. I'm forgetful. Oh, what was I saying? Oh yeah. Everyday I wake up at 6:30, or at least I assume at that time, as I don't have a pocket watch. And I spend around four to five hours fishing. It's not technically work, but mum makes me do it everyday, so I consider it work. You know, I could vaguely make attempts to argue with my mum, and convince her to let me skip work on weekends, but to be honest, we'd starve without fish. Fish is the only food we've eaten for about a year and I can't just suddenly stop supplying our food!

I only catch about five fish a day, but that's quite reasonable for four and a half hours. It's enough for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But I wish we could eat something different once in a while. Fish gets old, and I can't stand the static, bland taste of the salty creature. Someday I have a feeling that the whole river may become nothing but a puddle of black sludge and boned fish, if factories around here keep up pumping their leftovers into the river. Mum and dad used to tell me that the river used to be a main source of elegant pearls. It'd always make me wonder how clean the water must've been when they collected pearls.

Dad died two years ago. I was only ten when it happened. I got home and mum was sitting on the opposite side of the table, where dad usually sat, crying. I was shocked, as I

could barely take the bad news in, I wasn't crying; just thinking about life, how it would be without a critical family member. Not only emotionally, for the first time in my life I was thinking smartly; "How will this impact us financially?" It's not like I would know, ha, I was a ten year old! If I ever had a smart thought in my ten year old self, it was probably "How is it possible that fish are so stupid they eat bait on hooks even though they've witnessed their fish friends die from it, or even they can see the hook?" But I've come to accept that dad has passed, and that he looks down on us everyday.

Once I've ended my work day I come home with the caught fish. I've learned to live with it, but the fish usually have a green layer of some sort of mould strung around them. They have some blue spots as well, some clumps of dead skin and scales piled and stuck on their skin, some sort of debris, as I imagine it. I've never thought about it when I eat the fish, but mum always cuts that part out, so we never eat it. The only way we get money is from the fish we sell. If I ever have any left over I always make an attempt to sell it. This is only successful half the time, but it's worth a try.

My house is small, but it's not like that's a bad thing. I've never been claustrophobic and I enjoy being in small spaces, thinking about it now, I'm actually the opposite of claustrophobic! Fancy that! I have chores, responsibilities and education - well, you could call it that if you're desperate. I go to a small local school that considers 'education' cramming fifty kids into a single classroom and attempt to explain how two plus two equals four. After school, I go and play with Saul just to clear my mind and relax. Usually football. A football was my last and only Christmas gift.

Even when I was sad and I needed to be by myself, the river was the best place to go. Not just because it cheered me up, but probably because of what it did. Some time ago, this beauty was producing amazing pearls, we're talking the creamiest white color as an extremely round and smooth. However, now it's done. It's finished its work and is retired. Pearls don't appear out of nowhere now. But what really matters about this river is, even though it may be filled with black sludge and green goop, once in its lifetime it did something amazing. So that's what convinced me. Not only to live life to its fullest; but to stand out from the crowd - be productive, smart - to be what you can only bring yourself to be.

So out of all of this, what's so important? Well, just remember. If you're like me, right now. Sitting in a room, depressed, getting yelled at by mum, dad or even your sister, failing school - don't be me. Don't wait for that one day to come where your life succeeds victory. Make it happen. Don't just sit there and read, or talk. Get up. Do something. Something productive. Something amazing with your life. Doesn't matter if it's crazy! Or stupid! Make mistakes! Learn from them! Do something awesome! Do something that'll make yourself proud with yourself. Achieve something.

No matter whether it be producing beautiful shining pearls, or a line of chips or drinks, at least after you've done something that makes you feel good, you have the right to retire and live the rest of your life as it is. Because life's too short to be paranoid about being judged. They will accept you for who you are.

Because that's what important. Acceptance. Acceptance is better than rejection. And it doesn't come to someone naturally, like most things do. It has to be superficial, artificial, even. Something in your life has to convince you that life is better than you think it is. Regardless if that 'something' is another human being, an animal, an issue, ANYTHING! Or even in my case... A river. And that, is my story.

Thanks, Diary.

From Chan.

# Tales of Pearl River Delta

*Island School, Singh, Aryani - 13*

Silence surrounded me as I lie wide awake on my bed. I stared at the ceiling. It was beginning of December, too cold for my liking. I looked out the window as the cold wind made the curtain sway, creating a ghastly figure. I could hear typing in the other room, which gave me hint that Carlos was still awake. He's been working really hard since we moved to Macau, which was a week ago. I didn't want to move here, it's just we travel way too much, and I just felt like we should settle down somewhere. But being an archeologist doesn't help. I got up from the bed and stroll out to the living room, where I saw Carlos typing away on his laptop.

"You aren't sleeping Adlyne?" he questioned, while putting his laptop aside.

"No. What are you doing up so late?" I asked him.

"Well you see. We've got an investigation at the Pearl River Delta Region tomorrow, and it seems like we have a lot work ahead. So you might want to get some sleep." He told me with a sigh.

"Let's go get some sleep then." I told him while pulling him up with me.

With that we both went to bed. I tried not think too much, so I closed my eyes and let the sleep come over me. Tomorrow was going to be long day.

I woke up as a cold breeze hit my face. I shuddered as cool gust of wind hit me again. I turned over to look over at Carlos. He was dozed off, he sleeps like a log, nothing ever seems to wake him up. I checked the time, it was 7:05 in the morning. We don't have to get ready until the next two hours. I flicked Carlos nose, hoping he would get up. But he turned around facing his back towards me. Giving up I stood up and went to the bathroom to get ready. When I got ready and went out the bathroom. Carlos was in the middle of the bed snoring away. I ignored him and went downstairs. I noticed a file lying on the coffee table. The cover read "The Barren Land of Pearl River Delta Region", so this was what Carlos was talking about last night. I took the file and opened the first page and started reading. The file was about the investigation we had to do today. The place was a beach near a forest at the Pearl River Delta. Between the file lay a picture of the place. The sky seemed seem to

have been hung by gloom, and the water was pitch black. I put the picture on the table, but I couldn't get my eyes off it. The picture was captivating. I wonder what had happened in this place. A loud yawn pulled me out of my thoughts.

“So you finally decided to wake up?” I asked him, but it sounded more like a statement. He looked at me and then to the file that was lying on my lap.

“Oh, so you already read that. Great because you would eventually have too.” he said.

“The place, well...It seems very barren. Either the place has nothing at all or it is filled with secrets that we have to discover.” I replied. I was actually quite interested to go check this place.

“Well, we leave in the next forty-five minutes, which means you better start getting ready.” I pointed.

“Yeah right.” he said while sticking his tongue out at me.

I rolled my eyes at him and left.

“Wear something warm. I've heard it is freezing there in winter.” Carlos called back at me.

“Yeah, okay.” I mumbled and went to change my clothes.

I put on a pair of jeans, a full-sleeved shirt, a thick coat and a pair of boots and left my room. I waited for Carlos to come out. He came out carrying the bag of tools we needed for investigating.

We made our way to the barren beach at the other end of Macau. We drove till the beach, where we met our guide Serena Hui. She greeted us with a hello and took us to the place that I saw in the picture. The sky was suffocating, the dark clouds pressing in as if to crush you, the sea was pitch black, it was crashing against the rocks violently as if to shatter them any second. I looked around, the near the end of the beach there was a large rock almost like a rock. The waves were clashing furiously on the little cliff like rock. I noticed a shadow like figure on the end of the rock, I looked up at the sky and and looked back at the rock. I noticed that the figure was gone. I might have just imagined it, so I turned around and walked over to Carlos, who was taking the tools out the began the work.

Me and Carlos started looking around the shore for some rocks, to find some evidence from something from the past. I collected some rocks in a box, which I could study when I was back home. I felt a cool breeze pass me, it felt like I heard a sound, almost like a whisper calling someone. I looked around to see who the whisper belonged to. I found no one except Carlos, who was busy looking at some specific rock that he found. I start working again. But this time, I could feel the whispers get louder. I ignored it. Soon the whisper turned into an angry hiss. I felt like someone was trying to get my attention.

I look around, searching for who was trying to get my attention. Then I noticed a shadowy figure on the little cliff. I strained my eyes to look carefully at it. I went a bit closer, to get a clear picture. Soon I noticed the figure was a girls figure, she beckoned me to come closer. My mind told me not to go closer, but my feet weren't listening. I felt like being dragged towards the girl. I could here the her whispering something to me. As I got closer her voice became clearer. She wore a black sleeveless dress, her hair were brown and her eyes. Her eyes were a light hue of blue, her stare was boring into my head, sending shivers down my spine.

“Join me. Feel the breeze. Feel it against your face, let it flow in your hair.” she said.

I wanted to speak, say something anything, but my mouth was sealed. All I did was just stare. The girl kept talking.

“You know, the world is cruel. Very cruel, they only expect, never give. They only want

success. Without success you are a lizard being squashed under their feet. They break you until you cannot stand up. But we can escape this, we can be free.” She whispered to me softly.

I could hear Carlos call me from the back. But his calls were mixed with the wind. All I seem to know was the girl calling me towards her and I went. I was at the edge of the cliff standing next to her. Looking deeply into her ice cold eyes.

“Let’s get this over with. Let’s be free. We can escape this. Never live in fear. On the count of three.” She told me. She began the count.

1...

2...

And I was pulled back by someone. I saw the girl jump, I screamed for her. I screamed for her to come back. I betrayed her. Tears were streaming down my face hysterically. Carlos’ soothing words pulled me back to reality. I grabbed onto him, still sobbing.

“What’s wrong Adlyne? What happened?” he asked concerned.

“S-she jumped. She’d-died. I let her die. It’s my fault.” I cried into his chest.

“You didn’t do anything. You’re alright. I’m here.” He said trying to calm me down.

I tightened my grip on him and whispered,

“I want to go away from here. Far, far away.” I tell him.

“We’ll go. We’ll go as soon as possible.” He replied.

We went back to our rented house and stayed there for another week. Before we flew back to Seattle. No matter what I tried, I couldn’t forget the girl near the Pearl River Delta. I remembered her freezing stare and her distressed smile. I could never forget her, never forget her jumping of the cliff into the ocean as it swallowed her.

# Blood Sea

*Kellett School, Clifford, Florence - 12*

Far, far down below, the junk Eye of the Sea slid into the harbour as noiselessly as a panther, the red sails illuminated against the dark, brooding sky. Hidden in the black, rolling clouds above the sea the airship hovered, waiting to pounce. The red sails slipped on, the only ship on the deserted sea. Ahead was the harbour, the other ships resting peacefully; it was empty of human life and the only sound was the gentle slapping of the waves against the hulls of the boats. The sky above grew dark and ominous, the clouds merging together into threatening shapes. The airship waited.

There was a slight rustling of trees. A light glimmered in the harbour. It moved, twisting and turning down the slipway until it crossed the harbour wall, almost touching the rolling, pitching ocean. The junk subtly altered its course, heading towards the light.

Another light crept along the harbour wall towards it. The captain of the junk frowned. He had not known that there would be a second signalman. It might attract too much attention.

The second light clambered along the wall and stopped. The two lights made a door, a frame for the junk to slip through, unnoticed into the harbour. The captain relaxed and altered his course once more.

Only the airship, the Enigma Drift, hovering in the clouds, knew that the captain had relaxed too soon.

The Eye of the Sea was coming closer into the harbour, and the helmsman could make out the familiar brass lions guarding the entrance. The formerly friendly faces of the lions were tense and angry, bristling with rage. He shivered. Something was not quite right.

High above the harbour, at the top of the mountain, the lights in the hotel began to turn off. Slowly, one by one, at regular intervals, so that anybody watching would not realise what was happening. The cars in the driveway began to drive away, but the driveway was hidden by the forest, and the junk did not see.

But nor did Enigma, waiting silently in the clouds.

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Cal sat at the control desk, his hand suspended above a lever. They were stalling, trying to figure out what was going on below them.

September stood behind him, watching the red sails creep closer and closer into the harbour, into the area between the two lights. Those two swinging red paper lanterns were the only lights in the harbour; everything else was shrouded in darkness. She could just make out the guardian lions in the gloom and far away, in the distance, the city of Hong-Kong, surrounded on three sides by forest. She looked out to sea and glimpsed the rugged islands dotting the vast ocean, the moon reflected in the water, as calm as a mirror.

Neither of them noticed the snake of cars crawling down the mountain towards the harbour.

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Back in the hotel the bodies lay piled up on the ballroom floor.

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Underneath the airship's cabin, something was encased within a dozen walls, each one stronger than the last, but the trapdoor underneath it was flimsy and would give way at the touch of a button. A button only a few centimetres away from Cal's hands.

The something was an unassuming glass sphere, levitating above the trapdoor. It would fit in a child's palm, but the slightest touch would make a catastrophic explosion.

So if it was dropped from 1500 feet up in the air, the explosion when it hit the ground would be magnified a thousandfold.

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The cars rolled silently down the hill and came to a halt outside the harbour. The drivers stepped out, their deep purple livery almost as dark as the forest around them, guns at the ready, Scourge emblazoned on their sleeves, and they marched into the forest, calm and composed, but inside giddy with elation that Lion Base had been wiped out, and certain that the only danger they now faced was the junk with its precious cargo.

It never occurred to them that perhaps the only danger was in the sky, directly above them.

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Inside the base the exquisite marble tiles were stained with blood, and the silence was thick and claustrophobic.

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The red sails slowly trundled on. The captain felt a prickle of unease as the ship neared the lights. Leaving the helmsman in charge, he disappeared below deck. He walked down to the hold and he felt guilty at every footstep. He slowly creaked the door open and scanned the

room. The cargo was the one thing that seemed perfectly fine.

As his footsteps receded down the hallway, one of the boxes rattled.

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It was Cal who noticed the cars.

“Sep,” he cried, clutching her arm, “look at the forest!”

September followed his gaze and saw the telltale flash of purple.

“Oh no,” she whispered. “Oh no.”

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The captain of the Eye hadn’t seen the purple; nor had he seen the massacre in the hotel base; nor had he seen the Enigma Drift. He thought that everything was perfectly fine, though he could not shake off the feeling that something was wrong. He was delivering the very latest of the Machines to the League’s Lion Base, and the lights on the wall were signalling him in. He had been sent word of only one signalman, but surely another one was just a mistake.

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In the hotel the real signalman was dead.

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In the hold of the Eye, the Machines were beginning to come alive. Their brains were ticking away and they began to shift, itching to get out of their six-inch thick containers.

Six-inch metal was no match for the Machines and they knew it. The time had almost come. The League would be horrified to know what their own robots were planning, but it had been foolhardy to attempt to outwit a Machine.

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They were on the deck now; their containers were lying in shattered pieces on the floor of the hold and their eyes glinted with the prospect of killing. The Mortals below them were scurrying about, pure terror etched on their faces. Their faces impassive, the Machines swung their claws at the Mortals, as blood spilled onto the deck like red paint and clouded the sea below. The bodies, gashed and bleeding, were tossed overboard, swept up in the waves and lost forever. The captain backed away, consumed with a cold fear that ate away at his heart. As the Machines turned towards him, he leapt off the boat and the blood-drenched sea tossed him onto the rocks, his final cry ricocheting around the secluded bay, as the Machines, gloating, swung the boat around.

A tremendous splintering crash. Metallic screams. The sheathing of claws. Cal and September raced outside and below them they saw the Eye, torn apart by the shark-like jaws of the rocks. The planks fell apart, ripped in two, and the metal containers of the machines fell with a clang into the ocean below.

September gasped. She was so used to death she was not frightened of it, but the sight of

the Machines made her suddenly feel cold, despite the suffocating tropical heat.

Nine-foot-tall robots, their spidery legs whirring menacingly, swam to the shore. They gripped the rocks and climbed up the wall; snatching the terrified lights and snapping the sentries' necks; marching into the forest, up the hill, into the Scourge: hundreds of robots on a killing spree.

September and Cal didn't hesitate. Instantly the airship's engines kicked in and it whirred away, speeding towards the forest. The spidery Machines charged, overpowering the Scourge, and soon a vicious battle was underway.

The Enigma Drift hung above them. Inside the cabin Cal felt his bravery draining away, but September stood upright, her hand hovering over the fateful button.

She turned to face him. "Ready?" she whispered.

Neither the Machines nor the Scourge soldiers noticed the airship sweeping over them until it was too late.

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Far away, the lights of Hong-Kong were beginning to come on, and the sky was turning to a dusky grey. As the people began to wake up and the city came alive again, a tiny glass orb fell from an airship cloaked in clouds, a thunderous roar echoed around the archipelago and a volcano of sparks and flames erupted from the forest in the distance. Liquid fire flowed down the hill, reaching out with burning fingers and grabbing trees, turning them to ashes, and the Machines and Scourge soldiers, mangled and contorted by the flames, screamed in horror, one last time.

But the Enigma Drift had escaped unscathed, and September and Cal were floating away, rising high into the air, as the inferno blazed beneath them, swallowing tree and soldier and Machine alike.

Light flooded into the sky and the windows of the airship, and underneath them they could see the Pearl River Delta, its waters shimmering and iridescent, stretching away into eternity, and they watched until the city was hidden by the clouds.

# Can't do it? Or won't do it?

*Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Young, Stephanie - 14*

‘A young child at the age of eight was sent to the hospital last night.’

He took off his spectacles tenderly, discreetly placing them onto his desk. He let out a muted sigh, mildly running his fingers through his dark hair, as if trying to ease the burden that had been constantly pressured upon him.

‘Symptoms of vomiting and sudden memory loss that were speculated to be brought up by the current epidemic that had been sweeping throughout southern China was found on the child, however doctors are still not able to find out the reason behind these various symptoms, though some assume it is simply the trend of a tropical flu that would likely end in a few weeks time.’

The man glanced at the blaring radio, the only source of sound in the room that was supposed to be his ‘research room’, the only source of vigor in his tedious work life.

‘Some reason that it is the cause of contaminated food sources, but up till now scientists and doctors still cannot find a reasonable explanation to this formidable phenomenon.’

He closed his sleepless eyes for a brief moment; his exhausted mind was too fatigued to be able to continue with his work any longer. When was the last time he actually had a full night’s sleep? Was it a few days ago? Or was it a month?

‘Local news: environmentalists have been sending many proposals to the government for the past few months, claiming that the Peal River Delta is now being highly polluted by biochemical factories, however the government does not seem to take any action on this matter.’

“Lu, please get on with your work.”

The man, now known as Lu, jumped up at the sudden warning coming from his superior, immediately putting on his glasses and muttering an inaudible apology before digging back into his paperwork.

“I’m sure you are certain of what you need to do as a biochemical researcher, Lu.”

That was how Lu’s life every day went by.

★ ★ ★

“When was the last time you had a break?”

Lu’s eyes flew open as he gasped slightly, shocked by the sudden company that joined him. He didn’t even notice that he had been lying on his desk for the past hour, dozing off before he could even stop himself.

“I’m sorry sir, I’ll get back to my work immediately...”

“No, no,” the young newcomer stopped him, placing a hand on Lu’s in a friendly matter. “I’m not your superior... But, I can’t believe you’ve forgotten about me, Lu.”

The radio crackled in the background, creating a tense atmosphere around the two men. The newcomer happily made himself comfortable by pulling out a chair and sitting on it. Lu made no sign of dispute.

Lu looked up blearily, drinking in the ecstatic appearances of this man. His sculpted jaw lifted with a smile that seemed to radiate felicity wherever he went. And that honey-like voice...

“Fei...?”

Fei smiled heartily, his eyes fitting towards Lu’s table, piled with various documents filled with confidential information.

“Do you like your work?”

Lu shrugged mindlessly.

“It’s... my job.”

Fei sighed, letting his forehead rest against Lu’s table in a childish manner, his eyes never leaving Lu’s.

“You’ve changed, Lu.”

At that, Lu snapped his head up, his eyes meeting Fei’s brown orbs for the first time. His lips formed a small frown, eyes squinting at Fei, who glared back in an equal demeanor.

“I’m sure you know, Lu,” the laughter had completely evaporated from his eyes, his customary warmth gone quicker than spring showers on hot sizzling earth. A strange fire seemed to be burning in those brown orbs. “Your company, your beloved job, you know how they are contaminating the Pearl River Delta waters with the waste of unlawful genetic engineering of a new hereditary product which produces waste that brings up symptoms of vomiting and sudden memory loss.” Fei was now inching closer to Lu, a subtle smirk playing at the corner of his lips in his moment of arrogant triumph. “Ring any bells?”

“You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I perfectly know very well what I’m saying, but do you know what had you been doing for the past, what, ten years?”

Lu had now pushed Fei to the ground, snarling at him like a wild animal. Unexpectedly, Fei looked less than surprised at Lu’s sudden act of violence, instead, he actually laughed.

“Despite working in such a barbaric association, doesn’t mean you have to be senseless machines and work for such uncivilized causes. Look what you’ve become. A mindless animal.”

“Shut up.”

Lu raised his hand, preparing to deliver a hard blow to the petty face of his friend, but at the same time, a nagging feeling from the pit of his stomach seemed to be warning him that this wasn’t right.

“Lu, I’ve been aiding the government in finding the cure for this disease, this... catastrophe for years,” Fei reasoned, “These...orders from your superiors, it’s illogical, immoral even. Lu, what happened to the memories? What happened to ‘protecting our home?’”

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“Lu!” Fei ran through the grassy lands near Xi Jiang, a major southern river of the Pearl River Delta, his pretty hair blown from his face, but his face seemed pale, ashen even. “Lu, something wrong has happened!”

The dark-haired Chinese boy who had been sitting quietly on the grass, enjoying how

the sky adorned itself with brilliant shades of red and orange, how alluring swirls of color of this enticing splendor had taken his breath away, and yet this boy had to ruin such an overwhelming moment of peace.

“Your mother...” Lu’s attention immediately came to its full at the mention of his own mother, “she was poisoned, and the contaminated food of the River Delta...”

Those words fell from Fei’s lips like vapor, but landed into Lu’s stomach as shards of glass. Before Lu could even register the blood that drained from his face, he was already running, his feet pounding on the green terrain, heart hammering in his chest, and what he saw next tore his remaining forlorn hope into crumbled shreds into despair.

He couldn’t bring himself to believe the sprawled figure on his own doorstep was his own mother.

“Lu... I’m sorry...” that figure said in a wistful voice, “I failed to be a responsible mother...” The icy hand that touched Lu didn’t even feel humane, freezing, like a corpse’s depleted from blood. The lifeless limb weakly caressed his face, the once rosy red lips now formed a forced cracked smile. “Promise...” her breath seemed to come in uneven gasps, “Promise me to be a good man... Protect our home, our Pearl River Del...”

The hand went limp as it fell onto the body’s side, lifeless. Lu stared at the figure that was supposed to be his mother, her arms that had once brought him warmth and protection with her embraces were now scattered limply like a rag doll thrown onto the ground, her once beautiful complexion was now drained from its usual color. All these adding to the bluish lips of hers seemed unreal to Lu. Something that had once been so powerfully alive did not seem logical to disappear so quickly.

The shock was too sudden, hitting Lu like waves of realization, as the poor boy dropped to his knees, his agonizing wails echoing in the house, not even noticing Fei inch closer to him, hearing the words that left his mouth at that moment of misery.

“I promise.”

★ ★ ★

“I knew I failed her.” The atrocious memory was still clearly embodied into his mind; he remembered every detail, every emotion that racked through his frail body that day. “Every day... the same nightmare. It was as though I was seeing everything in black and white.”

Fei’s brown eyes searched Lu’s dark ones, the maroon orbs swirling with a mixture of compensation and suspicion, but still, Fei smiled, once again placing his hand on Lu’s, trying to ease his suffering.

“Ten years... what kind of monster had I become? Can I even become human again?”

“Sometimes... it’s hard to leave what you’ve always been through... but then, sometimes it brings you things you otherwise had never dreamt of...”

Lu looked back into Fei’s warm stare, his aura of felicity has returned, surrounding him, his smile mending the torn shreds of despair back into the little chunk of hope that still lies deep in that devastated broken heart of his. He gathered the pile of paperwork on his desk, handing them to Fei. And for the first time in ten years, Lu smiled.

“I’m sure these information would aid in the research of the government finding the cure for the disease.”

Fei gratefully took the papers and placed them against his chest, a wide smile growing on his lips, tears seemed to be glistening from his own orbs, tears of relief; tears of joy.

“Some things were worth the risk after all.”

## Ba Gua Dream

*Shekou International School, Kapur, Prisha - 14*

“**W**o yao..um..yao yi..um..” stutters Bill, as he frantically scrolls through his English to Chinese dictionary. He decided to buy one at a tourist shop near the airport, along with about half a dozen traditional Chinese black ink paintings. I personally thought them to be slightly overpriced, but that did not stop him from purchasing them.

Bill continues to struggle with his order, and by now, he has attracted a crowd. Everyone sitting in the small wooden chairs lined up next to the counter have moved their gaze from their food to Bill. They smile and snicker to themselves every time Bill tries to form a sentence, with some of them being not so discreet with their amusement. A old man carrying sacks of hay stops and listens Bill. He has a hunched back and torn up clothes, but that does not stop from a smile forming on his face. And the chef, is even more amused. He has a bloated belly and wears a white apron with stains covering its front. He listens carefully and tries to understand what he can as Bill speaks his broken Chinese in the hopes to order a plate of shrimp fried rice.

“Bill, would you please knock it off? Some of us are a little hungry here.” I state while gesturing towards my belly.

“Wait, hang on a second son. I almost got this” he says hurriedly.

Ignoring his pleas completely, I point at the picture of the delicious looking stir-fried noodles on the menu. I tilt it toward the chef, asking him to take it as my order. The chef in return, nods his head and turns around to find his ingredients. I slide myself deeper into the uncomfortable, minuscule wooden chair, and place my hands on the light wooden counter. I continue to hear Bill’s desperate attempts to get the chef’s attention, and silently laugh to myself.

It is times like this that I like to observe, and look around my surroundings. I look and see the busy streets in front of me. I see old women walking around carrying tiny feathery objects with a black structure. Back home, people call them Chinese dream catchers. But Bill told me that their real name is ‘Ba Gua’. They are kept in the homes of Feng Shui practitioners, and are believed to have the power to ward off evil spirits.

I see a group of men pass by, wearing identical straw hats. Not the ones they sell at airports made from plastic and glue, these are handmade. Every single piece of straw has been placed on the base and sowed together.

I see a man selling noodles on what looks like a wok and stove set up on a trolley connected to a bicycle. I can see him stirring around the ‘lo mien’ with expertise. This

was probably a recipe taught to him by his parents, and to his parents by their parents. This is how everything is here. Passed down through the generations, and having such tremendous meaning and long history. He has such an addictive smile on his lips, that I can't help but form one on my lips as well.

And it is times like this, times when I sit and look around, when I wonder, how on earth did I get here? How did life lead me to this small food joint in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, China? Looking back, it all seems like such a blur.

"Hey Greg!" shouted a voice from behind me. I turned around and found that it was Bill!

"Hey how are you Bill?" I asked.

"I'm doing okay son, how are you? Your mother doing okay?"

"Yeah, they're holding up, its always hard this time of year for mom. She seems so... fragile. It's so weird to think of her as someone who can actually...well, be hurting. She is always so good at concealing her emotions, sometimes it feels like she doesn't have any." I said, and I meant every single word. Bill was the only one I could ever really speak to truthfully.

Well, there was dad, but that's over now.

"Yeah? Well, this time of year is not easy for any of us. How's football going?" he asked.

I looked down at my attire, the knee length tights, and shoulder pads covered in a murky green jersey with the number "9" written on it.

"Yeah, its going great Bill, thanks for asking."

"Look, I know this must be hard for you bud, but you're gonna make it through. Tell you what, how about you come over to my office after your football practice is over. I need to discuss some thing with you. You know where my office building is?" He asked in his usual loving voice.

"Yeah, I know the way. Dad used to take me there when I was younger."

"Oh yeah, of course son. Well, I guess I will see you there." And with that, he walks off of the field. I finished with practice and took a short shower, then made my way straight towards Bill's office building. It took some tries to get the truck started, but it eventually got going!

I stepped into the front reception of Bechtel Corporation.

"Hi, I am here to see Bill Benson." I tried to put on my most formal voice.

"And who might you be?" questioned the receptionist, even though she gave me the feel that she really didn't care.

"I am well, um, I am a friend."

"All right then kiddo, make your way straight, its the first door to your right."

"Thanks." I replied hurriedly, and walked in the directions the receptionist told me to.

Soon enough, I saw a fully glass door on my right, with the letters "Bill Benson. Head of Marketing." printed on. I knocked on the door, and Bill gestured me to come in. He was on the phone, so I just made my way toward the couch and took a seat.

"Ok, ke yi. Ok, listen dude, is there anyone there who speaks english? No english?"

Hello? Ni hao? Wo bu speak Chinese? Hello? Can you put an English speaking person on the phone please? Oh just screw it!" he yelled frantically, his patience running out with every word from the other side. And eventually, he hung up with a frustrated groan.

"What was that? it seemed like you were speaking some Korean there for a second." I asked.

"It was actually Chinese. Learned some on a business trip a few months ago. Its a great place China, but damn the language is a pain." replied Bill. I simply nodded my head in

response, while awkwardly brushing my hand on the fabric of the sofa. Bill took a big gulp.

“And this actually brings me to what I wanted to ask you in the first place.” he said.

“Greg, your father, he was an amazing man. He was so—”

“Yeah, yeah he was amazing. What happened to him was so very sad. Bill, I have heard this all before. From grandma, from mom, from the guy who sells hot dogs outside your office. I know exactly what you are going to say. I have heard it all a million times in the past five years.

And I sit there and I listen to all of it, because I don't want to act rude. But Bill, I really do not want to do this talk with you too.” I sighed in frustration.

“No, no Greg listen! I did not ask you to come here for some sympathy speech or even to make you feel better for that matter. I..um...I need to tell you something. Your father, well, he was an amazing person. He used to travel a lot, especially when you were younger. Did you know that? He was gone almost one week from the month. And he didn't just travel to different parts of America, he went all around the world. Place you would have never even heard of.

Countries and cities he couldn't even pronounce the names of. But his favorite place of all, was China. He loved going there. He loved everything about China. The food, the culture, the art. He even took me a couple of times. We used to have so much fun, traveling from the peak of Tibet and all the way down to Guangdong.” He said, with the utmost fascination on his face.

“And how does this ever so slightly relate to me?” I asked.

“Greg, you guys never really got to travel along with your dad. Your mother won't let you miss school, and you just never really got the time to go. But, your father once told me, that he wanted to take you there.”

“Take me where?”

“To China of course! To show you the busy streets of Causeway Bay in Hong Kong. And to hike in the mountains of Guilin. He wanted to show you the world Greg. He wanted to take you with him and—”

“You know what, if he really wanted to show me the world, he should have stuck around to do so himself. My father made a lot of promises back in the day, and it took me some time, but I have finally caught on and know he cannot keep any of them” I stated angrily. I did not need to hear all the broken promises my father made, not today. I stood up from my seat and started walking towards the door.

“No, Greg please listen. I know your father is never going to get the chance to get to show you those places himself, but that doesn't mean you should miss out on them.” I stopped moving, but still faced the other way. I tilted my head sideways.

“What are you trying to say?”

“I am trying to say that I want to take you to China with me. Let me show you the sites that your father found such admiration for, the cuisine that he fell in absolute love with, and the culture he spent his life studying.” I turned around to face Bill.

“Well, if I wanted to ever eat Chinese food, I could just go to that Momos place next to the motel. Isn't that enough? It has everything I need to know about China in the first place.

Waiters with straw hats, and meat with a side of rice. It's much cheaper than flying half way around the world, and probably much safer as well.”

“No Greg, you don't understand. This was your father's dream. He used to tell me about

all of the sites he was going to show you when he brought you to China. He had pin pointed all of the restaurants he was going to take you to. All of the villages you were going to visit, and all of the accessories you were going to buy. Hell, he probably even picked the exact food you were going to eat. This was your father's dream Greg, his dream. He knew you would fall in love with the Chinese culture, just as he did." pleaded Bill.

"Ni hao, ni de mian" says the chef, pulling me out of my trance. He slides a plate of noodles enveloped in a dark sauce towards me. I grab a pair of disposable chopsticks nearby and snap them in half. I dig straight into my noodles, with very little difficulty to my surprise.

"You're really getting the hang of those chopsticks aren't you?" says Bill, finally taking a halt from his attempt at Chinese.

"Same cannot be said for your Mandarin Bill", I chuckle.

"Hey, it is a hard language to learn. And at least I try. All you do is point at things and draw pictures." says Bill.

"Yeah, and I have a plate of food in front of me, do you?"

"Ahh, forget it. Hey, do you remember that time I called you into my office, and first told you about China?" Bill walks forward and takes a seat on a stool next to me.

"Yeah, like it was just a few minutes ago" I say, smiling to myself.

"Yeah, I suddenly got reminded of that from this place. You know, your father brought me here for the first time about ten years ago. You were no more than a baby back then."

"Hey, I was almost eight years old." I say, while picking up another string of the fat flour noodles.

"Yeah yeah, whatever. But anyway, I remember when your father first brought me here. I was so, so ignorant. All I could think of was how dirty the streets were, and how unhygienic the food might be. But your father, he was the one that showed me that there is so much more to this tiny little food joint than the flies lurking around the front of it. That there is so much more to this street than the uneven pavement you find here and there. That there is so much more to this country than what you hear on the news." Bill says, raising his voice ever so slightly after every sentence.

"I know Bill, I know." I pause for a minute, and put down my chopsticks. "When I look back, it all seems so surreal. That I actually was that person once. Who thought that all China was was a bowl full of rice." I take a big gulp, and continue. "You know what Bill, I think I know why dad kept on coming back to this place. I think I know why he feel in love with the language, the people and the culture. Bill this place, this place is amazing. Its so amazing. And dad saw that beauty, in every curve of the ancient cave carvings. In every slice of salt cooked chicken.

And in every smile of the little village children." I laugh at myself.

"You know when I said that I was only doing this because dad would have wanted me to?" I ask, and Bill nods his head. "I think I might have to take that back. Take back what I said about this trip being a one time thing to finally get you off my back. And you better practice your Chinese when we get back home, because I might just need to come back here once more. Not for dad, not for you, but to eat those amazing dumplings again in Shenzhen." Bill lets out a heartwarming chuckle.

"What, I thought you got Momos back home next to the motel huh? Isn't that much cheaper than flying half way around the world to China?" he asks while making quotation marks with his fingers.

"Yeah, that Momos place is really great. But sadly, it isn't China."

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*St. Joseph's College, Wong, Sean - 12*

## Lychee Red

She was in a scene of velvet darkness. Suddenly, she felt something hot behind her. It was starting to get warmer, as if something, something was gliding smoothly across the surface towards her. She decided to look backwards. Nothing. Nothing but a red dot glimmering in the distance. It was getting bigger and bigger by the second. Finally, she saw it. It was a massive snake, shooting out a fiery flame, and it was getting closer to her. Closer and closer...

Lihung jumped up. What a strange dream! She saw a few lychees before her, plump and red. They were the best in the village. She laughed. She must have been daydreaming again. She picked them and proceeded to the next tree. Her dad planted the trees by Xi Jiang when she was born. She was named Lihung - Lychee Red.

She was covered with sweat. It was hard work in the villages. She looked towards where the river flowed. That was where the cities were supposed to be. No one in their village had been there, but propaganda posters that were everywhere told them that the cities were marvelous, and Lihung thought so too.

She returned to picking lychees as quickly as she could, throwing them into the basket she had behind her. As she felt the lychees, she already knew they were the sweetest and plumpest of the season. She had to pick more to sell to the fruit stall owners who were coming later that day. She hoped she could get a good price. The family needed more money to nurse her father back to health.

Suddenly, “Brr...” It was the sound of a motorbike! She had never seen one since her neighbor married! She rushed to the muddy dirt road and hoped to see it. There it was! The motorbike was shiny and sleek. It swerved and parked in the dead center of their field.

A woman stepped off the bike, signaling the driver to stand and wait. Then she walked towards the door, ignoring Lihung. She was wearing high heels and a red dress, as red as the lychees, trying to avoid stepping on the mud. Then, the woman knocked the door repeatedly. Lihung rushed forward to open it for her. She expected a thank you, but the lady just walked past, ignoring her. Then, Lihung’s mother ran forward and interrupted, “Nihao, let’s... talk

inside.”

In the next few days after the woman left, mum was quiet. She said nothing, all she did was to sit by her husband’s bed. But, she also wept alone quietly in the night. Lihung didn’t know why, but she was sure that it was something to do with the awful lady she had met.

Soon, the truth revealed itself. A fortnight later, the same lady came. Then, her mother came and said to her, “Lihung, I’d like you to go with this lady. She will lead you to a factory down the river, where you will earn some money.” Before Lihung could say anything, her mother handed her a red packet. There was a dollar in it. “May you have a safe trip along the river.” Lihung realized what had happened. She had finally got her chance, her chance to go to the city!

They went to a dock by motorbike, then got on a boat, travelling down Xi River. It was daybreak when she left. The water was clear. She could see fish swimming downstream, cows grazing the grass and farmers ploughing their fields, harvesting the fruit of their work. But by the end of the day, there were no more fields and grass and flowers. She could see a dimmed sky, some three storied houses and down in the river, the fish swam slowly. And sometimes, they saw some more boats, going in the same direction as they were.

It was evening when she awoke from a nap. She could see only one thing before her. Buildings, hundreds of towering buildings, with chimneys reaching to the sky, scraping the clouds. Neon lights blinked and blinked. There were cars, driving around in hordes and a faint sound of strange music. She was astonished. It seemed as if she had travelled to the future. But as she looked downwards, she saw no fish, at least no living ones, they were all dead, white bellies to the sky.

Soon, they docked. Lihung was led off the ship and to a massive building just by the river. As she entered it, she saw a beautiful office. It was clean and tidy, unlike her village home, which never was. She walked upstairs. It was the factory. She could see people all wearing pale blue shirts and white hats, with their heads down, cutting and sewing, cutting and sewing. Still upwards, she saw a massive room. It was the dormitory. Walking from one end to the other was like hauling water from the river. It could accommodate at least a hundred workers!

In the first few days of her job, the foreman assigned her to thread cutting, with the easy job of removing all excess yarn from jeans. It was tiring, plus she could only earn 5 yuan a day. But she worked seven days a week, 30 days a month, hoping to earn some money.

The living conditions were not good, and all the windows and doors were sealed with iron bars. The foreman said it was for the safety of the girls, as the city was a dangerous place. She didn’t know why. She had never left the compound. The foreman told them not to leave and save every penny, as by Chinese New Year, he would help everyone send their money home.

One day, as they were working in the factory, Lihung heard a loud knock on the door, getting heavier and heavier. “Thump, thump, thump.” The foreman ran up, panting, “All those under 16, hide somewhere, now, quiet!”

Ten of them ran into the toilet, the only toilet they had. It was stinky, but they had to follow their orders. Then Lihung heard voices.

“You know manager, your building is in quite a bad shape, and look at all those windows and doors...” It was an unfamiliar voice. An inspector! She had heard from her co-workers about them who came once a year.

“Yes, we have been having...some financial problems lately...so...”

“I understand your concerns, but safety for all is a priority for the nation.”

“Let’s go to a restaurant, I’ve reserved a table there, let’s ... discuss this there...”

It was getting stuffy in the toilet. Lihung opened the window which was so old its iron bars had worn off. She wanted to get some fresh air. But as she opened it, all she smelt was stinky, stinky smog. There was the decaying of the dead fish, the smoke of the chimneys... She slammed the windows shut.

After quite a long time, the foreman pushed open the door and told them to come out. Lihung was relieved. She was freed from the suffocating toilet. Suddenly, she thought she saw a snake breathing out fire at the corner of her eye, but she quickly dismissed it.

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It was the night before Chinese New Year—the time when Lihung could go back to her home. And she was. She had just had dinner with her parents. Her father was getting better, their family was smiling...

She woke to the screams and cries of her fellow workers. Lihung was sleepy, but she turned to look at why they were screaming. Nothing usually frightened them. There it was. A giant snake lashing through the dormitory. The snake snapped its mouth open. Fire billowed out. Then, it stared her in the eye. It breathed its fire. Lihung jumped off her bed, and hid behind it, closing her eyes. When she opened them again, her bed had been burnt to nothingness, along with her snoring friend who slept on the lower level of the bunk bed.

She ran away. The door was burning, and workers were running all over, trying to avoid the menace. She had to find another way! She didn’t know what to do. Then the concrete slabs fell. One after another, they tumbled. There was an escape route! She ran towards the hole in the wall. Behind the hole was the river. Lihung hoped she could jump in it. But the snake followed her. She jumped.

Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. She was turning. She could see the river beneath her, but she could also see the snake right behind. It stuck its tongue out and hissed in anger. Then it pounced, a huge flame. Lihung saw it grow, powerless to stop it. The flame was soon all around her, wrapping her up like the peel of a lychee on the flesh. She felt burning pain around her.

She screamed in pain, closing her eyes.

She opened them again. A scene of velvet darkness.

# The Worst Day Ever

*St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section),  
Wong, Judith - 12*

I thought getting fired would be the worst part of a job, but I guessed I was wrong.

The grey, cloudy skies matched the drab uniform of the workers walking to work, most of their faces buried in their masks. The toxic air only made it worse, making the people's skin pale and sickly. With their hunched back shoulders and fatigued expression, it was obvious that they were working overtime, and I was just here, watching them pass by. Once, I was in that group of people, dragging myself towards the large factory. Now, I am unemployed, and everything in my head was a large blank. It was devastating. On the bright side, I was free from that demonic factory who had no sympathy for any of the workers.

I've already found a job that suited me, even though I just got fired a few days ago. It was a change from what I did in my previous job. Instead of overworking in the day, I would be a night guard at night. Surprisingly, they offered such a high pay for it plus it wasn't even difficult at all. Only a day later, I received the letter from the company agreeing that they would hire me which was strange. Firstly, companies often take a few weeks to review it. I shrugged the thought off, and returned to staring at the gray horizon.

I set off in work in the given uniform, and I silently pray for luck. Mainly because I am actually really superstitious and avoided walking under ladders (there was a lot of construction around the factory). This was a large toy factory producing toys for famous toy companies. Again I could see the emotionless workers, their eyes fatigued from the work. A person, wearing the same uniform as me, began speaking with a heavy Chinese accent. His voice was squeaky and small, probably because everyone thought I was a little intimidating with my height. "You're Dan Chan right?"

I sighed. He said my last name wrong, I hated when people did that. I opened my mouth to tell him that, but he cut me off.

"The new night security guard?"

I could only nod, no longer bothered by the fact that he couldn't pronounce anything.

"I am your partner for night surveillance." I held in a groan, as this was the best thing

that could happen. At least he wasn't those people who did friendship bracelets and braided each other's hair and planned on being best friends forever.

"Come, follow me," said the person. I didn't move, and instead, I asked a question.

"What's your name?"

"You can call me Sam."

I followed Sam to a room with countless screens. They were extremely large, and you could see the workers, every one of them, working on those dolls that gave a slightly eerie feeling.

Sam noticed me staring and said, "Those dolls are creepy, but you'll get used to it." He began going on about the different screens and the buttons.

I was only listening half-heartedly. This job was easy, apart from the dolls with their bald heads and unblinking eyes... I don't even know how children enjoy looking at their devilish appearance. I shook the thought away before more negative things corrupted my mind and I should focus on whatever my new job partner was trying to tell me despite his weak English.

"... and this is basically everything you have to do." Sam finished. He looked relieved when he concluded his tutorial. He then opened his mouth as if to say something, but he closed his mouth. I glanced over at him suspiciously, but he simply pointed at one of the screens.

"They're leaving," he told me.

Before I could say anything, an older woman burst into the room. She was in the same uniform as me, and I assumed she was a security guard for this factory also. Her face was caked with makeup, hair pulled back in a bun so tight, I almost thought all her hairs were going to fall off when she took her bun off. She eyed me skeptically for a second, before clearing her throat and started to talk.

"I apologize for being late, I had some matters to deal with. We hired you for a special reason. One, of course, is to replace the former security guard. Two, there has been some unusual things happening around here." I didn't like the sound of 'unusual things'. "It has... caused some quite unexpected casualties." I stiffened slightly. I probably did my prayers wrong. "It has been happening for quite a while, and the previous night have all are gone mysteriously."

"Alright, I understand." I answered, trying to sound as confident as possible.

After the woman left, I sat down on a chair, staring at the numerous screens. Sam did the same.

"What about you, Sam? Were you employed before the other security guards?" I asked as casually as possible.

"I... Well, saw what happened to them, but I never could see it clearly enough to provide evidence." he added, "It's not lucky to talk about that at times like this."

I decided not to answer any more questions, and continued staring at the screen with all the dolls. The faint buzzing of static screens made it more unnerving. The long silence continued, the longer I stared at the screen, the more it seemed that the dolls were moving inch by inch. Shaking my head, I was probably simply sleepy. I looked over to my right, and Sam was sleeping. Abruptly, there was a deafening crash, coming along with a something falling – I could feel shards of glass hitting my skin. Just as I was about to reach for my flashlight, a sudden piercing sound made me drop my flashlight and cover my ears. I had my eyes open, and I swore I saw a dark shadow, rushing away from the scene. When it finally stopped, I shakily stood up and turned my flashlight on. I shone it around the room, and there was no sign of Sam, except a lot of broken glass, with a couple of large rocks. I stopped

at the wall where the woman earlier stood, now was spray painted with which I recognized, a bunch of Chinese profanities. I heard a low groaning behind me, and a small shiver went down my spine. I turned around, and I was glad to see Sam. He was still in a daze.

We stood there for a moment, catching our breaths. "Sam, look." I pointed my flashlight to the wall with the spray painted wall. Sam winced a little at the words written on the wall.

"Today isn't as bad as it was at least." Sam told me. I didn't say anything back, with the million thoughts buzzing in my mind. Oh god, what did I get myself into?

The echo of rapid footsteps was coming closer, and I could feel Sam tense beside me. Gladly, it was only the woman who warned me about the strange things happening.

She simply took a glance at the wall, and asked us immediately, "What happened?" I explained to her about the crash, the broken glass and the wall.

"We should find somewhere else to talk about this." Sam suggested, his eyes darting around the room looking for any signs of abnormal activity. I agreed, and so did the woman. We went to the convenience store nearby. The shopkeeper seemed bored, and sleepy. He didn't even look up when we entered, so I guess he probably wouldn't eavesdrop on us.

"We need to do something, before it does hurt us. According to previous events, they are trying to scare us, every night more and more worse than the previous night, and if we don't act fast, we're -" The woman imitated her neck being cut open. "We were lucky today, I think the person doing this was probably surprised."

"Why don't you call the police and let them deal with it?" I asked. The police seemed like a much better idea.

"That's because it's going to go on the media, and companies won't hire us to manufacture anymore, seeing that there are possibilities that their products will be damaged, and that won't work well." The woman replied.

"First step of finding out the criminal - be the criminal." Sam suggested.

Before he could say anything else, a man walked in, and I realized he was the CEO of the old factory I worked in, because on his shirt, was the familiar logo that I resented so much. Apparently, he didn't seem to recognize me. His name was Bob.

"What are you folks doing here so late at night?" He asked, with a grin so friendly it seemed suspicious.

"None of your business," I replied quickly. I didn't trust this man. If he could make your life like a nightmare, he was probably the devil himself.

Sam smacked my arm. "Don't be rude, Dan." I muttered a quick apology, and Bob only laughed.

"No worries. I just came in here to get some food, then go back to work." He said. My expression remained brittle until he left.

"Why is he doing stuff so late at night?" I questioned the others. Did anyone even realize that?

"It's not really that unusual for other workers to work overnight." The woman replied me. "Why were you so rude at him anyway?"

"Nothing, I simply didn't want anyone else to interrupt us." I decided not to tell them about my old job. My head wouldn't stop thinking about Bob though. Factories hating other factories weren't uncommon, because they all were very competitive and wanted earn more money, of course. But destroying and painting graffiti on the wall seem more cowardly than being competitive.

"Okay, Sam, you can continue your idea." The woman said. We continued discussing about Sam's plan, even though it wasn't so ideal but it was the only chance we have. After a

long time, light began seeping through the windows. We agreed that the plan should happen tonight, and we were off to do our own things. And there went my first day of work.

I was so exhausted from what had happened today, and once I reached home, I slept without bothering to change my clothes.

It was the afternoon when I arrived, the glass was swept up but the graffiti was still there. Sam already went up to the air ducts and observed – there were some dents, so it was obvious that someone had been up there. The attacker must have thrown rocks through the air ducts, probably with another person turning off the power for the lights. We loosened the grill bit of the air ducts, so when the attacker started throwing rocks, the grill would fall off and we would be able to see who it was.

And so Sam and I sat at the room again, with a small laptop showing the activities of the workers. Sam had his eyes fixed on th

"Shouldn't you be looking at the air duct?" I asked him.

"Dan, you were hired to be a night security guard and look out for any robbers. Also, the attacker would obviously realize that something was up." Sam answered in a low voice.

I nodded and went back to looking at the screen. There was nothing much really, and this was also mainly why I chose to do this job. I began to feel drowsy, but I forced myself to stay awake. The attacker could come anytime soon. As I was about to close my eyes and take a 2 second nap, a sudden clattering sound made me jump to my senses. And on the floor, was a dusty, black clothed man. On his shirt, was only the too familiar logo of my old job's factory.

The woman stormed into the room, glaring at the man. "I called the police already, they'll be coming here soon."

The man was still in a daze, obviously confused. Me and Sam had already tied him up tightly, preventing him to escape. The man struggled to get out of the ropes, but obviously he wasn't strong enough. Grunting, he asked, "What do you want from me?"

Sam opened his mouth to say something, but his face was as red as a tomato, furious. Looking out at the small window. Sirens were blaring outside. The man struggled even more, his eyes wide when he knew what was going to happen. The police rushed to the room, and arrested the man.

A few days later, this was in the news – the demonic factory I used to work in was now closed, since their CEO got arrested for trying to harm other factories. Apparently we weren't the only ones being affected. Most factories along the Pearl River Delta also had been suffering from these attacks too. Other than that, my salary got a rise too.

Maybe I was wrong about this being the worst after all.



# Fiction

Group 4

# The Presidential Boy

*Chinese International School, Cheah, Yew San - 15*

The moonlight gushed into the balcony like silver water weeping cold as sin into a vast, desolate ocean, and, as a consequence of the door being left open; the hotel room was filled with the rich scent of chrysanthemums. Inappropriately, he had flung himself on the wicker divan outside, though it was after dark. Defiantly, he knew if his mother found out, she would surely ground him (the family was departing the hotel first thing in the morning). However, in the ecstasy of lying there and so breathlessly, on that last summer's night, catching the winter gleam of the stars, he wrote, very romantically (for he had developed the habit during CTY):

The Sheraton Hotel, Sanya,  
August 25--26  
Dear Cecile:

When I think about not being with you at freshman year prom next June, as well as all those inexhaustible, wild-lovey-dovey dances (especially Christmas) that exist only to “get in” (organized by one hierarchical arts committee or the other), I feel I should only want to draw up a bath, lie down in it, and die. My father and mother are of the more radical variety, and feel it would be best if I went to school up north in the Mainland after the summer's over. When I think about you wooed by some other superficial, sentimental rhetoric and held tenderly in the arms of some other evening-clothes boy (someone from the Island schools? Or maybe Chinese Int.? German Swiss...?), I feel I should be there instead of him; holding you; loving you; breathing the same air and being in the same world as you; for your hushed and remarkable eyes are even more beautiful and bright than the snow-filled stars I so carelessly feed upon now - they scatter the night with a melancholy brilliance and make the day worth living. But without you, Cecile...! Without you! Oh dear...!

P.S. Visit me at Badminton (the school) — IMPORTANT!! Find the address on the envelope!!

Yours Faithfully,  
STEPHEN CHINA

He was to spend a little more than a year at the Badminton School. With the fading scents of late-summer still whispering, Stephen had appeared at the train platform, shy but earnestly heroic, in his first tailored trousers, complemented by a fern-green tie and a “Shanghai-Tang” collar with the hems facing upright to one another, and brown brogues made more exuberant by green socks. But even more than that, the ecstasy of entering an unknown, teeming world rife with unfulfillment and ambition stirred a steadfastness in his heart; for his “abstract” interests, he formulated one of many romantic beliefs that he would have to go to a place where things “didn’t happen”, as generations of unimportant statesmen and poets had done before him. Stephen was proud of the fact that he was a man-of-letters (he decided a month into his fourteenth birthday) – rather than a mathematical or scientific genius.

Unsuccessfully, his parents had tried to temper his egotist tendencies, where he would always get in petty, verbal scrapes with the “older boys” – but only resolved to increase it; he worshipped success, fame, and to be on the vague top of the world more than anything else; therefore selfishness and a self-suspicious conscience was one of the developing Stephen’s many introspective debates — he found himself suppressing his intellect for the sake of social interests and curious skirmishes with love. This was Stephen floating about the gust and whirlwind of adolescence.

With midday’s fervor imminent, Stephen stepped on the train rolling his suitcase behind him. Looking around, the lighted square where he had lunched was bright and ecstatic with the apathetic wail of largish men in striped-maroon polo shirts, and chin-tilted, snappy women in high-heels and bright jewelry, and the swelling, futile pleas of young property men in ill-fitting suits.

Taking in all this, he adjusted his collar as he handed his ticket to the attendant-man; thanking him in assured English, it stirred a few cries of surprise from the Guangzhou populace: “what a splendid-looking boy! And he speaks English!” they cried. Stephen wondered if he really was that handsome to the Guangzhou population, for he had the inherent, fortunate tendency of self-doubt. He wondered if the language he had first learned as a young boy really could accumulate so much jealousy and admiration.

But all that didn’t matter! — Passion and Desire gleamed in the cloudless, rich skies above, and he could even see, outside, as the train engines started with a low roar, a beautiful, remarkable-looking girl laughing with the brown-irises of her eyes in full-flowered bloom.

#### A PENSIVE, SYMBOLIC INTERLUDE

Of the whole boarding event, his father, Mr. China, a coherent, explanatory man who had a taste for Keats and a habit in investing “in an around the pearl”, wrote in an excerpt to a conservative and aristocratic sixty-something:

“Talking about the past I can only feel loves and dreams... and the feeling of all those years being washed away. At fifteen I fell in love with the tonic and unutterable kindness of early-morning; at fifteen-and-a-half I fell in love with the wild, effervescent beauty of the stars.”

## II

### “SETTLED IN BADMINTON”

December of his first and only year at Badminton was a bright star in Stephen’s memory. After the lamentable failures of a highly-academic fall, in which he struggled achieving only five out of eight marks in chemistry and extended algebra, the carnival and bankruptcy of a rich and more pleasant winter -- football, dinner-dances, karaoke and movies out in the town, uninterrupted dreams late through winter mornings -- fell with glowing affection on

the faces of many, like a baby laughing when she first learns to swim.

#### GALLANT IN IMPRESSIONABLE FORM

The game with Greentown Yuhua, the state school team, was played late from five far into a snappy, emotional winter dusk of the most beautiful blend of pearl, pink, and gold, fading into the evening amidst the cries and despairs of wild, crashing boys. Stephen, at centre-forward, his red captain's armband flapping gloriously in the December night, surging and commanding in furious exhilaration, plunging into the dirt from the bloody tackles of a thousand aching legs and Chang's broken glasses... he had a sense that he was playing the most romantic and historical sport... flung on the elusive ball he twisted in impossible dribbles scarcely perceptible to the astonished spirit that he left in his wake, and in the heroic scenario of him strong-arming and revelling in the beating tide of a thousand cheers afar gushing, flowing, thundering, roaring, so close to him... he ran behind and fired an impossible shot into the top corner of the Yuhua net – the only goal of the game.

#### THE ZHUHOU OF BANTER

By time of Christmas he had completely forgotten about Cecile. The frivolous and calamitous tone of her betrayal, discovered by one of those up-to-date girls who took pride in their specialty — Eleanor Weiley (in Hong Kong) had seen that Cecile had gone off with one sultry boy or the other at the megamall ice rink. But, however spooked from this, Stephen had secretly appeased his weird philosophical desire for a modern tragedy. He didn't show or tell anyone, however, lest it would be judged as "cringe" (as people his age said so often nowadays). As what would be congruous with popularity, he acted bawdy and outrageously crude at even the mentioning of her name – "So what happened with Cecile... is it true that thing about Cecile..."

One afternoon, during a dour meal of Jinhua ham, potato French fries, and minestrone, he had received a tactful Snap from the contemptuous Cecile-suitor, whose name had come to his attention:

TIPPY TAM: "Hey there, Stephen, sorry about that thing..." (indecisive keyboard emoticon)

TIPPY TAM (SUCCEEDING SNAP): "Cecile told me you would be jealous."

STEPHEN: "Nah, haha - now, why on earth would I be jealous?"

(A crowd of Stephen's contemporaries are gathering around the table, each saying furiously: "Lemme see the screen," and pushing.)

TIPPY TAM: "I guess. Just thought twas' time for her to move on and all."

TIPPY TAM (SUCCEEDING SNAP): "I mean you've been gone like four months."

STEPHEN: (His lips stirring unsurely): "Yeah you're right. It only makes sense, hahaha."

STEPHEN: (SUCCEEDING SNAP) "Didn't even like her. Just Bants." (ended with a pair of sunglasses emoticons)

(He gets up emotionally from his chair, and leaves the dining hall.)

TIPPY TAM: "Haha yep, just banta. Thanks dude."

(The dining hall door slams shut from the wind.)

"HAHA, NOW WHY ON EARTH WOULD I BE JEALOUS?" Stephen repeated a while later, lounging by the breezy open window in Jake Ma's room, the wealth of early-afternoon sunshine filtering through. Jake was reclined in a large chair reading, in the original Chinese, Jin Yong's *The Duke of Mount Deer*, borrowed digitally with the help of the librarian. Stephen was scrutinizing the lightness of his response to the contemptuous boy-suitor who had subtly tried to apologise:

"Well, damn!" he said after a long while, tossing a bright mandarin peel right out the

window.

“Damn!”

### III

#### “BABES IN THE WOODS”

Gone were the thoughts of Cecile now, two days before Christmas eve. In these times, Badminton had about it an aristocratic indolence -- like a spring day, and so it was only appropriate for the headmaster, as inarticulate as he was in his much-too-long e-mails, to decree that there was to be a dinner-dance to celebrate.

In the large ballroom, dark forms retreated into silver shadows and Stephen, yet to run into any of his friends, nervously found his place card. He had now been at Badminton since the beginning of August, having boarded, and he had found the settling-in pleasant, the people of some consequence and even “admirable” in some academic faculty or some bright, resonating personal quality or the other. On that blue evening, he had come, like many other upperclassmen, for Myra Chang, the most popular girl at school - in any school in the East.

Myra Chang was a girl of the most curious mixtures of love and inwardly radiance. It was said her eyes were like a butterfly’s wings, and her steadfast and bright personage, which had filled in it countless lights that glowed and accepted all the vibrant walks of life -- served to balance this intense physical magnetism.

Seven o’clock moved into nine. The last polished plate of lasagna had been removed by the dandy, conscientious waiter, but Myra still couldn’t be found, and Stephen, and inevitably many other voracious upperclassmen, were beginning to tap their wingtips on the marble floors irritably. The air turned languid and thick and powdery. Disappointed boys began to pick up their evening coats. Click Clak! Aching heels limped out of the ballroom doors. Stephen, suddenly alone, sat a dark, empty table. When he got bored, he drifted out to the moonlit veranda.

Then, as the last heavy vehicles deserted the rich avenues, and silence was all there was outside the big republic of the school gates, a girl could be seen descending the steps of the vestibule balcony. Even from afar, Stephen knew she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. It was his youth’s felicity and his unwavering prejudice for romance that he knew, from the flame-like passion in his heart, that the girl his great eyes now lay on was indeed Myra Chang.

As he decided on his next movement, he was reminded of a line of his own that he had written for Cecile, at the end of year nine...

Swim, and dance, with me tonight, my love

For a foolish wreath is on thy head!

Stephen watched her discreetly from the veranda as she drifted to the bottom of the steps and over the trembling grass. Carefully, he turned and moved down the veranda steps.

She was wearing a long white gown that outlined her slender, supple body, and a wreath of flowers adorned her forehead. Her eyes were dark and sad and lovely, and her pale hands swung gracefully by her sides.

“Hello,” he cried softly. “I’m Stephen.”

Hearing his voice, Myra turned around. What she saw was a boy of incomparable romance. His dramatic eyes lulled her fatigued soul into bits of paradise, and then his name finally got around to her... Stephen! Oh, Stephen...!

“We’ve met,” Stephen said breathlessly. His dark eyes said: “We’re in the same year... but I don’t think you know me very well...I stayed behind, after everyone left, just to see you.”...

“You might have met my older brother, Monroe China.” At the proclamation of his brother’s name, Myra’s face perceptibly brightened. “He was captain of the Football team at Archibald some years ago, but he’s since graduated.”

“Oh, yes, Monroe China...” she said pensively. “So you’re his brother?”...”He’s a collegiate legend of sorts – my brother Dorian knows him, went to the same university. Real Archibald sportsman. You should be very proud.”

Precipitately, a nervous jealousy throbbed in Stephen’s head – not for Monroe’s success, but because of the fact that Myra respected Monroe more than himself. They were walking off the pitch, into the darkness of the nearby forest. Amidst the thick foliage, pale moonlight slipped onto the glinting leaves and through the innumerable gaps in the trees. Stephen allowed a little distance between them, for fear Myra wouldn’t like the intimacy.

“I so very adore you,” she whispered very suddenly, settling herself on a smooth rock. “Men nowadays are all facile, unromantic things who lack the eternal quality of patience. You see the beauty in different things, and your mind is cool and measured, and that’s where a generation fails.”

For the first time in his life, Stephen had found idealism, and the impossible quality known as physical perfection, which now sat tremulously in front of him. Advancing toward her, he placed a polished shoe on the rock, and both of his arms resting coolly across his leaning leg, he said: “I’m deeply flattered, Myra. Back south -- could I visit you sometime, give you a call?”

Her eyes beamed with passion. Sitting there, she turned her wan face up to him in the moonlight, and her pale lips trembled.

“Why-yes Stephen, of course...”

Precipitately, a harsh, imperious voice tolled through the night like a forlorn bell, taking with it all the beauty of the night:

“Stephen! Myra! You two come here this instant! It’s way past time!”

Hearing this, she raised herself from the rock – very silently, the ends of her white blouse slipping sadly off it.

“Good-bye,” said Myra.

“Good-bye,” said Stephen.

Stephen watched her disappear into the blue foreground, drifting like a phantom until she was only a scarcely perceptible dot in the distance.

Skipping away, Myra saw vaguely the large, flame-like windows of the girls’ residence, and scarcely keeping up with her rich, delightful blue streams that ran and jumped over rosebushes and turquoise growths – full of floating lilies and gleaming a silver hard as steel.

She heard the calling of the moon: Come away, come away ... and her soul softly sighed, conscious of the eternal hydrangeas adorning her forehead, and at that moment, she knew she was beautiful.

#### IV

##### “A CHINESE DREAM”

In Christmas Stephen didn’t go skiing as many of his friends did, but instead stayed at his father’s estate in Shenzhen, golfing and drowsing over the wading-pool through indolent, late-afternoons in regretful languor. Protesting didn’t help. His father insisted they would remain in Shenzhen and go back down to Hong Kong once a week for poker and cocktail mixers. His mother wasn’t worried when her husband went off on his own, because all the women there draped themselves in face-masks and long pieces of garments and sleeves, head-

to-toe, as to protect themselves from ageing in the sun.

One warm afternoon, still in Shenzhen, lounging on the sofa reading, as was his custom after a long day on the course, Stephen had realised something, given the time: he had fallen back, full of faith, into the arms of extremely generous parents, a mother and a father who had given him profusely more than he had asked. But even more than that they had given him the best upbringing – a liberal, private education, openness to deep conversation, and the time to “find himself” and to discover his true specialties and strengths. For that he was grateful.

Watching a returning buggy go by, filled with conspicuous yellow caddie helmets bobbing ecstatically along the darkening roads, anticipating their tips at the starter, an overwhelming sense of longing for Badminton crushed his heart into flakes: football, dinner-dances,, basement pool tournaments, karaoke and take-away and enchanted nights... and Myra...! Oh Myra...! Even now he could hear her footsteps, light as happiness, coming up the porch steps, and down again...

From this, he had located a newfound respect for China. Despite the old creeds and the bizarre excesses, and the rampant ugliness of its industrial steel, he was glad that it was rising, rapidly, above death, poverty, sickness... -- prevailing through the grotesque debris, as a land and as a people. But though the more exquisite caves of life were ignored – art, subtleness, poise, romantic philosophy... – it would re-discover it again, as the great Tang poets had done in their own fine days...

China was the graves of great men and women in 1911, and the heroic foot-march of weary, nervous country boys dying in the Pingjin, their scarlet bodies languished to musical dust, hearts-in-tender-hearts, all fighting for one final cause -- to pave way for the freshness and strength of Stephen’s generation. Whatever faculty of life Stephen was to choose: arts, politics, finance – he knew it was only his duty to carry out what the old longings and devotions had fought for -- and with time Badminton had taught him this, and all the general wisdom it could think of.

# The Pearl on the Horizon

*Chinese International School, Jeong, Gyu Ho Kenny - 16*

On the last evening of that empty summer, I wandered down to the old beach in Tai Tong Wan with a case of lukewarm beer. For the first time in three weeks, the smoke in the skies had cleared, revealing a clear vermilion sunset. I was able to see the red sun and the ocean reunite on the horizon, the crimson orb casting a clear reflection of the sun on the calm waters. Up in the heavens, the thrushes were leaving the palm trees to return to their nests in Yuen Long, where they would rest until the next morning.

Ever since the incident that we are never supposed to talk about, there is nothing down here in Tung Ping Chau anymore. Apart from my father's old church, no building in this village is over two stories tall. The only people who live here are the ones who desperately cling on to the image of what this place used to be a long time ago, an image that will forever remain a figment of the past; they refuse to acknowledge that the Delta has irreversibly changed, and the things we had grown to love have disappeared. Once one person realized that this village was long dead and left for Lamma, everyone was quick to follow him with their own families to pursue new lives. Since then, evenings here are quiet and uneventful, except for public holidays. On those days, the sounds of white tourists on yachts echo across the waters down to this beach, but I make sure to scream and shout back at the sea if I ever hear them.

It's not as if I wanted to stay here. I remember packing my own suitcase for the new life ahead, anticipating the day my father would come home in his old motor boat, bearing news that I would move. In my mind, there had been no doubt that we too would go to Lamma, just like all the other kids at school had. But that day never came. The day before my 16th birthday, he unpacked my dreams and sold the suitcase to a qigai for just a few dollars.

Much to my regret, my old man was a pastor; much of my childhood was spent devising ways to avoid the pointless early worship services that I was dragged to every morning before school started, the endless hours dedicated to studying the memoirs of a mortal but albeit sage man who preached love for god and other humans, and the long sermons about obedience and compassion and love and obedience and compassion and love and god. To be frank, I never realized how much I hated him until my birthday, when he left alone for the city, leaving me only his old bible for a birthday present. Seeing that there were no believers left in Tung Ping Chau, he wanted to move to Hong Kong Island to preach the word of his god. That evening, I ran down to my family's grave with a shovel and buried this cruel joke that he had the indecency to call a birthday present – and there it lies to this day, right next to my mother's coffin.

But that blessed summery day was different from all the other days that I have lived out here in Tung Ping Chau; as I settled into a dilapidated beach chair, I realized that there was someone other than myself on my beach.

Pacing along the coastlines was a tall slender man, dressed from head to toe in a formal suit. While he immediately drew my attention, he didn't look anything like the shangren that appeared in the magazines released these days in Hong Kong; the suit he was wearing was old and torn along the seams. Moreover, his face was browner than a city person's, more like the farmers who used to live in Tung Ping Chau. Another young man driven by his ambition, only to be denied by the realities of city life. With every step he took, his shoes dabbled in and out of the cascading waves, teasing the water.

With the mellow rays of the twilight sun shining into my eyes, I shuffled forward on my seat to get a closer look. The man strolled the length of the beach with his eyes staring into the horizon, before he finally stopped and sat down on the edge of the water. I thought to myself, maybe the man was born here. Maybe he just came back down here to see a family relative. Or perhaps it was just a man who had come down here to think, a man who wanted to forget everything and escape it all.

I slid off my chair to approach the man who sat frozen on the beach, staring into the horizon. Step by step, I walked down to the waters, until I found myself only a few meters away from him. It was at this point the man reached into his bag with his right hand and fumbled around, until his hand finally found what it was looking for – a small black revolver.

Once he drew it out, he proceeded to play an interesting game. He pulled out the fully loaded cartridge and picked one bullet out. I expected him to pull more out but after a minute of contemplation, he spun the cartridge, reloaded the gun, and raised the revolver until the barrel was right next to his head. I had seen many people do this on TV programs, but never with five bullets. People would gamble against fate with only one bullet. Occasionally two or three if they were feeling brave. Maybe the man felt god was on his side that night.

But for a few minutes or so, it seemed like he had lost all interest in what he was doing; he sat there, eyes fixated on the horizon, with the loaded gun trembling right next to his head. All he had to do was move a muscle and let the gun do the work. One small movement of his index finger would shatter the silence of the beach. One small piece of metal. As the sun sunk inch by inch, I felt my heart beat accelerate in unison with his heartbeat.

Soon after, the man stood up and started saying the lord's prayer. I thought to myself how naïve the man must be to have so much faith in his god. But as I watched the man's face outlined against the red horizon, I realized that something about this man was changing. Perhaps it was the way he seemed to find comfort as he went on with his prayer, the way his hands stop frantically shaking and the way the creases on his forehead relaxed with each word. But slowly and surely, the prayer came to an end and the man pulled back the hammer of the revolver.

For a second, everything in the world stood still. The sun, the wind, and the sea froze, waiting for the bullet to leave the gun. But after he pulled the trigger, there was no sound. There was no death. There was no bullet.

The man dropped the gun from his hand. I fell onto my knees and in complete disbelief, stared at him standing against the sun. I could feel the blood rush through my body, pulsating faster than it ever had in my entire life. Maybe the gun had jammed. Maybe the bullet was a dud. Maybe the bullet loaded in the chamber just didn't want to leave. But none of it mattered anymore to me. There was no death. I watched the man pick up his bag and begin strolling along the coast with his feet dabbling in and out of the water, as if the past ten minutes of his life had not just occurred.

I ran down to the water to pick up the gun.

## From Me, To You

*Chinese International School, Kang, Jimin - 16*

The statistics arrived yesterday: in twenty years, my father has manufactured over three million and five hundred thousand cards. That means three million and five hundred thousand birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, congratulations, signs of gratitude. Three million and five hundred thousand lives interconnecting with other lives, perhaps two million sealed with a kiss, perhaps a million that traversed turbulent seas to find loved ones dozens of hours away.

A dizzying prospect, I know. How much can a card hold?

As I looked at the figures that day, tracing the abundance of zeroes with my index finger, I thought of the cards that flew out of my father's factory to fly back to me. In retrospect, it was surprising how slight these figures were.

One sender, one recipient, three cards in total.

But each worthy of a million on its own.

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Dear Jia Li - I present to you a birthday card, custom dad-made! I know it isn't your birthday, but when I saw the cat on the front I couldn't help but think about the cat-and-mouse game we used to play back in Shantou. Remember that?

Back in 1979, Peng and I were two ordinary six year olds growing up in a small village in Shantou. At precisely ten in the morning, both our mothers would release our squirming bodies out into the labyrinth of the village streets, where we spent hours and hours playing a whole range of childish games. Although there were several kids in the village, Peng and I preferred each other's company above all else: we had a telepathic connection that even the village elders used to chuckle over.

Everyday our pounding feet would scatter dust throughout the village streets, our squeals echoing past the wood-paneled windows and signs. We were quite the rascals, mind you. Our hide-and-seek strategy of hiding behind the greengrocer's newly arrived produce would

always end in complaints, while the local Chinese medicine practitioner was never happy about how our whirlwind sprints altered the positioning of his prized deer antlers.

Our favorite game was, unsurprisingly, the one that landed us in the least amount of trouble. For lack of a better name, we called it the ‘cat-and-mouse game’. The rules were simple: one of us would be bestowed the role of honorable cat, the other of honorable mouse. The cat would chase the mouse until the mouse was caught, or until the cat forfeited in fatigue. In both cases, the ultimate loser was punished in the same way: the captured mouse or the exhausted cat had to consume a whole dried fish. No matter the month or the weather, the fish – bitter, sour and strangely crunchy – was never pleasant, hence explaining why our cat-and-mouse games often lasted for hours on end.

Whenever we played, it was customary to completely immerse ourselves in the respective roles. The cat would don a pair of whiskers that were drawn slightly askew with some cosmetic or another, whilst the mouse had to wear a headband sporting a pair of round paper ears. Each game would start with the both of us laughing at how ridiculous we looked, and then the chase would commence.

Whilst Peng and I played our game on one particular day in the summer of 1979, we noticed that something about our little village seemed different. Although it was only noon, the Chinese medicine practitioner had already cleared away his collection of deer antlers and was closing his shop for the day. Other businesses followed suit; soon, Peng and I found ourselves running through quiet streets dotted with aging footsteps with no one in sight. Once we saw the greengrocer tucking away the greens he had yet to sell – which, we realized with dismay, would discolor and wither throughout the empty afternoon – we decided to call a truce. There was no dried fish that day; the market had closed as well.

Back then, we never fully realized what was happening in our little village. We walked home to find our parents flanked with all the other village adults. When they saw us approach, they hushed their frantic whispers and looked at us two children, their lopsided smiles plastered half-heartedly beneath harrowed eyes.

“Ma ma, why is everyone here?”

“There’s no reason, Jia Li. We’re just talking about village affairs.”

A wrinkled man – perhaps the man who lived two blocks away from our hut – shuffled to my mother’s side and whispered something in her ear. Her lips quivered. She nodded her head.

“Now hurry off you two, and don’t worry about us. Leave the adults to meet in peace.”

But before we were out of earshot, I heard the old man say:

“This is how it ends.”

★ ★ ★

Dear Jia Li – Hong Kong – wow! You’ve gone a long way, haven’t you? I hear there are some things in Hong Kong you can’t find anywhere else. Like the tram. Have you taken the tram before? Why is it called a ding-ding? Have you–

In 1985, our family said goodbye to Shantou forever.

After the government had declared the official opening of the Pearl River Delta region, no two things had ever been the same. The neighbours we used to see meandering about town, lazing in the warm sun, now preoccupied every waking hour fantasizing about business enterprises they claimed to have always wished to open but never did. They blamed it on the village: how small it was, how slow it was, how separate it was from the rest of the world.

The Chinese medicine practitioner closed the blinds of his shop for two whole weeks. When somebody suggested he could process his ingredients faster in a factory, his stony eyes simply clouded over as he replied: "I am an artisan, not a fool."

In his view, everybody in our village had become a fool overnight. Within two or three years, hordes of people had left our village in search of prosperity. They murmured about factories and economic prospects and business models. These people, who had never taken a business class in all their lives. Starry-eyed, they walked away without a second glance back at what remained. What remained was our village, fractured, quiet and never again the haven it used to be.

Amidst the exodus, my dad himself hatched a dream of economic prospects.

"Jia Li, what do you think about making cards?"

He wanted to make cards, all kinds of cards. Pink cards, blue cards, rectangular cards, circular cards, birthday cards, wedding cards, the list went on and on. He had been inspired after one of our younger neighbours - who had been one of the first to leave - had sent us a greeting card from Hong Kong.

'You cannot imagine the reality of Hong Kong without seeing it for yourself,' the card had read. 'Do not lock yourself in the past: come, come and explore what is beyond.'

Whether he was truly interested in cards or whether he just wanted to leave, I never found out. After six years of ruminating and planning at his small desk in the right-hand corner of our house, my father declared we were going to move to Hong Kong.

"I'm going to open a card-making factory in Shenzhen. I've got it all planned out," he said. "we're going to move to the neighboring city. You'll be able to learn English, my dear."

Hong Kong? English? Neighboring cities? Factories? All these concepts seemed to foreign to my twelve year-old ears. I couldn't help but harbor pangs of fear in both my mind and my chest. What about Peng? Although the gradual onset of adolescence had meant we spent less time around each other, Peng was still my best friend. The knowledge that he was constantly nearby soothed me whenever the world seemed to spin on the wrong axis. Peng, with his ruffled hair and foolish grin, his long arms and small feet. Peng, who occasionally knocked on our door with a batch of biscuits his mother had bought for us. What would happen if I lost Peng? If I never saw him again?

And yet there were morsels of wanderlust floating within the crevices of my body. Like dust motes illuminated by the lazy afternoon sun, each thought of Hong Kong carried with it an anticipation that could stretch on for hours. You cannot imagine the reality of Hong Kong without seeing it for yourself. You cannot imagine the reality of Hong Kong. You cannot imagine the reality. You cannot imagine. You cannot. You.

You will change. We will all change. New faces, new sights, new beginnings. It was a threshold begging to be crossed, an entrance into a new land where I could blossom in an entirely different way.

When we finished packaging our bags that summer of 1985, I tried to retain this thought in my head. It had been a silent day: so silent that one could hear a personal radio cackling and whispering from the dirt roads. Many people had come to say goodbye, but for me there was only one thing that mattered.

"I can't believe you're doing this," Peng sighed. We stood facing each other a few meters away from where the adults were, exchanging final handshakes and hugs. "At least we should play a final game of cat-and-mouse?"

"Don't be stupid," I replied. As I attempted to smile, my cheeks felt heavy and my lips could only manage a faint curve. "You'll write to me, won't you?"

“Of course, stupid,” Peng laughed before giving me a hug. “You know what, I’ll write you on your dad’s cards.”

“Hilarious, Peng,” I punched him on the back. “As always.”

After the goodbyes had been done and dusted, my parents and I stood at the entrance of the village, looking back at those with whom we had spent many years of joy. It was time to walk away, starry-eyed... yet I saw no stars that day. The figure of expression only alluded to the mosaics that dotted my vision, enlarging and blurring the contours of the world in a wet, kaleidoscopic dance of light.

“I’ll miss you!”

I never saw Peng again.

★ ★ ★

Dear Jia Li – I’m sorry for not having written to you for so long. Things have been messy at home. My dad’s sick and my mom might as well be – she’s so worried all the time. Don’t fret about us, though, and tell me–

It has been twenty years since I walked away from a place I had always called home.

In fact, even now as I hold the third and last episode of Peng’s handwritten cards, I cannot help but smell the waft of pungent fish we used to smell as we played our games. I cannot help but see Peng and his cheeky grin, the bob of his hair as we ran down street after street with ridiculous appendages stuck on our heads.

I just heard from my father that he, too, is sick. Something is growing inside him – which means that he might have to go back to China sometime soon. But me? Now I am old enough to do whatever I want, yet I don’t know what I want to do. Hong Kong is home, yet by the same logic there are millions of other homes just waiting to be found.

Hong Kong is a city of wonders, yet it will never be what Shantou was to me. Here, life never seems to stop. Towering vehicles bustle through crowded roads, filled with faces not one of which I recognize. The buildings are chromatic, tall and unforgiving, and each Chinese medicine practitioner I see is not the one I used to know but a foreign man, whose deer antlers never exude the aura of mysticism and magic I used to feel at home.

I am a foreigner with wings made of card. In my dreams I see myself with wings – constructed out of a hundred paper cards – flapping as it brings me to places I’ve never been. In each place I shed a card, leaving my memory, and I know one day all my cards will have been shed and I will have to stay where I eventually land.

And home? I don’t know what Shantou is anymore. I resigned myself to an Internet search and I didn’t recognize a thing – cold-faced buildings dotted the streets I used to know.

I do not know where Peng is, nor do I know whether or not I’ll hear from him again. I do not know whether or not he is still in Shantou, living in the same villages we’ve always been in, or whether he too has traversed different seas into foreign lands we’ve never seen together.

Three million and five hundred thousand cards.

Dear Peng – the world is smaller than it seems.

# The Ties That Bind

*Chinese International School, Li, Sophie - 15*

A.

Even the way she stood was loud: arms crossed, feet planted firmly on the tiled floor, shoulders set, stubborn, strong. Mei could see her shadow, short and squat like she was, peeling away from her feet and folding over the ground. She was fighting the first war: Mama wanted to eat out for dinner and Grandma refused to go. She said: You didn't know what restaurants put in the food they served you and it could be gutter oil or rat meat or only fat bits and even if it was safe to eat it was always unhealthy and it was much better, always better, to stay put and cook your own dishes. So she would stay at home and cook her own dinner. The rest of them could go out, she said, but she wouldn't be leaving.

Mama pushed air through her nose. Chinese characters speared from her lips, bitten out between teeth, and light hit her diamond earrings, refracted, before bouncing away to cast a million different shades of glowing white in small, vivisected panels on the living room walls. Again and again with all this trouble...! It's a good restaurant, Ma, it's trustworthy.

Grandma didn't budge. You can go if you want to, no one's stopping you.

And Mama returned fire: Are we a family or not! Do you need to be this difficult? This is the smallest thing, Ma, can we please—

Round and round they went, horses on an infinite carousel. Mei liked watching carousels go and liked riding one even more, watching the world around blur into a river of colours, the yellow-white of street lamps fizzling into each other against a blue-black background. The sky was blue-black, a heavy colour pressed with grey cloud, brooding thunder clouds, they hulked like great beasts and gargoyles. On nights like this one Mei knew that the sky was old and old and old, she thought it rather looked like a battle was being fought, something was coming, War. The grown-ups said it. Or didn't say it, were too afraid to say it, but their eyes and anxious hands were loud. And their worry lines said: we may not survive it.

So.

So Jie started helping in the harvest and Qin minded the house.

She stacked yams and ground corn into bowl-shaped loaves and kept the rooms stocked

for the men who slept in the day and went out crouched low when darkness came. When they returned, dusty and ravenous, Qin handed out her wares, pressed between sheafs of rice paper, watched them shovel it into their hungry mouths. She did her part.

So did Mama, who covered her face, rubbed charcoal around her eyes and tied strips of cloth around the limbs of men who didn't come home quite right, and sometimes her own. Sometimes it was Jie who did the tying, her hands sure and fast and her mouth a thin white slash slicing across her jaw.

These men had starving eyes and flinty mouths. Qin swept the floor around their feet and flung mud back out of the house, avoided their large gleaming eyes reddened by ash, their rough hands cracked from cold. Thank you, he said, a man with thick eyebrows and a cut opened on his temple. What's your name?

Qin. Like qin lao.

Qin, he said, and sighed it out, a breathy syllable. Qin lao. A good name. All your life you will work hard...

(She's too young to do this, said Jie. Mama just handed Qin more corn to grind, a pile already stacked higher than Qin could see over.

There's no too young. Do you think there's a wrong age to die, in their eyes?

Jie shook her head. You sound just like—)

The war had been won. Grandma exhaled, a long, swollen breath, and went to put a coat on, and Mama put her fingers to her temples and rubbed, hard. Mei tipped herself across the back of the couch and leaned over upside down, legs hooked over the couch and her hair falling straight down to brush the floorboards. From this angle Mama looked ancient, a statue of stone that stood impossibly still, and bent with some impossible weight on her shoulders.

Mei please don't do that, said Mama. She leaned down—or leaned up—and pulled a boot on—or pulled it down. Mei blinked, saw faint stars, and hastily straightened, falling back onto the couch cushions. Yes, Mama.

Grandma came out, face as closed as stone. I'm ready.

Finally... Mama moved towards the door, her mouth a thin white line slashed across her jaw. Zou le. Let's go.

Bodies floated. Swollen monstrous. They came bursting down the fields as the river did, carried on a strong thick tide of water, that had brought them life once, now it killed. Now it killed and killed and killed.

Qin waded through mud, through the swaying forest of wheat half drowned in the flood. Somewhere a woman wailed. Qin wanted to, shaped a sound that snapped against the back of her teeth and couldn't squeeze out. She was cold all over. Under her feet the earth squelched. Qin had sludge on her fingers and raked across her cheekbones, and icy water that stuck her clothes tight against her skin.

—Come on, girl. A hand slipped into Qin's own, thin and tough with calluses.

Jie's eyes were dark and like the pieces of flint Baba sharpened his harvest scythe on. Hurry up. You walk slower than a snail.

They moved, silent and like ghosts, through the light mist rising off the great arms of water, towards the river banks, looking for what they could save, and who. Who had been near the river when they broke the dam, who had been scything wheat in the fields, who had been there to die, Baba. Who.

Houses had prostrated themselves onto the ground. Crumbled onto the people inside them. Qin stepped forward and felt something soft that squished under her shoe, she looked down and a scream took shape, put itself together and oozed up her throat, it pried her mouth

open...

Jie's fingers were so tight against Qin's fingers they hurt her. Jie wouldn't let her stand there, tugged her forward in a sharp jerky movement and pulled her up when Qin almost tripped into the water.

More words knocked around in Qin's mouth, smooth and wild pebbles. She said, Lan...

Jie's mouth opened, she kept looking forward. She said, Why're you using my first name all of a sudden? What's wrong with Jie? You older than me now or something? She said, We'll fix everything together.

We will rebuild. Will.

Mei's shiny shoes squeaked against the floorboards following in Mama's footsteps, trying to walk just that much faster to match her small strides to Mama's long ones, hurrying up. Grandma frowned. Remember your daughter. You're walking too fast for Lan.

What? Who?

What?

Mei tugged on Grandma's coat sleeves. That's not my name, Grandma.

Grandma blinked once, twice, slowly, deliberately, reminding Mei stronger than ever of the tortoises they watched documentaries of in school, those old and crusted animals, carrying their thick and enormous shells, taking an age to drop their eyelids down and lift them back up again, a time the lifespan of continents. To Mei everyone was old and old, but Grandma, nearly eighty, was old old. Ancient. A whole new species of personhood.

Did I say Lan?

Yes, Grandma.

Mama turned around with a sharp look, then paused in place and turned back again, she had a strange expression on—she turned back around. Bie luo suo le. No more fussing around, let's go.

In the car Mei fell asleep, sliding down her seat and propped up against the door. She fell asleep to the sound of crickets, and there were

Rumours of soldiers marching towards their village but most people didn't believe it. They couldn't see why soldiers would be bothered with their small village when they'd never been before, and that was in the way of rumours, and fear mongering. Besides, if ever the soldiers did come they would likely be warned: scouts would tell them if the rumours were true and when

From her nap Mei woke up—

Qin woke up, and the sky was on fire.

Flames ate the world alive, there was screaming, there was

A sharp curse from Mama's mouth, bitten off. Mei heard the wheels of the car screeching on the tarmac, making high shrill

Noises that cleaved the air apart. Qin tasted ash, settling heavy in her mouth. Mama was not home, when she should've been home. Mama

Swore and jerked the steering wheel sharply to one side, muttering under her breath. It was the fault of winter time, the roads were wet and slippery

Blood was slippery. Mama looked at Qin, eyes white and over bright in the darkness, framed in the doorway with night spilling around her body, blood spilling from her neck, life spilling from her. Mama's skin was wet against Qin's hands when she caught her, a second mouth gaping open on her neck and leaking down her shoulders.

The noise that had chased Mama inside came roaring in now, the howling, the gunfire. Mama was heavy in her arms. The taste of death on her tongue was heavier, shots shaking the

air apart, Uncle was shaking the curtains open... Uncle was telling her to let go, Uncle was telling them they all had to go. He was herding them out of the room, he was saying to put their hands up. Qin put her hands up, blood sliding down them.

Grandmother dozed in the front seat, bent against the dashboard. Rain ploughed into the ground in fast silver ropes. In the distance lightning forked down and speared the encroaching hills.

In the distance houses were burning. People were screaming. Mama.

Uncle's eyes were wild and on fire. You wanna live, girl?

In the reflection of the car window, Grandmother's shadow was a crooked beast, a stark black shape among bright city lights. Her head was bent, eyes unfocused, eyelids drooping. Grandmother looked like she was in another place, another time, transported.

Mei remembered a time sitting out on the porch peeling green beans in front of their knees angled over wooden stools, the backs of their palms wet from the moisture and Grandmother's hands turning wetter, the skin under her eyes glowing bright under the lamplight and her eyes busy bringing the past back to life. You are so young, she said, voice dreamy. Work hard in school, Mei... You will work hard all your life...

The diagnosis. When Mama heard it, it turned her face, slapped her cheek around to face briefly the wall where no one could see what emotions flashed across it. When she turned back around there was nothing there, wiped completely blank of any expression, a blank and impersonal canvas. Early-stage Alzheimer's.

The doctor told Grandma. Mama translated. You will experience some memory loss. Ni you xie shi qing hui wang ji de. Sometimes the past and the present will melt into each other, blur together. You shi guo qu he xian zai hui rong hua yi qi de. I am sorry, but there is no cure. Mama's throat moved. Zhe ge shi zhi bu liao de.

Who's Lan, Grandma?

This was the truth of Qin: a crack in the stone, hands grinding corn, a weed sown in rock still growing. You wanna live, girl?

Yes I do yes I do I do yes I do.

## B.

Dogs were bloated. Tongues black and swollen. Stomachs, drum-like, hung distended, near touching the ground, scraped shallow trails in the dirt when they panted along the streets, roads turned slick and dull grey under sheets of rain and sleet. They died in droves, lay down with a sigh and died, their bodies vanished almost as soon as they hit the ground, people were hungry and hungry, and bowls were empty.

No rats were left. There was bark. Peanut shells. Whatever Qin thought could be food she put into the big cooking pot and stirred and stewed, anything that could be mashed between teeth, downed, digested, to live another hour, another day, two days: the bark snatched from the highest branches Qin alone was light enough to climb to, pilfered from squabbling hands and screaming bodies all fighting for the last skin of trees not stripped naked, leaving forests peeled raw, standing skinless in the grey snow. Mama and Baba were both an upturned patch of land slightly darker than the dirt around it and two slim stone markers. That left the two of them.

Qin's fingers missed the texture of yams, she missed the feel of something solid between her teeth. Hunger was a dull ache and a fickle presence. It stabbed rude and heavy just when Qin thought she'd gotten used to it. She caught Jie's glance sliding sideways, thrown longingly at the corner where piles of yam cakes and corn bread used to lie stacked higher

than they were tall. Now little food. No food.

Food smelled good, better than good. Pickled cucumbers in small delicate dishes, peanuts roasted and salted, lotus preserves sweet and cold arranged in perfect circles. Vegetables heated on plates and glistening, squares of tofu sitting poised and perfect. Rice was steaming and hot. Roasted pork sizzling, Mei's mouth watering. Mei dug in, eager and hungry, scooping up rice flavoured with meat sauce.

In her slow, deliberate fashion Grandma began to transport steaming yams to her plate, measured, methodical. Chopsticks, poised over the target for slightly over a second—then to secure the target, carefully squeezing—then to bring it over the table cloth, an ocean of white, and safe into port. One more. Two more. Three. Mama looked askance at the four yams sitting snug in the porcelain, but said nothing, just poked at her pak choi with her long hair trailing on the table. Grandma picked up a fifth yam. She put it in her pocket.

Mei spoke up. What are you doing, Grandma?

Eyes like wolves and not humans. When Qin walked home she saw them through the door, huddled and squatting low around a stone cooking pot, children. The mother slowly stirring with a long wooden spoon, the room a smear of darkness, smoke snaking out between lid and pot and drifting up and disappearing. The children moved closer, murmuring, asking why the food was so slow to come. Qin saw their eyes through the doorframe, they looked like they were going to eat their mother. And there were stories...

Don't look at that man, Jie said. She moved slowly through the door, the careful tread of the starving, turning her back on the crouched frame of a man who walked the streets, a man Qin recognised as the head of a family of five who lived a mile away from them. She poked at the coals of the fire with a metal stick, watched the thin flame warm the bottom of the pot of thin broth Qin had slaved over for a good hour. You don't speak to him and when you see him coming you walk away, do you understand?

Why?

Jie straightened. They say he ate the leg off his wife.

What?

Shi de. People say they had no food left, everything gone completely. One day they found her one-legged body rotting in the woods.

As she took her sixth yam Grandma was focused solely on her task, paying no heed to anything else. Mei had to say it again. What are you doing, Grandma?

What?

Mama frowned and put her chopsticks down. She means the yams, Ma. What on earth are you doing?

Grandma blinked. These are good yams.

Well, yes, but what are you doing putting them in your pocket?

I'm bringing these for Lan, said Grandma. She doesn't think I should call her that but I think I am old enough. She likes yams...

Mama's cup clattered to the floor. Grandma went on, dreamy-sounding, We haven't had yams in so long. She is hungry, I am saving these yams for Lan.

When the soldiers came raiding again for food and for people it was a cloudless day, the sky cool and grey, the earth soft and wet under their feet pounding across it. Uncle had been right the first time, if they wanted to live, they had to go. They ran and ran, lungs on fire, every gulp of breath rattling up a storm inside Qin, her bag drumming against her back, hitting hard and heavy.

Jie reached the wall first, her legs longer. For the first time there were no soldiers

guarding it, they could climb over the wall and disappear forever. Live. Leave.

Leave the village forever. Qin saw Jie's eyes move up the expanse of rock and look for gaps, footholds, small crevices to lock their fingers into. She saw her throat moving, and Qin was afraid also.

(You thought the darkness would never end, you thought the teeth of grief would never leave your muscles. This was the colour of a sky lit up with fire: the air thick with noise, the sound of rock splitting living in your eardrums, the road paved with bones, bones, flesh, the shape of a road that would never again lead you home.)

So, said Jie. Ready to go?

Qin was quiet.

Jie said, I bet I can climb it faster than you can. I bet you can't beat me.

... Yes I can.

Really? said Jie. Think you can beat me, baby girl?

I bet I can, said Qin.

Bet you can't.

Bet I can!

Then show me.

Jie hooked her fingers between the stone and put one foot against it. Show me, Jie repeated. Her eyes shone in the darkness.

They climbed the wall.

# Conquered

*Discovery College (Secondary), Leonard, Alix - 15*

The war had been long.

Elizabeth Leighton stood, leaning on the edge of the forecastle, watching the grey waves hitting the bow of the ship. They had nearly arrived. She'd been able to taste the cool Asian air for days now. They sailed in the mist, no land in sight, yet she knew that they were approaching their arrival. Her head was heavy from the weeks of sailing through the oceans. Though stopping in the Raj for several days, the swaying feeling and nausea hadn't had time to fade away before they set back on for their journey. She was sick of the waves.

It was mid-winter 1941, and they were on their way to Hong Kong. Though they tried to hide it from her, Elizabeth was not deaf to hear all the sailors talking quietly about a Japanese invasion occurring. She was an aristocratic woman, sent away from her country due to the danger the war posed to her family. As Winston Churchill's niece, that was expected. Her father had taken immediate action, by sending Elizabeth and three of her other siblings away from Britain. They'd stopped at the Raj, but were quickly forced to leave due to the anarchical instability. No matter where they went, shots were fired, people killed. The world had become a massive battlefield: only those who could afford to move would survive.

"Land ahead!" cried a nearby sailor – indeed, Elizabeth saw, as she strained her eyes, a shape forming in the thick mist. It looked like a rip on white paper, the edges not straight, their imperfections neat against the pale sky. As they drew nearer, minor detail formed on the initial black stretch of land. The waves lapped against a small port where they were heading, licking the sides of other small fishing boats squatting the area.

They reached the docks minutes later. Stumbling down the ramp, Elizabeth took her first step on Chinese land. She followed the troops towards the foot of the first mountain: there, a soldier stood rigidly, eyeing them with utmost respect.

"Commander Dowding, sir," said he, with a wave of his hand resembling a salute. Sir Dowding bowed his head down slightly as a salutation.

"We are here with Sir Churchill's nieces and nephews," he said, vaguely gesturing at Elizabeth, as well as another girl (Anna) and two boys (John and Chris). "I was ordered to

bring them here so that they can travel safely to Hong Kong.”

“Requested by whom?”

“Churchill himself,” Dowding replied. “As ex military commander, the Minister has given me this special duty. I am to drop them off here as I head to the Americas.”

All four felt nervous as the Chinese soldier inspected them, then nodded curtly.

“We shall request a carriage immediately,” he said, beckoning them to follow him.

“They are to be accompanied by some of our men,” Dowding said loudly. The Chinese soldier turned around.

“So be it,” said he, frowning slightly. “But no more than three; there is limited space in the carriage.”

Dowding picked out three of his best sailors, before bidding the four children goodbye. It was strange to watch all of the troops turn away back to the ship; they had been their family, to some extent, in the past few months. They didn’t have to wait long before the sound of an engine echoed down one of the roads. A sizeable car drove into view just as the crew had finished re-embarking upon the ship. Elizabeth followed her brothers and cousin into the automobile, slightly cramped as they tried to fit all seven in the back of the car. She bent down, craning her neck, and saw out of the window, the ship sailing away from the docks. Seconds later, its’ sails completely vanished behind the murky fog.

★ ★ ★

In all of the years to come, Elizabeth would never forget how she felt the first time she travelled through the Chinese countryside. At first they passed through mountainous lands, peculiar little temples, travelling along bumpy roads, gigantic steep hills, all the while overlooking forest-covered valleys far down below. Then they came to lands that became increasingly inhabited, the grounds somewhat flattening as they reached a wide respectable town named Zhanjiang. There, they found good roads, small rickety inns, and many seafood trading posts. The villagers here spoke a foreign language and sang songs quite unlike what Elizabeth had heard before. The poor little girl started to feel her stomach growl; it was well past teatime, and felt that it would soon be the same for dinner.

“We are expected in a small inn, just outside Zhanjiang,” said the chauffeur, with a heavy Chinese accent. Elizabeth jumped: this was the first time he’d spoken since they’d left the port.

It took a few minutes to drive through the town, as there were quite many people in such a small space (the streets were very narrow). At last they all came to the suburban inn named Huandao, and were delighted to find its doors flung open wide. This particular building looked quite like a little temple, nestled among cinnamon trees and mangroves; there were curious round lanterns hanging from the front porch, with religious ornaments decorating the walls and the roof. Slithering on top of the roof was what looked like the shape of a long, snake-like dragon. The children came into the house all for supper, seeing the beautiful things and smelling the delicious smells from a nearby room, where food was cooking. Elizabeth would gladly have stayed there for days on end, until the war was well over so she could return home; but as she was constantly reminded, they were expected in Hong Kong, and therefore forced herself to not get too comfortable.

The master of the inn was a brawny Chinese fellow (one of those people whose entire ancestry had been born and brought up here) and whose name was Ling Chiu. He was as strong as a warrior, as hotheaded as a whistling kettle, and as wise as an owl. His tavern was

pleasant, warm and snug, and was perfect for those hungry voyagers who felt ravenous after a tiring day's worth of travelling. He lived there with his wife, Mei Chiu, who, unlike her husband, was as kind as an angel.

As soon as the company arrived, they were delightfully welcomed by Mrs Chiu, who put on an apron, lit fires, boiled water, and settled the guests down around a large round table. Mr Chiu appeared seconds later, and collapsed onto a short stool opposite Elizabeth. He was whistling loudly, and, after briefly introducing himself, whipped out a stained newspaper, which he read until Mrs Chiu came fussing into the room, carrying all sorts of bowls, chopsticks, and tablespoons.

"Help yourselves to some tea, sweets," said Mrs Chiu, motioning towards a flowery tea set.

"A little beer would suit me better," Chiu said loudly, folding up his newspaper and sitting himself upright to face the table. Elizabeth felt bewildered and bewuthered; this man had some very poor manners indeed!

"Of course, dear," Mrs Chiu answered, rushing around the room and helping everyone serve themselves to some food. "Oh, Anna, is that right? Would you care for some xiao long bao? They are divine..."

Soon a big jug of coffee had been settled upon the hearth, most of the plates were halfway empty, and Chiu was settling on a second round of noodle soup, occasionally sipping his beer. Mrs Chiu kept bustling to and from the kitchen, all the time leaving with empty plates and coming back with filled up ones – there was a lot of food indeed, from sweet-and-sour turkey to chicken on crispy noodles to egg-fried rice. Finally, the four children, feeling satisfyingly full, lay back upon their stools and sipped tea from their china mugs. They sat in silence for a while, watching the fire crackling from the fireplace.

"We will be setting for Hong Kong tomorrow," said Chiu, breaking the silence. "You will need to rest tonight. It will be a long journey." He paused, helping himself to another pint of beer. "We will travel by foot."

"By foot?" poor Elizabeth blurted out before she could stop herself. "I beg your pardon," she added apologetically, "but Sir Dowding specifically sent us here so you could bring us to Hong Kong as fast as possible."

"Yes, you crude little girl," said Chiu, in a tone that suggested irritation. "But do you even realise who you are?" But Elizabeth just stared at him, lost for words – she was feeling very hot, and red in the face, and annoyed.

"Forgive us, Mr Chiu," John amended on her behalf (he was the eldest of the four). "But we do not really realise what you mean."

"Well, is your uncle not the Prime Minister of Britain?" grumbled Mr Chiu, helping himself to a hot, pastry-looking sphere. Hear, hear! thought Elizabeth. She did not understand how this related to their walking to Hong Kong.

"Yes," said John, slowly.

Mr Chiu looked at the four children, as if expecting some kind of response on their behalf.

"None of you know how much danger you are in, I suppose?"

John, Chris, Anna and Elizabeth shook their heads. How strange Mr Chiu was acting!

He took a deep breath, before adding:

"All of you are running a terrible risk coming here."

John and Chris exchanged puzzled looks; Anna sat back into her seat, whimpering slightly; Elizabeth, on the other hand, carried on staring at the man. How could they possibly

be in danger? She soon got the answer to her question.

“Perhaps you might like to explain why they are so, Mr Chiu,” said Mrs Chiu darkly.

“Oh! Alright!” said he impatiently, repositioning himself in his seat, finally dropping his chopsticks into his plate, and intertwining his hands above the table. “Have any of you four ever heard of the Kylin?”

“The what?” stammered Elizabeth. Chris stamped her foot from under the table.

“The kylin,” Mr Chiu continued, cringing at her impolite exclamation. “Is an animal of ancient Chinese mythology. It resembles a deer, with horns on the head and scales over the body. Its tail is like that of an ox. The kylin,” Mr Chiu took a deep breath, “is said to have the ability to live over two thousand years. It is also said to have special powers, such as spiting fire, and roar like thunder.” Elizabeth shuddered: she was not sure she liked the kylin.

“Now, what you have to understand is that the kylin is said to convey the will of Heaven, and therefore dictate the rise and fall of a dynasty. Some folk say that he brings children to them; others just think it’s a prestigious creature, symbolising brilliant talent and intelligence.

“So you can see that the kylin has many powers, and is one of the most important and sacred creatures of Chinese culture. And I’m telling you now – the kylin exists. He, the dragon, the phoenix, and of course, the turtle, make up the Four Divine Creatures. It is believed that, once all four original creatures are captured and put together, the bearer will possess eternal power and longevity.” He swallowed. “But such capture comes to a terrible price. It is a monstrous thing, to cage these animals. Only those who have nothing to lose would commit such a crime. The capture of the Four Divine Creatures would lead you to practically eternal life, yes, but from the moment the fourth creature is in possession of the huntsman... let’s just say all hell breaks lose in the world. Demons, goblins, trolls, giants – all of the creatures from hell are released into the world, and cannot be controlled. The only person they will not slaughter is the Master of the Four.”

The four children gaped at Mr Chiu for a moment, Mrs Chiu hurrying along with the teapot and refilling empty mugs.

“But whom would be that desperate?” John wondered aloud. “Surely living a normal life, surrounded by people, would be better than this... malediction.”

“Of course,” Chiu agreed, draining his pint of beer. “Someone who has nothing to gain, and nothing to lose. That is, of course, unless you are two inches from death, or from a fatal loss, which could potentially affect the entire world!”

“But these are just legends, of course,” Elizabeth said nervously. She was feeling quite overwhelmed by this new information, and yet could not make a single connection from the kylin to their situation.

“Alas!” Mr Chiu exclaimed. “The kylin does exist, as does the phoenix, the dragon, and the turtle. And there is our problem.” Mr Chiu took a deep breath. “Someone is trying to assemble all four; someone is after eternal glory, and a prolonged lifetime. There is someone walking the Earth, who, to this very day, searches for the Four Divine Creatures.”

“I do not understand,” stammered John. “What has this got to do with us?”

“Everything, my boy! See here, our people believe very strongly about these old legends, and are utterly sure that Westerners are the ones trying to hunt down the four creatures. That is where you come in. There are many stories going from town to town, door to door, mouth to mouth. It is said that your dear sweet uncle is in possession of three of the Four Divine Creatures, and that he sends you to hunt down the kylin in order to win the war.”

“Lies!” snarled Elizabeth, temporarily forgetting her manners. She was feeling positively flummoxed, hot on anger. “Impound and bebother these fibbers! We are here for safety, not

trouble!”

“We know, dearie,” said Mrs Chiu, sweeping over to her and patting her shoulder. She turned to her husband and began scolding him in a language Elizabeth could not understand. Finally, Mrs Chiu piled up the plates, and took their orders for breakfast. They all got up, and were allocated very snug bedrooms filled with made beds, chairs and sofas, before stowing away and each nestling into their bunks.

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The next morning was fresh and breezy: the sky was of a pearly white, and the jungle trees swayed in the wind. They bid farewell to Mrs Chiu and left accompanied by her husband. That is how they came to a start, walking away from Zhanjiang one fine fresh morning, singing farewell and merry songs as they went; the party moved along at happy speed, telling stories as they hiked through the mountains. They walked at good pace all day, stopping only twice for meals (which did not come quite as often as the children would have liked, I dare say). They had now strayed far away from the main roads, and contented themselves to tricky mountainous ones; they passed many villages with curious folk, until eventually they were buried so deeply in the mountains that there were no people left, no inns, no villages, and the roads grew increasingly worse. Long were the days as they rose higher and higher up the seemingly never-ending hills, constantly glooming in the shade as they trekked through dark foliage.

Mr Chiu led the way. “We must not stray from this path,” he said one morning, as they awoke once more to stiff necks and numb feet. “We are in need of food, as well as rest in a reasonably comfortable place. I say! You will also need new garments. You have sweated through them as if you’d plunged headfirst into the sea.”

They were asking him where he was making for, and he answered: “To a small tavern nearby – they call it Fahua. The innkeeper is an old friend of mine, whom I sent a message to, and is expecting us. We should be there by the end of the day.”

Still the party walked on, never looking back, determinedly urging themselves forward. There were many paths upon these mountains, but most of which were merely deceptions leading to nowhere or dead ends; also they had to be cautious about where they were walking, so as to not attract a possible ambush. Morning passed, afternoon came; but in the resolute silence they could not hear any sound of dwelling. At last, they arrived at a clear scrape of land, where a small building quite like Mr Chiu’s inn stood. The air down here was somewhat warmer, with the smell of oak and pine trees dazzling the children. Their spirits rose as they thought of the good warm dinner and comfy bed awaiting them there. Elizabeth already pictured herself curling into a ball next to the fireplace, whose chimney she could see emit smoke. As they drew nearer, a small, beefy man jogged out of the house, swinging his arms wildly over his head, shouting at them. She saw Mr Chiu stop dead ahead of her, spreading his arms out to prevent the children from walking any further. It was then that Elizabeth knew something was wrong. Though the Fahua landlord stood several yards away, she could hear him yell as though he were beside her.

“Comrades!” he bellowed, still gesticulating wildly. “Comrades! Walk no further, for Hong Kong has been conquered by Japan!”

The party stood frozen for several minutes. Then, they began to panic.

And that is how their adventure began.

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Dulwich College Beijing, Chan, Elvis - 13*

Staring down, I am mesmerized by the receding tides that leave a glossy sheen on the beach of shingle. In an instant, the guano-splattered rocks magically morph into glistening pearls that washed up from the unforgiving depths of the ocean. The spray of the seawater distorts the lights for a moment, and then it shimmers as it reveals a sunbow, proudly laying out its colours for all to admire.

I reach my hand out in an attempt to catch the beam, but stop dead in my tracks when I hear the deafening blare of an approaching junk. The water submerges the pebbles one again and waves ripple across the surface in an angry protest before dissipating into nothing. Leaping into the frigid water, I charge towards the approaching junk.

I have been waiting for this day my whole life!

From this distance, I can faintly make out a figure frantically waving his arms around. It has to be Pa! I rush towards the junk with renewed vigour, the steep descent forcing the water up to my shoulders. Even then, I tilt my head up and tiptoe in what I can only guess is the approximate direction of the junk. The sun hits my eyes in a blinding flash. I shut my eyes a fraction of a second too late, with the sun still dancing underneath my eyelids.

The junk is now so near that I can feel the thrum of the motors shaking me to the bone. It all feels so familiar. After all this time that they left, I still remember the steady hum, the heavy swell, and the salty tang... I am never going to forget the tender feelings of love.

My frail frame can't suppress the shivers that snake down my spine. It takes me a moment to register that it isn't the numbing seawater or the overcast skies. It is the pure thrill to see Pa again after all this time. Part of me feels like hugging him and never letting go, while another part of me feels like slapping him in the face for leaving me here for these twelve long years. I feel torn between the two extremes on the spectrum, each one tugging on me. While I puzzle over my first reunion with Pa in twelve years, the boat reaches shore. I snap back into reality and wade through the water as quickly as I can. For the first time, I have the chance to examine Pa's features in detail.

He has grey, stormy eyes that tell stories of raging storms out at sea. He looks older than most men of his age, but underneath his tanned and calloused skin hides a more youthful man. He wears a shaggy white beard - not in an attempt to look like a stereotypical fisherman, but just to keep his face warm on gusty, blustery mornings. It is unmistakably him.

Clutching hands, Ma and I step gingerly onto the deck and fall into Pa's embrace.

"I missed you two so much!" he mumbles.

"Me too!" is all Ma can muster before breaking down and sobbing like a young girl.

The mellowness of her voice feels a bit too quiet after hearing Pa's gruff voice. They are about as incompatible as oil and water; I stop to ponder how they came about liking each other in the first place.

"A fisherman's first catch determines his fate. Good luck, boy!" he says in his gruff voice

before slapping me on the back and handing a net over to me.

I cast my net into the water, silently mumbling prayers for a good catch. I close my eyes and breathe in slowly. Suddenly, I feel a sudden jerk and clumsily hoist my net up.

Time seems to stop.

They turn their heads and stare expectantly at me with their breaths held.

My heart pounds in my ears.

It takes all my effort to pull the net up onto the deck. I feel it slipping away, its weight threatening to pull me off board. I grimace when I feel my sweaty palms slip against the coarse rope of the net. I feel like I am going to tip over before I grasp onto the side for dear life.

They're watching with widened eyes now.

I regain balance and tug on the rope with all my might, eventually falling backwards onto the deck, pulling the net behind me. It lands mere centimeters from my head, so close that I can feel the spray on my face. Hastily, I sit upright and my heart sinks.

The bag is full of pearls.

I steal a glance at Pa, afraid to make eye contact with him. However, to my relief, he is grinning from ear to ear like a clown, his crooked yellowed teeth showing. I furrow my eyebrows, trying to read his thoughts. But he manages to read mine first and, upon helping me to my feet, hugs me so tightly that I feel like I am choking to death. He doesn't seem to notice at all, too overwhelmed by his surging emotions. It takes a few moments for him to get over his giddiness. "Fate is in your favour," he finally manages to whisper.

I drag the net filled to the brim with pearls and sit cross-legged on the deck of the junk. I wipe beads of sweat from my brow, panting with exertion. I hear the most beautiful music when I pour them out: the tintinnabulation is faint as fairy bells. As I examine them one by one, I notice the individual personalities each pearl possessed. They show different eras in the history of the Pearl River Delta. Some are sentimental of the past, showing yellowed films of my ancestor rowing boats and hauling up nets full of pearls just like I had. Others are more forward-looking, showing high-resolution images of skyscrapers that disappear into the clouds.

I pick the very first pearl and the very last pearl that respectively represent the past and the future. No matter how hard I try to put one on top of the other, they always slip apart. But if I place them gently side-by-side, they come together to form a larger, more beautiful picture. Just like Ma and Pa, as incompatible as they may seem, the future and the past can coexist alongside each other to form an interesting mix of both: skyscrapers next to junk boats, this is the present.

"It's too heavy!" I hear Pa yelp out. He curses under his breath.

The boat sags. I thrust the pearls into the river, entrusting everything in its arms.

"Didn't you want to keep them? They are pretty special after all," Pa asks.

"Yes, but I'll keep them at the bottom of the river where they belong, so that my descendants can also admire their wonder and beauty!"

The boat floats back up, and then speeds ahead towards the vast expanse of the ocean. I turn back, waving my final farewell to the river.

I know that the water will caress them with motherly love, pirouette alongside them with grace and thrust a protective shield over them. Treasure these pearls, as they will be the last to appear, because the past, present and future are already in the hands of the knowing Pearl River Delta. Without me knowing, from the start to the end, the river has been connecting me with my ancestors, with my descendants, with Pa.

# The Dead Fish And Other Dreams

*Good Hope School, Chik, Eva - 15*

Britain, 1925. I stared at the fish in the coffin.

“Farewell, Pearl.”

No one has ever seen Pearl. Only me. Now that I remember, him as well. The ghost fish, as the staff in the aquarium would call it. They heard about it, its appearance and tales, but never seen it. Some of my closer friends would call me cruel; hiding such a mystic creature and praising it in front of them, but never let them see its beauty. I would always say, “I cannot show you because I made a promise.” Promises are important, I think. No matter it is a promise about getting sweets at the confectionary for your child or a promise you made about not showing a fish to anyone ever.

Pearl was lowered into the ground. My memories at Pearl River surface above my head.

1911, China. I have followed my parents to a remote village next to the Pearl River. My parents never told me where exactly we went. So, my parents and I boarded the ship headed to China, carrying suitcases of research materials and a limited knowledge of Chinese, we settled down in one of those village houses. As a sensible 10 year old boy, I started looking for friends to play with.

There was a boy I lived next to. He has long braided hair, skinny and wore tunic-like clothing. Whenever I say hello to him, he smiles at me but never say a word. As days passed by I cannot stand the boredom of the rustic life, so I decided befriend him.

It was a bright morning. I went to play in the river. When I was walking along the river bank, I saw him washing some clothes. I bent down, and using my crummy Chinese, I said, “Hello. My name is Arthur. What is your name?” He stared at me for a moment.

“H-hi. I am Cheung.”

“Do you want me to help with the clothes?”

“Y-yes, thank you.”

We picked up the clothes and walked along the river bank.

“So... How old are you?”

“I’m ten. You?”

“Me too! You know, this place is like, really pretty! Especially the river. When the sun shines, the light reflects and it’s like... it’s like, a movable drawing!”

Cheung look at me with shining eyes. His black eyes black eyes mixed with the light, like coins in the well when light reflects. As round as pearls, his pupils went even bigger, even rounder. His lips, from two corners slowly rises, flashed a bring smile, took the clothes on my hands, bowed, and ran off.

Ever since that day, we have been inseparable. We went to play in the mountains, to pick flowers in the woods. We’d collect water from the river, bring it home, and then return to the

river to play with the tiny fishes. We lived in the final months of the Qing dynasty. So, when he still had his long hair, I like to tease him by putting flowers in his braid. He always flung his head vigorously so to express his distaste for it. Every time he does that it reminded me of Sally back home, always shaking the flowers out of her hair the boys have planted. It was like a tornado of petals.

The year 1912 came. It was February and the Qing dynasty have collapsed. Everyone can now cut off their braids and have short hair, like modern men. Everyone was eager to cut off their braids, so does Cheung. I offered to cut his hair, and I showed him some hairstyles from the magazines my parents owned. He chose a style, I tried to cut and style it in that way. I wouldn't say it was a good haircut, but Cheung did not say a word. His eyes went teary and start rambling. "After so many years—we Han Chinese finally got rid of the Jurchen people! So many years of dishonour—finally washed away like the dirt in the river!" He held my hands and said thank you for releasing him from humiliation. I never knew he was the patriotic type.

Spring blew the worrisome winter away and the trees that are dead came back to life. So, Cheung and I took a basket, went to look at the flowers that blossomed. We went to our favourite tree, next to the river and around the deepest part of the village. That tree was huge, very suitable for climbing. Most of all, it was beautiful. We all have an eye for beauty. People in my life often spoke of boys should not look at trees and exclaim its' beauty, but I thought that if boys cannot like things that are pretty, then what is the point of life? To live, is to enjoy, to appreciate what God has installed for us. I don't care if society says it's okay or not, because all these things are created for all humans, and man or not, you have the right to enjoy it. Appreciate it. All these thoughts, while we were walking, came to my head.

As we walk by, we saw the river was already filled with flower petals. All the colours you could ever imagine: ivory, pink, lavender, light blue, pale yellow... I was surprised at the beauty of this place. Can anything I have ever seen in Britain compare to this sight? I have always thought, we were English, we should do everything right and above others. But now, boy, I was wrong! In this obscure little village, was blessed with rivers and mountains that surpassed anything I have ever seen in Europe, I dare say. When we were about to reach the tree, we saw a sea of flowers already claiming its place on the grass.

Cheung looks at those flowers and said to me, "Isn't this beautiful? Look at that one," he pointed at one that was particularly huge. "Let's gather them!"

I nodded and we start picking up flowers that have fallen. Very soon, the basket was filled with variations of white and pink flowers and petals. We left the basket next to the tree and went to the river. I wanted to get in, to swim in the sea of flowers, but Cheung warned me that I will catch a cold if I did. So, I reached my hand into the cool water and scooped up some flowers. The water, as clear as crystal, slipped slowly through my fingers drip by drip. "Like raining diamonds", Cheung said.

The season of raining diamonds went by with the summer sunshine. Leaves fell and cover the ground like a carpet. We played in the fields, picked apples and cherries from the trees.

We went back to my home. While we were eating the fruits, Cheung asked me, "Hey, what's that you wear around your neck all the time?"

"Oh, it's a cross."

"What's a cross?"

I went over to my bookshelf and picked out the Bible.

"Have you ever heard of God?"

"No...but...I like his work?"

We both laughed like idiots. I didn't know Cheung has this strange sense of humour. We spent the whole afternoon indoors, with me explaining Christianity to him.

After a while, Cheung said that ever since the Qing fell, he wanted to have more exposure to the world. I offered to give him an English name. I named him Albert, after my best friend in Britain who moved to Poland. Al for short. But still, I like calling him Cheung better. It gives him his identity, his identity of being Chinese; of being different from anyone other nationalities in this world. Keeping his original name, I think, in a way, protects the thousand years of traditions and culture passed on in his motherland.

For a few months, my parents and I left for another village to do some more research. I told Cheung I'll be back. My parents and I travelled upwards along the river, and after spring came we went back.

"But let me tell you something, the water up there definitely do not have flowers covering the surface." I said to Cheung, pointing to the river.

"Huh? Without the surrounding environment a river is just a river!"

"I know!" I whined, "It's so boring! When Spring came I thought at least I could collect some flowers, but the flowers there are not blooming!"

"All I will say is that's just sad."

"Hey, Cheung..." I said as I slowly sneak behind him.

"What." Cheung starred at me.

"Do you think flowers bloom so pretty in here because of your presence?"

Cheung didn't say anything. He stared at me with a blank expression on this face.

He kicked me in my shin. Ouch.

A bird flew above our daydreaming heads. Cheung pointed at it and told me a song his grandmother taught him to sing when he is a little boy. It goes like "little bird, little bird, how free and pretty you look in the sky. Soar high, and if you're ever hurt, don't cry, don't fret, you're not alone, you're coming home, home to the Pearl River where you belong..."

I never forgot the words to this nursery.

It was the season of raining diamonds. We can finally go into the river and play. As we were splashing water at each other, we saw this fish swimming to us from afar. It was so beautiful. Maybe it's the sun; maybe its summer; but the fish seemed to have rainbow scales and sparkling fins. In the river shining like tiny crystals would have been there instead of water, we caught the fish and put it in the basket. We got out of the water, carrying the basket and ran to Cheung's house. He has this huge tank in his backyard. We filled the tank with water we got from the river and put the fish inside. Only now do I see how the fish really look like. It has bright scales, big sparkling eyes, and fins that looked like satin flowing under water. We both decided that this fish is so beautiful that it can only be possible under the works of Mother Nature, and only here, in the Pearl River can this fish be created.

Since we caught the fish, I went to his house every day to look at the fish. We would then walk to the river, collect some water so to keep the water fresh in the tank every other day. We decided to give him the name Pearl, after all we caught it in the Pearl River. In Chinese, it also means precious and a treasure. This fish has become our most prized treasure. We promised each other to refuse showing it to anyone ever, not even our parents, solely because we are the ones who caught it. Now that I think of it, it's kind of silly, but we were boys, silly little boys. Until now, we are the only ones who have ever seen Pearl.

It was a cold winter morning when we found out a thin layer of ice started to form on the surface of the water. We were so afraid that Pearl might die, we boiled the water we collected from the river and wait for it to cool down to the temperature of the summer water. We made

sure the water was exactly how it is in the river during summer and moved the tank into the house. I was quite puzzled why the water froze in the tank but not in the river, and Cheung said a small tank of water can be froze but not a river, just like a man can break one stick on his own but not a bunch of sticks.

The year passed by quickly. With letters from my relatives in Britain, they told us that the European world is in a mess. Conflicts between nations has been strong as ever and a war might begin. Sometimes when I help Cheung in the field, I can't help but think that this place, this peaceful, pretty village in contrast with my beloved home, Europe. We always say it is our burden, the "white men's burden" to bring civilization to the world. I don't see how that is needed. In this place, people live together peacefully. In this place, they feed on the same river and do not go to war over who owns what in the river. We do we bring to the world exactly? Only teardrops. We bring teardrops, we bring war, and we bring violence to the world. How many times do we have to fight, do we have to cry before we do it right? We together with the rest of the world, should bring calm after the storm together. But what do we really do? We blame others. We make false proclamations. We are not united.

"My greatest wish," I told Cheung, "is to see the world stop fighting with each other because of silly things. I hope that people will stop taking things that are not themselves. Stop interfering other nation's decisions and stop trying to justify wrong doings with concepts from 1832. I hope, really do hope I can see these wishes fulfilled before I die."

"Maybe, Arthur. I do hope your noble dreams can be fulfilled. I'll wait forever and a lifetime for that to happen as well."

I smiled.

We went over to Pearl. It was still shining, heaven in its eyes. Pearl is like the sun in my eyes. So does this place, this river, everything here.

Late July, 1914. The First World War has started. My hopes have been confirmed as just a dream. But dreams don't make people scream.

A few days later, my parents informed me that we are going back to Britain. Since the war started, we have to go back and handle some issues.

"Hey Cheung, I have to go back..."

"I always knew this day would come...but why so fast?"

"The war has started. I have to go back."

"Wait."

Cheung ran back to his house and came back with things in his hands.

"Here."

Upon my departure, Cheung gave me the fish in the tank and a bottle of the Pearl River water. He bid me goodbye and said, "Please remember this place and me. The years with you as my friend have been the best years in my life."

"I will. I always will remember the river, you and everything here. In a world that's quick to change, this place is the only place that I know of, that will always stay the same."

The day I board the ship, it's like my last night in the world.

1925, Britain. The war ended ages ago, but the aftershocks live on. At a fish's funeral, I stared at the coffin in the ground. A bird flew over my head. I thought of Cheung and his song.

"Little bird, little bird, how free and pretty you look in the sky. Soar high, and if you're ever hurt, don't cry, don't fret, you're not alone, you're coming home, home to the Pearl River where you belong..."

# 365 Days

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheung, Zoe - 14*

1960

**May**

I live in Huizhou, a village that cowers under the looming shadow of Guangzhou city. I tell my baby brother that Guangzhou is like an owl. It sleeps in the day and comes alive at night, opening beady neon eyes that stare at us from across the Pearl River.

There, the streets are packed with freshly-painted red double-decker buses, and shiny Western sports cars that whirr like hummingbirds; I know because Father always talks about those cars when he think we're asleep – he speaks in hushed, excited whispers.

I know Father would like to move to Guangzhou someday.

I see him sit by the riverbank just after work, squinting over with his sad, tired eyes at those dancing neon lights ... and, just for a moment, those sad, tired eyes ignite with the flicker of aspiration and desire, only to be dimmed seconds later by the dullness of reality.

I like Huizhou, though. It's quiet, simple, and isn't any more than meets the eye –like me.

Early this morning, Father and Mother headed to the pastures with wide-brimmed straw hats on their heads. I'll have to start work soon – after all, it's my ninth birthday today and I suppose being nine is quite old. But for today, I take my baby brother and we sit by the waterside and play with long blades of dry grass, letting them twist and slide between our fingertips.

I look down into the Pearl River, with its water so clear and still that it resembles glass, and I see our reflections; we are both round-faced and innocent, with wide curious eyes.

**December**

My baby brother died today.

Huizhou froze over and turned cold and blue - so did he.

I am sitting by the riverbank this morning, because I don't want to hear Mother crying anymore, or Father saying if we had moved to Guangzhou this wouldn't have happened. In my hand is a photograph; the only photograph we ever took of my baby brother. He sits in his cot, a soft head covered by only wisps of smooth hair, and the same wide, curious eyes. Today, mine are red and brim with tears.

1961

**May**

It's my tenth birthday, and Mother made me her special pork buns; I was surprised that she did, because we haven't been able to afford any meat in two months - it grows more expensive by the day.

Even though it's my birthday, I still have to sell rice and vegetables in the market, and my voice is still hoarse as I head into the house for dinner. Father isn't home yet, so Mother and I sit down and start to eat; her voice sounds hopeful as she tells me that spring is on its way, so we should be able to make enough money to buy pork and beef. We both sneak anxious

glances at the clock as the sky begins to bleed from blue to purple and eventually, a shade so dark that we can't even see the huge banyan tree that towers just feet from our house.

An unanswered question is thick in the air: where is Father?

At eleven o'clock, I grow tired of waiting and retire to my room. Mother tidies the dishes, and I can hear them clanging angrily against the sink – she is usually quiet and careful, and hums to herself as she carries out her chores. I listen to her as I lie awake – my bed is narrow and hard and I am growing quickly, so I barely fit in it now, but I remember a time when it was big enough for both my baby brother and me.

Hours later, there is a pounding at the door, and a slurred voice bellows from outside.

“Let me in.... Let me in!” A string of vulgarities follows.

I am hidden by shadows, and cover my ears to try block out the sound as the screams grow increasingly furious; it is the wrong sound for a still night in Huizhou.

Mother flies to the door, with a finger pressed against her lips, and flings it open as Father slumps onto the ground in front of her. His face is the shade of a ripe plum, and his muscles are slack. Mother tells him in a hushed voice that he is very, very drunk and needs to stop shouting. He tells her to shut up, that we need to move to Guangzhou right away – there is nothing for us here. Mother tries to guide him to bed, but he snaps at her. She asks him why he can't just appreciate that we all have each other, a loving and complete family. Father spitefully reminds her that baby brother is dead, and everyone in the village is cold and starving for half the year anyway. Mother's mouth opens in protest, but the words die before they reach her lips.

I shrink into the shadows, because I can see Father's face turn an even riper shade of plum. He is tired of Mother and her endless string of questions; tired of being tied to us and this sleepy village; tired of bending over rice paddies each morning, and coming home to a meal that leaves his stomach growling through the night; tired of gazing longingly across the river at the city of lavish in things that he can only dream of. I am ten years old, but I think a small part of me understands him.

And then Father raises a shaking hand, and brings it down onto Mother's face hard.

That is something I will never understand.

## December

I am down by the river again.

It is cold – cold enough for frost, but not snow. My teeth chatter and my shoulders shake but the river is my favorite place to think and today, I have a lot to think about. I have to think about the purple bruises on Mother's face that never seem to go away, and the way Father's breath always smells sour. I have to think about how I hate the sound of Guangzhou now – how the purr of the exotic cars has turned into an angry roar. I also have to think about how baby brother died a year ago today. I imagine what he would be like now, a charming and bright-eyed three-year-old, and I could have taught him how to add up and read.

My bare feet crunch over frosted ground as I look into the river. It is not frozen, but I know if I fall in, the cold will seep into my skin and numb me over. I squint to make out my reflection; the water is cloudy, and little fragments of debris float about in it – a plastic bottle cap, and bits of algae mar its glass-like quality – but through all the fragments, I can make out a long face and sunken cheeks, with dark eyes that are far too tired to be curious.

It's funny how much a year can change someone like me. Perhaps I am more than meets the eye after all.

# New Tales of the Pearl River Delta

*Heep Yunn School, Leung, Juliet - 15*

The sun lashed out its fiery tongue, leaving sunburnt marks on already scarred backs while the waves beat against the pier, equally relentlessly. The sun gloated at the lack of wind and tried to suffocate the coolies. It was a stifling noon, but the Chinese foreman, standing on the raised platform, made them skip lunch until the infinite stacks of cargo are stowed away. From the nearby eatery, the fragrance of tea and char siu buns came wafting out, sending their stomachs into protest.

‘I am starving. How long does it take for us to grab a daibao and a sip of polei?’ hissed Ping. He eyed the foreman with murderous eyes. At nearly six feet tall, he was the strongest, and the most violent of all the coolies in this port; the precipitator of everything, mostly the troubles.

‘Exactly! We just want a bite, don’t we?’ echoed Keung.

‘That gongtao over there, who does he think he is? Not ten months ago he was slaving away like all of us. Now hesees himself a British scoundrel too,’ scoffed Ping.

‘Someone tell him he’ll kill everybody off with the way he works us. He’ll be sending poor Chi-Wo over there into a grave soon,’ said Wei-Hai as he shrugged his shoulders towards Chi-Wo, a tottering kid who could barely shoulder the cargo on his back. They sweated like fountains spewing water, and cursed the foreman violently in secret: the prospect of going up to him was far too intimidating.

In 1928 Hong Kong, ‘employee’ and ‘welfare’ were two separate ideas. The meagre wage which Wei-Hai received was all that kept his family of six from the streets. Although Wei-Hai didn’t look like it, he had already been his family’s breadwinner for four years since sixteen.

Eventually, when the sun decided to abandon its post, the foreman dismissed them without compensation for the lost lunch. A veil of black crept over the city, and Wei-Hai trudged back home feeling numb in places where he didn’t know he had muscles. A light appeared at the corner of his eye in a well of darkness, and he saw the dried seafood store lined with all manner of delicacies: dried squid, abalone, and shark fins. They always made his

mouth water when he passed by every night. He remembered his impossible vow of bringing home fish maw, but the occasional addition of charsiu on the dinner table was enough for the family to relish for a week. Inside the seafood store, an old lady was setting the table for her workers' dinner, as she had done every night while Wei-Hai dragged himself home. Wei-Hai longingly imagined himself in a workplace where employers showed small acts of kindness, treat them to dinner. Then, the Chinese foreman's fat face swam into mind, and the light that had fleetingly floated into his heart was drowned by darkness again.

Wei-Hai's next day was equally back-breaking and he wished the scorching sun would disappear behind the clouds to provide some respite. As he stacked interminable crates of tobacco at the end of the pier, he noticed the two British managers in top hats daintily pick their way across towards the foreman's office. The younger gentleman had a handkerchief over his nose, and Wei-Hai rolled his eyes at the sight.

Ping came over, narrowing his eyes when he saw the two top hats bobbing across the pier. 'Look at those English dogs. I've had enough of this. We didn't topple a Chinese empire for a British one!' Ping looked as if he wanted to throw his crate towards the foreman's office. Wei-Hai didn't reply, but when he looked into the foreman's office, he saw the foreman bowing ninety degrees before the two Englishmen.

Nor did it help when the sun melted away the clouds, and Wei-Hai nearly couldn't suppress his boiling feelings towards the despicable Chinese foreman, nor his contempt for the Englishmen. But he wasn't born to be rash like Ping, and he returned to his crates of tobacco. For four years, he had been trying to work his way up to become a foreman. It would mean a chance to help all the coolies who shared the same fate as him – terrorised by someone of the same skin colour as their own.

All of a sudden, a loud splash of water sounded at the far end of the pier. Wei-Hai looked up to see only the old Englishman left at the edge of the pier, waving his hat madly and shouting in English, which were then followed by other shouts in Chinese: the younger manager had fallen into the water.

'Ha! Serves him right. Let him drown! Or at least let him drink his share of sea water!' Ping showed no inclination to do anything or to commiserate.

Wei-Hai however, experienced a prescient moment of struggle. On the one hand, his life was too valuable for someone he hated with a burning passion, but it wasn't in his bones either to let someone die in front of him. Despite Ping's ever more vociferous protests, he ran to the edge and jumped into the water. The sputtering Englishman was dragged out of the sea, still clutching his handkerchief and struggling to free himself from Wei-Hai. The other gentleman, though much flustered, noticed Wei-Hai, and gestured for the Chinese foreman to bring him into the office. No one cared that he was still dripping like a soaked duckling.

'So... you're Wei-Hai, aren't you?' boomed the elderly gentleman in the top hat.

'Yes. Me, Wei-Hai.' He stuttered in halting English.

'Someone fetch us a translator.' The Englishman told the Chinese foreman.

'No, ah... me know Eng... English.'

'Oh, I like the lad's attitude. Well, all you Chinese care about is money, don't you, young man? How much do you think I should pay you for saving my nephew?'

What was this about? The Englishman was speaking too fast for poor Wei-Hai to catch up.

Meanwhile, the Chinese foreman patronisingly translated for him. 'Mr Brandon's asking you what you want in return. Just write down the amount here.'

Wei-Hai ignored him and spoke directly to the Englishman. 'You teach me... buy sale.'

‘Mr Brandon, I think he means that...’ The Chinese foreman attempted to explain.

‘I understand what he means, sir! I wonder how different you and that boy can be. Fancy a bet on how long this attitude of his would last?’

Wei-Hai opened his mouth again. ‘I want “buy sale”!’

‘Yes, yes, you shall get what you want, nothing too much, really. But first, you’ll need to polish your English a bit, before we get you into this uh, “buy sale” business.’

In the following days, Wei-Hai discovered that the wind at the Queen’s Pier no longer felt oppressing, but every tepid breeze was a splash of spring water on his face. He continued to work as a coolie in the morning, but in the evening, he studied English and Accounting, subsidised by Mr Brandon. Wei-Hai felt like the gap between him and his dream of being a foreman had turned from the Pearl River into just the Victoria Harbour.

The Chinese foreman, however, became consumed with jealousy, and brooding on that platform of his, he thought of all kinds of punishment he could inflict upon Wei-Hai to make up for it. Longer working hours, he decided, was the best treatment during which he could berate Wei-Hai for the most miniscule of problems. But Wei-Hai continued to have the summer breeze on his side.

As the winds of the harbour passed by, so did the frost. The scorching sun lashed out at the coolies again, and Ping was muttering about how he wished the foreman would evaporate in the heat. As Wei-Hai tried to tune him out in order to review account management in his head, shouts rang out somewhere far away. Wei-Hai dismissed it as just a few coolies bickering, but the shouts became impossible to ignore, and he looked up to see a mass of people gathered a few yards in front of him.

Ping had already been there and back and was bursting with news. ‘Hey, Chi-Wo is down. He must have got heatstroke!’ Wei-Hai dropped his crate and ran to where Chi-Wo had fallen. Chi-Wo’s face was black as charcoal. Wei-Hai broke out in a cold sweat. Suddenly Death himself had made his presence known among them in uncertain terms. Chi-Wo looked so small compared to the pier, so insignificant compared to the harbour stretched out in front of him; his death was so big a loss, so small a sacrifice to Wei-Hai.

Mr Brandon came to the pier flustered, desperately trying to restore some order of normality. The hysterical Chinese foreman fell down from his platform with a loud thump. A coolie had died right under his nose, and he had a lot more to lose than his job. The more he frantically tried to excuse himself, the more of his atrocities came to light and Mr Brandon’s frown was etched even deeper in his face. Wei-Hai said nothing. On the one hand he gloated over the Chinese foreman’s downfall, but then the innocent face of Chi-Wo floated into his mind, and he couldn’t help but review on the price of this downfall.

Finally Mr Brandon turned to Wei-Hai.

‘Wei-Hai, this gentleman here is evidently not competent enough for his job anymore. Would you like to take up his post?’ The Chinese foreman’s face went grey as ash as Wei-Hai’s face lit up. ‘The first task I am giving you, is to send all those outside back to work.’

Wei-Hai faced his first challenge in his new role. Outside the office block, a group of coolies, led by Ping, were demanding justice.

Wei-Hai looked at Mr. Brandon. ‘You will... will pay Chi-Wo’s family?’

Mr. Brandon scoffed. ‘My dear boy, I take that you are joking, where have all your accounting lessons gone to? If we compensate each worker for a scratch we’d be bankrupt!’

Wei-Hai remembered the seafood shop he passed by every night. He remembered the night when he saw the elderly lady hand out red packets. He remembered the thankful faces of the workers, even though he also distinctly noticed lesser shark fins hanging from the

shelves. He took a deep breath and dove into the crowd and climbed onto the raised platform, now vacated by the Chinese foreman. He consoled the crowd with promise of a compensation deal for Chi-Wo's family and not to repeat the Chinese foreman's mistakes, conveniently forgetting to mention where the money would come from.

From that day onwards, Wei-Hai was the new foreman of the Pier, working for Brandon and Co.. Finally, a time to fulfil his vow. He couldn't have felt more accomplished as he spent his time sorting out the perennial problems at the pier. Even the harbour itself seemed glittered a sapphire blue with his efforts.

But the company never gave Wei-Hai enough money to pay for the coolies' extra hours, and they always gave him more than enough work. With more money on his hand because of his own pay rise, Wei-Hai tried to pay the workers back to realise his dream of a better life for all coolies. Sometimes he saw Chi-Wo smiling at him, and this pushed Wei-Hai forward in his efforts.

Nonetheless the minimal pay rise he received for himself was not enough to cover the overtime that he doled out from his own pocket. He ended up doling out promises. Promises that couldn't be fulfilled, that sunk into the deep harbour and left no trace on the surface, but pierced deep into Wei-Hai's heart. He began to feel that the piece of glass between him in his office and the coolies took up more space than the sapphire blue strip at the far end of the pier which stretched across the harbour towards Kowloon.

That day, after giving out the last of his own wages that he could afford to cover for three coolies' overtime, Wei-Hai went home in a dejected state, feeling his empty pockets. There was no money for fish maw, there wasn't even money for char siu. Out of habit, he slowed down as he passed the dried seafood shop, and eventually stopped in front of it. The elderly lady saw him gaping at the delicacies, and invited him in for dinner with a sympathetic look. Wei-Hai, racked by a sudden wave of insecurity, ran into the darkness, as the light from the shop diminished behind his back.

On the following pay day, the occasional thunder tore through the silence of the crowd of coolies that huddled around the platform. A storm hung waiting over them like a funeral shroud. Wei-Hai announced that there was to be no compensation for the overtime. He went home, with the satisfying, yet guilty sound of coins in his pocket.

During the next months and years worldwide recession began to affect Brandon & Co. like a long, foreboding storm. It was 1931, and Wei-Hai, though barely twenty-three, was looking older than his years. He stared into his cheque books, marked in red here and there. He looked out and saw Ping, still muttering away while hauling the cargo. He saw Keung, still in his position one step behind Ping, acting as his echoing machine. He sought for Chi-Wo, even though he knew it was futile: He had never seen him after that gloomy pay day when the coins rang in his pocket and not the others. He slammed his cheque book shut and took two sheets of paper and a stack of coins. Before he left the office, he first stored away his share of the wages.

'Everyone, the company can't afford so many workers anymore. The first list announces the people who will no longer work for Brandon & Co.. The next list are workers who will have their wages reduced by 20 per cent.' He sank the names on the list into the bottom of the harbour, shackled to his heart.

Wei-Hai, the Chinese foreman, could hardly navigate his way to the office the following morning. A grey dullness engulfed everything, the rain and the thunder struck Wei-Hai like a million arrows. He waded on into the mass of people and climbed up the platform even though the rain was close to pushing him down under again.

‘You hon gan! What did you promise us when you first became foreman? And now you bend in front of those snobs!’ shouted Ping.

‘There is a recession going on in the world, and the company has to cut costs. Gentlemen, we are all in this together, including me.’ Wei-Hai stood on the platform and tried to make himself heard over the shouts.

‘We’re not budging till we get what we deserve!’ roared Ping. ‘We won’t leave. Traitor! You betrayed us!’ the coolies raised their voices and the words ricocheted back into Wei-Hai’s ears, sending him tumbling down the platform, tumbling into his own abyss of thoughts. Wei-Hai was suddenly alone, his vision splattered with rain drops, and etched deep was the word ‘traitor’ in every drop.

Mr Brandon would have none of this nonsense. He literally threw the evening paper across the office and nearly hit Wei-Hai as he slouched into the office, the same soaking duckling he was several ages ago.

‘Look what you’ve done! I have wasted so much time and money on you, is this how you repay me? I told you to cut back on costs, not to start a strike!’

‘I’m... I’m sorry, Mr Brandon. But the workers, they just want to feed their families.’

‘And I have many more mouths to feed than you bunch of imbeciles. Now see to it that this matter is resolved, or you will find another way to feed your family,’ raged Mr Brandon.

Wei-Hai left the offices and went homeward, the rain still pouring relentlessly upon him as he trudged home into the dark streets. The dim light of the dried seafood shop caught the corner of his eye again. The elderly lady was standing by the door, handing out umbrellas to those who were going home. The remaining workers helped her barricade the doors against an expected typhoon. A small section of the shelves were already empty, and she looked a little sad, but the number of workers remained the same.

Wei-Hai thought of his own office. The company had always been harsh on lunch breaks, never mind treating them to decent meals. Wei-Hai himself had compensated the coolies, but the delighted faces he had once seen seemed so long ago. He then wondered whether the coolies were still at the pier. Did they have umbrellas? Would the Englishmen pay them to leave? But he was too tired to go back. Perhaps he no longer cared anymore. He certainly knew that Mr Brandon couldn’t care less even if any of them died.

Perhaps that was the difference between Chinese and Westerners, a difference that was wider than the whole of the Pearl River. The Chinese proverb of ‘every man for himself’ couldn’t be truer when crises hit Western companies. The elderly lady held her fort. She wasn’t one to let go of her comrades in arms. But what had Wei-Hai done to his own fighters? He acted out the captain’s orders: he, as the captain’s mate, threw them off the battleship without a moment’s hesitation.

Guilt seeped into the rain and Wei-Hai was enveloped in it. His thoughts sank deep into the Victoria Harbour. He tried to locate the promises he had dropped down there. He tried to find the list of names he sank into it. He tried to find his heart that he had shackled names to. He was glad to find the chain still intact. His thoughts came back to the Pier, and in that brief moment, he thought he saw Chi-Wo smiling at him again.

# Mother China

*Island School, Chan, Wing Kiu - 14*

Mother China awakens, tired from the long month of working. She stands up and stretches and floats to the pale blue sky. The smell of the rain from yesterday seeping through her nose. She arrives at the transparent platform of the sky and walks to the wooden mahogany table that they gather to every month. She sits down on her usual black armchair and leans back thinking of what might happen in this meeting. Her red dress flows down from her chair to the floor, as if it was a red carpet for the others to walk on. She taps the table 3 times, slowly but loudly. The hollow sound of the table rings throughout the sky and the children of the Pearl River Delta awaken.

“Please gather my beautiful children of the Pearl River Delta,” Mother China calls out, her voice booming through the land, “it is the time for us to gather once again. Come, come now.”

One by one, the children of Pearl River Delta awaken for their monthly meeting, rising from their land, it's bodies floating up to the sky to meet their mother. The children begin to gather, one by one settling around the round table. They sit and begin to chatter, updating on each other about the things that have been happening in this month. However the greater ones of them came in last, Foshan, Dongguan, Macau and Hong Kong.

Foshan, walked in with his chest held high, his wing chun outfit blowing in the wind. The black shirt, black pants and black kung fu shoes made him look like a shadow. He strutted his way, looking down upon people when walking. Everybody looked up to him since he was one of the mother's favourites. Mother China smiled as she saw her proud son walk in.

Next came Macau. Just like every month, he came with his beige trenchcoat and his suit. His hair was gelled back with a brown fedora on top of slick hair. His shoes were shiny and brown just like his hair. He took off his fedora as he sat down, leaning back on his chair and placing his legs apart, his head cocked back with a smug on his smile. He pulled away his cigar and smirked looking upon his siblings. He then blew air out of his mouth and white smoke came whirling out of his mouth immediately.

Hong Kong walked in straight after Macau. His green polo golf t-shirt was still worn with his red and white checkered pants. He rushed in, checking his watch every minute or so, fidgeting with his round glasses all the time. Underneath his eyes were huge dark circles, could say it resembled a panda and his face was covered with wrinkles. He plopped himself down, rubbing his eyes and fiddling with his white gloves that were still worn around his hands.

Lastly came in the beautiful Dongguan. She was beautiful unlike any of her siblings but she didn't have a smile on her face. She looked, annoyed. She pushed everybody and everything out of her way and walked straight to her seat without talking or even looking at anybody. Her red qi pao with her matching red high heels as if harmonizing with her mother. Her face was full of makeup, her hair tied up in a bun. Her eyes flicked around instead of just looking at people properly.

Mother China smiled as she saw all her children walk in. When everybody began to settle down, she began to stand up. Everybody immediately quieted down and looked at Mother China. She was getting old, even her movements were obvious to her children that she was beginning to age. She moved slowly, but at the same time making sure everything was gentle and elegant.

“Welcome children. I am glad to see you again. It has been some time since I have last seen you but you all still look young and fresh. Now let's see shall we begin our meeting the old fashion way? Reports first, complaints later. Now Hong Kong, my young boy begin.” Mother China said as she moved her hands around, signaling her children to listen intently.

Hong Kong stood up as Mother China began to settle down back in her seat. He fidgeted around then took a deep breath and began to speak in a very fast tone. “Well I guess not much has happened but I guess you can call that a lot has happened too, well the biggest issue is occupy central which you all probably would have heard of, but don't worry it's now all under control and I can assure you that next meeting this issue will be settled so don't worry about me Mother China and just continue on with the others.” He breathed out a sigh of relief and smoothed out his golf shirt before sitting down.

Mother China smiled and said in a soft and gentle voice, “Well, that's great to hear. I trust you Hong Kong, but make sure you get that fixed. I don't want any complaints to be coming from other parents about how us China is being unreasonable to our people don't you agree?” Hong Kong nodded continuously until Mother China laughed. Hong Kong immediately became embarrassed and began fidgeting with his glove again, pulling on every finger as if wanting to rip it off.

“Your turn my darling Macau, speak. I will listen.”

Macau stood up slowly and looked around. Everybody stared back at him, waiting for him to speak up. He smirked and stared back at Mother China. He pulled his cigar out and blew out the reeking smell of smoke out of his mouth. “It's just this and that again. I mean what do you expect would happen in just these short few days of a month.” Macau said in a slow but cocky tone. “As usual, it's just gambling, drugs, gambling, drugs and gambling again. Told ya it would be the same didn't I?” He bit on the cigar that was hanging between his fingers and sat back down, leaning back into his chair and moving his leg up and down.

Mother China sighed and turned to Foshan. “Well, I hope your report will be slightly more... mm... positive shall I say my dear boy?”

Foshan stood up immediately will pulling his black kung fu shirt straight and smiled. “Of course mother. Even though this may not be the most positive thing, but I can gladly assure you that there is nothing wrong going on, no drugs, no riots, just a normal city.” Foshan gave

a reassuring smile to Mother China as he sat down. Mother China finally let out a sigh of relief and murmured to herself. “At least I have one reliable son...”

She looked back up to Dongguan and her eyes lighted with a spark of light. “My beautiful daughter, would you have anything to report?”

Dongguan sat there, not moving.

“Dongguan? My darling? Speak. I am waiting.”

Dongguan flicked her eyes to Mother China. “Speak huh. To you? About what. Do you want me to tell everybody what you did to my city?”

Mother China stared at Dongguan, surprised at her attitude towards her. She frowned. “What are you talking about? I am unclear. Speak with more elegance young lady.”

Dongguan laughed. “Acting innocent now huh? Don’t play games mother. I know it was you. You took away my business, took away my only dream to becoming big like brother Hong Kong. Even though it may be shameful that I’m famous for prostitution but guess what, at least I managed to make money from this! Factories, my only other source of getting money are all leaving me too! You happy now?” Her voice rose as she spoke, from speaking to shouting. Her eyes flared with anger and her breathing became heavier after every word she spoke.

Mother China stood up. “Dongguan. How dare you speak to me like this! I am doing this for your own good. You should be glad and not mad. Go away, I do not want to speak away for the rest of this meeting.”

Dongguan stood up and ran away, tears coming out of her eyes. She decided that this wasn’t going to show Mother China anything. She wanted to show Mother China what she was really capable of. She decided to take a rest, not do anything, shut down her city for a while. Make Mother China payback for what she did to her.

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For the next couple of days, nothing seemed to happen. But soon, complaints started to come in. Companies from all around the world began to call Mother China, telling her how much their business is dropping without Dongguan’s factories to support it. At first Mother China was ok, she managed to convince companies to resolve the problems another way but soon it was out of control. Every minute or so, the telephone would ring and she would yet have to convince the company of using another way.

Mother China immediately calls on her dearest sons Foshan and Hong Kong to attempt to convince Dongguan of going back to work. They immediately went to visit their sister but even with the help of her admirer Hong Kong, nothing seemed to work.

She was actually beginning to enjoy her time laying back and not working. It was none of her business anyways. When the companies complain, she’s not the one receiving all the complaints, it’s all up to Mother China. It was also nice, seeing her siblings one by one come by, obviously sent by their mother to attempt to beg her to get back to work. It was funny actually, she was usually the one begging not them. She finally felt happy and her heart began to soothe from the pain she was given by Mother China.

However on the other side, Mother China was struggling. None of her children were able to fulfill her requests so the only other way was another meeting. She flew up to the round table once more, and knocked on the mahogany table. The children immediately gathered once more, with Dongguan walking in last.

“Dongguan. I know you are trying to seek revenge, however you are going too far. You

must stop. This is not only going to ruin your future to be like brother Hong Kong, but you're also ruining the reputation of China, do you even know how long it took us to build that?" Mother China said in a soft yet aggressive voice.

Mother China took a deep breath and let out a long and gentle sigh. "I know you all think like me and believe in me. Our dream together is to make China the best country. But do you think we will be able to do that with all this? This dream will never country! We have to work together!"

Everybody began to talk at once, some disagreeing, some agreeing. Mother China closed her eyes and stood still. All the children began to quiet down. She opened her eyes and in front of her stood a bundle of sticks. She passed it around and said "Let me ask you children, do you think you will be able to break these sticks by yourself?" All the children tried, but no one seemed to even break half of the sticks, not even the might Foshan. Mother China then unraveled the piece of rope tying all the sticks together and passed out one each. "There you go, now try breaking the stick." Everybody snapped their stick in half in just seconds. Mother China smiled.

"See what I mean? Individually you can't break the sticks, but together, when you split the work, you can succeed. Dongguan, I'm sorry for taking your business away and I understand you're upset, but you cannot just abandon us, abandon the country. Even though you may not be one of the main cities which are known when spoken of China, but you make a great impact among us. Without you we cannot succeed to fulfill our dream. United we stand, divided we fall."

Dongguan stood there, suddenly feeling a pang of guilt within her. Even though her mother took everything away from her, she now understood that she still shouldn't have done what did. It was bad, she caused great pain towards her mother and her siblings. She kneeled down and said in a quiet voice, "Please forgive me mother. I am sorry and I will reflect upon my wrong doings." Mother China immediately walked over and lifted her back up. "Don't worry about it, but promise me that from now on, you will help us and we will fulfill our dream together."

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As time went by, China became stronger than ever, soon becoming one of the top 3 most powerful countries in the world. Mother China smiled upon her children as they succeeded together. United they stood, divided they fell.

# A Greater Treasure

*Island School, Gaultney, Lindie - 14*

Pearl River Delta Facts:

- Since December 2004 HK and other cities found in the Pearl River Delta are interconnected through subways and rails.
- The Pearl River Delta is one of Chinas leading economic regions and major manufacturing center
- By train it takes 2 hours to go from Guangzhou to Hong kong
- The Pearl River Delta is becoming a more popular destination

Use legend of the pearl

- In the middle of the Guangzhou river sits a gigantic stone island, gradually washed and eroded by the water that the stone became slick and smooth like the shape of a pearl
- Third longest river in China

A Greater Treasure

I had always wanted to see the shiny pearl of the river. The one my ancestors told me about. The thing that only the most successful and humble people were allowed to see. The treasure so precious that the dragon of the water curled it up every night like a new born threatening to send storms if challenged. It was my dream place. Something I had hoped for ever since I was a little child. Odd you might think, but to me it was the epitome of adventure and beauty. A key to my somewhat lost heritage.

I dreamt of the salty air blowing against my long black hair, the waves silently lapping against the rock and my thin, pale teenage body resting on the very top of the pearl in the most supreme and important spot. The moon would be full and awake with light, fish dancing and playing in the dark mysterious waters. The industrial cranes have stopped their work for the day and the only people in sight are the old fishermen making their way in for the night - their paddles swooping and swaying as if singing a tune.

They told me it wouldn't be an easy journey. I would have to travel day and night by boat past the monsters of the sea. In my way stood many obstacles, that's why I had started planning ever since I was seven. The plan started off rough and rigid as to be expected, but later began to gain depth and complexity as I learnt more about the dark secrets of the river. I learnt not only that it's the third largest river in China, but that it is also full of legends and mysteries. One of these tales described a stone island in the Guangzhou region of the river. Legend has it that the waves washed and eroded the stone making the stone slick and smooth like the shape of a pearl. This is how the name for the river is said to have originated. That is the treasure I wish to find.

I imagined the joy I would feel when I finally saw the towering structure, strong and prominent in its place. Quite large for a treasure one might think, but to me it would be a

piece to the missing puzzle of my heritage, a memory that not even the most powerful man could take away from me, something I could treasure forever. This is my story.

The time had come for me to go to secondary school. It was the last week of summer and I had spent it in my room huddled over my Chinese history book sucking in all the information I could get. You see the thing is I was born originally in Guangzhou in the Pearl River Delta Region. A few months after I was born I was sent away to an orphanage in which I grew up until I was four years old when my adoptive parents came for me. I was never told exactly why my parents gave me up, but rather was told an array of white lies every time the subject was brought up. Anyways this is beside the point so I was in my bedroom just minding my own business when I heard my adoptive parents arguing in the room next to mine. They kept switching languages from English to French and back, making it hard to gather what they were saying or what was causing them to get into an argument.

Then I heard the words. Quiet and muffled, but unmistakable. Guangzhou. My heart started beating irregularly. Palpitating. What could this possibly mean? Would I finally get the chance to go to the place of my dreams... What if they are sending me back? My mind raced with an endless list of possibilities making my head feel heavy and numb. Then the voices stopped and that's when the footsteps started growing louder by the second echoing the closer they got to my door.

The door opened revealing the two familiar faces of my 'parents', their faces showing little emotion, "We need to talk".

I fumbled my fingers nervously as they sat on the bedside. Then Charlotte (my adoptive mother) said "Pierre and I have been thinking... We think it's time you explore your roots a bit more... get to know your past life a bit..".

"What do you mean?" is all I managed to squeeze out.

"We are taking you to Guangzhou", Pierre replied.

That's when it all became too much. My vision became spotty and the world around me seemed to give way. Thump. Darkness everywhere, but then a light appeared, one that welcomed me into its warm rays. The light woke me up.

"Kim? Kim?", were the first words I heard spoken with fear. "Are you all right?"

I mumbled as I tried to gain sense of my surroundings. Shock was the first thing that hit me. I was really going to do this; I was going to go the place I had longed to go to ever since I had left. My adventure was just about to start.

That's how I ended up here. In the Pearl River region six months later. We had just arrived to the docks where we rented a small fishing boat that would take us on our adventure along the river, an adventure that was far simpler than I had ever planned or imagined. I hoped to myself that this might be the time I see the treasure long sought after.

It was a peaceful journey as we sailed into the night sky, the moon began to peek out as if to say hello. Its brilliant white beams reflected in the deep water and then... It was just as I had imagined: the fish danced happily in the water, the water was as mysterious as could be and the fishermen made their way home. All except one. From a distance you could make out it was a middle-aged woman. She stood silently on her boat, paddle in hand staring at something I couldn't quite see. It wasn't until we got closer that I realized she was staring at the pearl.

Our boats collided gently for a minute, but strong enough to make her turn. She turned and looked towards us, first to my adoptive parents then back onto me where she held her gaze for a while. Confused and slightly shocked. She whispered under the sounds of the wind and I could just make out the words "Kim".

# Memory

*Island School, Law, Yue Hang - 14*

The cold January Breeze blew across a blossom filled floor, gently blowing the flowers round the damp soil. The sun was setting, letting its last rays of light dance across the mossy fence. By the fence, stones carved carefully placed in neat rows. A figure stood in front of one of these stones. Bending down carefully, she placed a bunch of white flowers along with a crisp envelope. A male called her from outside the fence. Lingering for a moment, she looked at the stone, about to say something. After arguing with herself, she decided against it and spoke nothing. She kneeled down and traced the faded words on the stone with her finger. She closed her eyes, as if reliving moments from the past. Finally stepping up, she walked away.

Without looking back.

Siu Xina

(1995~2004)

Loving, Kind Sister

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Rina sat under the old wooden bench, staring off in the distance. The memories still seem so fresh to her, it's like she lost her yesterday.

“Big Sis, Big Sis!” a girl cried.

She choked back a sob. Is it possible? Is it possible that she came back?

“Where were you? I've been looking for you!” an anxious girl, obviously the older sister asked.

“I went off, off on my own to follow a puppy!” The younger girl blubbered back

“Don't do that anymore, what if bad people caught you and held you hostage? I'll never see you again”

“I'm sorry, Sissy! I'll never do it again!!!!

The elder sister reprimanded the crying younger sister, wiping her teary eyes on a lint covered tissue. When the last of the younger girl's tears are gone, she gently smiled and took her younger sister's hand.

It was unbearable to see the flashbacks appear again

\*\*\*

“Sissy! Sissy! Where are you? Where did you go???” A crying girl sat in the police station. Her eyes were completely blurred by the big tears that have formed. Face crumpled, she kept crying, hoping that her sister would find her.

A police walked over and questionably looked at the small kid crying on the bench.

“What happened, partner?” He asked.

“The little girl, she wandered in saying that she lost her sister” his partner, another policeman answered.

“Did you find her sister?”

“Not yet, but the little girl has been here crying for almost an hour-“

“-XINA!” a voice bellowed from the doors. There she was, soaked from the bone. She had been searching for her sister all this time, the shock she had when she found when she lost her sister. Just like the little girl, she had been crying nonstop for an hour. In her hands, she held a worn down plastic sheet.

“Siu Xina!” Rina choked down her own tears. “Do you know how worried I was? I WAS WORRIED SICK ABOUT YOU!”

“I, I was following the puppy along the path, and, and I lost you!!!” Xina wailed.

“NEVER, NEVER go off without telling me, ever again. Never again, never-“ Rina started blubbering

The two girls, both clutching each other, were reduced to a sniveling pile of mess in front of the police station. Holding onto her sister’s hand firmly, she walked out of the police station. Using the worn sheet of plastic, she held it over her sister’s head to shelter from the rain, not once thinking of using it on herself.

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Rina stood up and started walking. Glancing at the sky, she could see there was a bit of sun today. Rina smiled. Xina always did like a bit of sun. Looking back now, if that had not happened, will Xina be with her today?

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It was partially sunny. Lying on the concrete floor of the rooftop, the two sisters looked up to the sky. The sun seemed to peek behind the grey clouds that threatened to cover the whole sky. Xina broke the silence:

“Whenever there was a bit of sun, I’d imagine I was a bird, with the sun rays melting my frozen wings, so I’d be able to soar free from this misery”

Surprised by her sudden outburst, Rina asked “But why don’t you want the day to be a sunny day? Won’t it be much pleasant to have a sunny day instead?”

“If I get too close to the sun, you’d be burned”

“Me? You’re willing to take me with you? Aren’t you afraid that I’ll drag you down with me?”

“Will you? I’ve always believed in you, why would I stop now?”

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“I’ve always believed in you, why would I stop now?” Xina’s voice echoed in her mind.

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She thought back to how protective Xina was to her. Inwardly, she smiled.

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“I’d like you to meet my new boyfriend, Keith!” Rina announced.

Keith was Rina and Xina’s childhood friend. Without parents, Keith took care of the two

sisters, providing them with a simple shelter in a small public housing estate.

“What- he can’t be your boyfriend!” Xina exclaimed indignantly.

“Why not, Xina?” Keith asked jokingly.

“Bec- Because It would be weird, you know, you’re like our friend and stuff,” Xina spluttered, twiddling her fingers.

“Well,” Keith started.” I promise to you, if I ever, ever make your sister cry, or miserable in any sort. You may take her away from me.”

“One mistake, fella.” Xina warned

“I promise”

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“Are you okay? Do you need me to come over?” Keith asked.

No, She was not okay. Xina trusted her, Xina believed in her. A rash decision, a failed part as a sister had cost her sister’s life, but what can she do now? It’s all over, she can’t come back,

“I’m fine.”

“You’re not fooling me at all, Rina - “Keith started

“Just stop. I’m fine, okay. I don’t need any consoling, “Rina snapped back. When she saw the shocked look on her boyfriend’s face she looked down, shame faced. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-“

“Save it, I know how you’re feeling now. I’m not blaming you, but don’t feel too bad about yourself, okay?” Keith said. He, like Rina is equally close to Xina, childhood friends at least. Keith has been taking care of Rina and Xina like family. “You didn’t mean for it to happen, so... Don’t blame yourself.”

But he’s wrong. It was my fault. Rina thought bitterly. She could remember it like yesterday. The day her world started falling apart.

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It was raining. Cars beside the rocky pavements whooshed pass like wild horses. The two sisters, each with a bag of groceries in hand, walked on the rocky pavements, joking about when Rina was going to get married. Out of a sudden, a man, obviously in a hurry, ran past Rina, knocking her in the process. The bag of groceries, inside filled to the brim with Groceries goes flying up in the air, falling like a shower of rain on the roads. Without looking up, Xina drops to her knees, picking up the food and putting it in the bag.

What happened next was unbearable to think. A loud honk, the smell of burning tires, and...

A scream

A scream embedded in Rina’s mind forever. The piercing scream that came from Xina before her body was thrown back a few meters. Rina could only stare with her eyes open, her mind already forgetting how to think. Gathering her thoughts, she crawled over to where her bloodied sister was.

“Oh my god, Oh my god, there’s been an accident! Someone! Someone call an ambulance!” She heard someone say. She could hear the opening and closing of the car door as the driver- flustered, started to call for the ambulance. The crowd formed around her was suffocating and unbearable to the least. The tears from her eyes started to blur around her.

“Little girl? Little girl? Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?” a stranger had asked her. The words of concern just drifted past her, not making it in her brain. All she could focus on was the bloody mess of her sister.

“Xina...Xina... Talk to me Xina!!!” She pleaded her unconscious sister to reply. Silence dropped like an anvil.

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“Beep----- Beep----- Beep-----“The steady beep of the monitor sounded over the room. Rina sat on the small, uncomfortable plastic chair. Keith stood by the door. The doctor came out a while ago, telling her with the rib fractures and the blood loss, there is only a small chance she might make it. Rina, pale and shocked just nodded and drifted over to the hospital seats and sat down. She took in Xina’s sleeping face, hoping that she’d make it through.

“Hey, sissy?”

Rina was a little surprised, her sister was awake, and she was fine! Wasn’t she?

“Sissy, I... I don’t think I’m going to make it...”

Rina doesn’t want to hear it. Rina doesn’t want to hear it from her.

“Hush, Xina. You’re gonna make it through, just like that. Don’t say things like that again, okay?” She whispered.

Xina gulped and looked at the ceiling. “It hurt.” She said

“Huh?” She was surprised, ready to call the doctors “What hurt?”

“Being hit by that truck, it hurt so much... I was so afraid that I might die. I was more afraid that I’d never see you again-“

“Please Xina, don’t talk about it. You’re going to be fine.”

“Sissy, can you help me get some Water? I would like to talk to Keith for a while and my throat feels kinda parched.”

“Sure,” “I’ll come back to check on you later, don’t miss me too much, kay?”

“Ha-ha~ Oh, and one thing:”

“I love you”

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She should’ve known when the doctors all suddenly rushed past her into the small room. Frozen in shock, she could hear the faint, dull single beep from the heartbeat monitor outside the room. The water she brought spilt over the floor; she could care less about that. When the doctors gently placed a cloth over Xina’s head, the thread snapped. She was screaming, pounding at the doors. Tears streamed out of her eyes like two rivers. She begged and pounded on the doors for the doctors to let her in the room. Her sister was in the room, she needed her.

That’s why. Why would she send her out of the room, Xina must’ve known all along that she wasn’t going to make it past tonight, knowing her sister won’t accept the fact that she’s not going to make past tonight. Keith, who saw Rina slumping made his way over to Rina and hugged her tight,

When finally she was allowed in, Rina made way and caressed her sister’s cold cheeks, as warm tears made their way on her own. Even on Keith’s face, tears were threatening to spill on their own. Stroking her sister’s hair, she could only imagine how life would be without

her sister: Colorless and Empty. The thought only made her cry harder.  
And that night, she cried all night long.

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A few years after the burial, a figure stood in front of a gravestone. Bending down carefully, she placed a bunch of white flowers along with a crisp envelope. A male called her from outside the fence. Lingering for a moment, she looked at the stone, about to say something. After arguing with herself, she decided against it and spoke nothing. She kneeled down and traced the faded words on the stone with her finger. She closed her eyes, as if reliving moments from the past. Finally stepping up, she walked away.

Without looking back.

Dear Xina,

Hey, it's been a while since I visited you. Keith and I just got married; I wish you could've seen us. It was beautiful, but I felt really lonely without you. There were loads of people that came to our wedding, but it wasn't the same, because you weren't there in the audience.

You know, we recently adopted a puppy and named her in your honor. Xinie has your energy, your love. It's funny; she's like a complete reincarnation of you. Did you come back to me as the puppy once you realized I was lonely?

I really don't know what to say now. Although I miss you loads, I guess I moved on. You wanted me to do this right? The day you made me leave the room, you didn't want me to dwell on you passing away, right? I think I'm finally doing this, so this will be the last time I talk to you. Thank you, Xina. Thank you for all the memories.

I love you.

Love,  
Rina

# A Letter from the Pearl River Delta

*Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Wan, Gabriel - 17*

1 October 2005

Dear Shang,

This has to be one of the hardest letters to I have ever had to write. You have no idea how I wish, after all these years, this letter would finally be one that would bring good news, one that would contain, at the very least, a shimmer of hope for the future. But please forgive me, for this is not the case. Leaving you was the greatest mistake I could ever have made, and no words can describe my ardent yearning to come home, but you have to understand that I had no choice back then; I was never given one to begin with, and I still have none to this day.

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I pause. My pen falls to my lap as I look up from my letter and stare blankly ahead, unsure of how to continue writing from there. How exactly do you put your feelings into words anyway? It is simply impossible to do so, for how can language invented by man aptly express the deepest, most heartfelt sentiments of the human soul?

I close my eyes, feeling the gentle touches of a light autumn breeze softly caressing my face and trying to sooth away all my sorrows, but all is done in vain. There is a subtle whiff of smoke and dirt that has drifted from the city streets down below in the otherwise refreshing zephyr, travelling all the way up to the rooftop and attacking my senses. This is almost an exact depiction of how Shenzhen is – a mixture of beauty and destruction.

My eyes flutter open at the thought, and I drink in the magnificent view of the city from the factory's rooftop. The quietly flowing river sparkles with the luminescent reflections of the city lights, and on the other bank, ostentatious cars dash about in the streets, and the lights from glass skyscrapers outshine even the moon, illuminating the night, albeit blindingly so. A thriving city buzzing with life, and one of the most economically successful places of the Pearl River Delta. Yet today, no amount of stunning city lights is going to console me.

All I can see are memories flashing before my eyes, memories lost and never to be relived again. All I can hear is the sound of forfeited youth and dreams, swishing and swirling as they drifted downstream along with the water. All I can feel is morose, with a hint of madness slowly creeping up on me, feeding on my sanity like a parasite.

I take a deep breath, and pick up my pen once more.

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You must have thought that my life is all flowers and rainbows, with the way I described my time here in Shenzhen in my previous letters, and you must have hated me for giving up on my family to seek wealth elsewhere. But you must know that if I were ever given the choice to stay behind and live a simple, peaceful life with you back in our village, I would never have left for Shenzhen. I would have stayed with you and Xiaobao, and I would have been happy and content. But with Xiaobao so young and our fields taken away - sans compensation - in the name of urbanisation, fate has taken away any sort of choice I might have in life, and I simply had no choice but to come and work in this strange, unfamiliar city of the great Pearl River Delta.

The Pearl River Delta. Such a grand, opulent name; one that speaks of opportunities, of prosperity, of hopes for a better life. But that is all it is - a name, and nothing more. True, the cities in this area has most certainly lived up to it, becoming one of the regions in China to experience the fastest economic growth since 1979, and once upon a time, this was the San Francisco to us - a land whispering promises of wealth. This illusion was what fueled me in the beginning, thinking that with my hard work, I could one day earn enough for all three of us and come home to you.

I had been thrilled about the beginning of a new life. A senior colleague of mine taught me to read and write when I got my first job at the printing factory, and she showed me around the city, which, back then, had just a handful of new factories that have moved from Hong Kong. I worked religiously around the clock, and for over seven years, I never even so much as took a single day off. I had dreamed that with hard work, I would reap the reward I rightfully deserved, and finally be able to build a new life for the whole family. We would be worrying about which university to send Xiaobao to, instead of worrying about where to get our next meal. We would be having a good life together in the city, instead of separated by the cruel hands of fate. We would finally be living, instead of simply surviving. This thought gave me hope, and kept me going.

Throughout these years, I bore witness as this miracle happened, when more and more businesses and factories took root here, and this once humble fishing village transformed into a budding megacity in just under two decades' time. But by the time I came to realise that reality is, in fact, otherwise, it was already too late for me to regret my decision. Yes, the Pearl River Delta does give promises of riches, but these promises are only meant for the large companies and the businessmen - not for us peasant workers who came all the way from the inland to these cities. And discovering this, the dream extinguished like a weak flickering flame in a hurricane.

With neither degree for completing education nor qualifications for professional skills, I could only move from factory to factory, committing to mundane, repetitive jobs like polishing the tiny components of electronic devices, or screwing on plastic caps of toothpaste tubes. We never earned much money or respect, and life gets harder by the day. They would request us to work overtime without pay, as well as threaten us into accepting jobs with the

lowest pay or risk getting laid off - a cost too high for me to bear. I could barely support myself in the city, let alone Xiaobao and you.

Despite having lived here for over a decade, I can never be one of their own. Not with their condescending tones when speaking to us, and certainly not with their surly glares directed at me wherever I go anyway. To them, I have always been, and will forever remain, a lowly peasant. This is why even though I desperately wanted to have Xiaobao come live with me in the city, I never did. I might have no choice, but I did not want my son to be treated the way I have been since my arrival. He deserves better.

This Pearl River Delta that gave me so much hope and so many dreams, is the very same one that took them away. Behind its façade of wealth and affluence, are the blood, sweat and tears of people like us. Yet no matter how we feel or what we say, there is nothing we can do to change our unfortunate circumstances for apparently, no one cares enough to fight for us, and no one cares enough to stand up against the authorities for us. Our fates are written by the moguls, and sealed by the silent majority.

We never really do know how precious time is until we've got hardly any left. There's still so much I want to say to you, but time is what you have run out of. I am sorry for so many things: for leaving Xiaobao in your care when she was not your responsibility nor your burden to bear, for being so stupid as to trust that my heartless husband could turn away from gambling, and most of all, for not being the sister you deserved. I wasn't completely honest with you in my previous letters, but I hope that with this final one in which I have, at last, told you the whole truth, you would not leave blaming me for what I have done. I simply had no choice.

Farewell, my brother. I will see you again.

With love from

Mei

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I put down my pen, looking up towards the cityscape. I try to look for some sort of meaning to it all, and coming up with none, I decide not to dwell upon it.

I pick up my letter and climb down from the roof, my legs moving on their own since my brain is definitely not functioning anymore, having been numbed from both pain and remorse upon learning of my brother's passing. But while my brain is nullified, my heart is still very much alive, screaming in anguish and weeping in agony, mourning for how much Shang had sacrificed for my son and I, and mourning for the fact that he is never going to see this letter, and I am never going to see him again.

Stopping by the bank, I tear up the letter into shreds, and scatter them into this nameless stream of running water, which would somehow meet with the prominent Pearl River, and, eventually, drain into the vast ocean. But by then, it matters not where the water came from.

# Memories Returned by Moonlight

*West Island School, Chen, Serena - 14*

She was about a year old when we found her, stranded, and alone in the moonlit night. It feels so long since then, but I still remember the first feature that caught my attention when I saw her, her eyes. They were crystal blue, almost an indigo shade, and lined with deep silver. Her coat, though covered in dirt and grime, was a beautiful shade of white, almost illuminating the dark night. I remember my grandmother tugging at my sleeve, telling me that we needed to go, but there was something about her. Maybe it was her eyes, watching me curiously, insistently, which made me want to stay. Stray dogs were a common sight in my village, victims of people who didn't have the heart to look after them any more. But even though, I didn't believe I had ever seen this stray before. However, there was something oddly familiar about her flawless white fur as it flowed in the soft evening breeze. "Hailey," grandmother's voice called me back to reality. Sighing, I followed her towards the road home. But out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash of white. The movement was so graceful it seemed she was flying, before vanishing into the night.

'Mom' and 'dad' are two words that haven't passed my lips for many years. For as long as I let my memory take me, my grandparents have been the ones who had raised me, took care of me, and gave me the love closest to parenthood. I was never told much about my parents. Only that they were both killed in a car accident when I was still young. Grandfather worries about me sometimes. I've never been very social, a home-schooled child who spends most of her time alone. But loneliness has never bothered me too much. It has become a big part of me, a part where love and trust used to be. When I'm alone, I get more time to think. Reading has always been a hobby of mine. The stories captured so delicately in hundreds of pages are fascinating to me. I've read about characters with lifestyles so different from my own, where the people have real families, and friends, and of course, the happy ending that I never had.

When I was younger, my grandfather used to tell me many captivating stories and legends of a sacred river. Tales of mythical creatures once believed to have roamed these lands, but I can't imagine them taking place now. Our little town sits at the very edge of Zhujiang Delta in the Guangdong province of China. Small, and so left unmarked on most maps. However, size has never held our province behind. Over the years, I've seen change, even in my little village. People say that foreign influence is developing rapidly and will continue to expand. Nevertheless, our traditional legends never change. I've always heard stories about the mysterious secrets the Pearl River might hold, and though we live near, I have never actually travelled close myself. Grandfather never saw much point in taking me. 'A muddy, old river,' he described it as. As of being a good, traditional family girl, I never speak by to my elders. But deep inside, I felt he was wrong. Through my bedroom window I could see the luminous waters in the distance, sparkling and flashing in the mid-day sun, as if threaded with silver beads. Travellers, tourists and fisherman have crowded the shores with boats. A few were docked just slightly further in the tides, the waves crashing lightly on their wooden decks. Pearl River Delta is mass in size and stretches far into the north and east. An incredible

sum of the three smaller rivers it is made up of. The stories always said that a time at Pearl River might help you discover yourself. Its tides can capture your memories and lead you in the direction you're supposed to go. Magical, and though they are only myths, I often find myself dreaming about going there when I feel lost. Instead, in those lonely times, I would hide in my bed and let myself cry, hugging a small pillow that my mother had once made for me. Sadly, it's the last thing I have left of her. I didn't know my parents for long before they died, but it still hurts. It's left a wound that can't be seen, only felt, and it's a wound that never healed.

The night I first saw the stray, I lay awake in my bed for hours. But listening to the quiet tick-tick of the clock only made me more restless. I thought about the way she had stared at me, the curious look in her eyes had made her look strong yet vulnerable at the same time. Strangely, it felt like I had seen her before, but I was sure that I never had. The clocked kept ticking and the minutes flickered by. Eventually, I let the sound soothe me. Soon, my eyes closed as I fell into light, shallow sleep.

At first, I thought I was dreaming, but I must have been woken a scratching noise outside my window. A moment later, I passed it off as rain falling on my windowpane. Nevertheless, something wasn't right. The noise continued, and I finally sat up in my bed, squinting in the darkness. Outside my window, everything was still dim, only lit by streetlights and the gleaming light from the moon. The river looked mystical under the clear, bright moon, areas that were lighted seemed to glisten like silver pearls. Suddenly, a large figure emerged from the shadows. I couldn't tell what or who it was, but its sharp eyes seemed to glow in night. They searched until they found my window, cutting through the glass, until finally locking their sight on me. I froze.

Someone, or something was watching me. My heart was thumping in my ears. Its eyes didn't move away from my face, and I was forced to stare back. I braced myself, expecting to see a menacing reaction, but it never came. Instead, I found myself staring into crystal blue, a deep but soft gaze. I exhaled. It was the stray dog I had seen earlier that evening. She must have followed me home. I don't know why I felt a sudden sigh of relief. Street dogs could also be dangerous, if not handled properly. But this one was different. I could feel it. My regular village room, like many others, was road-level, and so left me exposed. Somehow I wasn't worried. The wooden floor felt cold under my bare feet as I walked towards the window. This was crazy and I knew it. Cautiously, I pushed the window open. Wind blew strands of hair into my face, but I didn't care. I stared at the stray, and she stared back, neither one of us moving. Above our heads, the brilliant white moon shone, its light reflecting against the dog's flawless coat, just as it did on Pearl River Delta. She looked almost ghostly. Her eyes were wide and insistent. Beautiful.

In that moment, she got her name. Named in honour of the bright, breath-taking moon and the great Pearl River of China; Yue.

Winning a stray animal's trust is never an easy task, but I was patient. We worked together for hours, days. I tempted her with food. Sometimes we would get close, but still never touched. My window was the barrier between us, protecting me, protecting her. Something that surprised me was that, through it all, she chose to stay. Yue never roamed far, usually only wandering off to a nearby fountain or stream for water. She slept under my window and ate on my lawn. I was careful to keep her out of my grandparents' sight. Their scolding and punishments for me if they found out were something I was less prepared for than Yue's training. Grandmother would never approve. She despises animals, saying they were filthy and wild. Luckily, she and grandfather were out in the market that day. Yue improved fast, and I was glad she seemed to like me. She was still wary, but came when I

called and seemed happy to see me in the morning. Maybe it was time she learned she didn't have to fear me. For the first time, I reached outside the glass wall that split us apart and called to her. Hesitantly, she approached me. For a while, we just stared at each other, like we always did. I spoke softly to her, not knowing if she understood my words. "I won't hurt you," I told her gently. Instead of coming closer, she took a few steps back. I sighed and drew my hand back in. Without warning, I saw a flash of white fly through my window. I stumbled back, shocked and horrified. Yue scanned my room with her blue eyes. She didn't look afraid anymore, but happy and well in control. A part of me was stunned and speechless, but another part felt a surge of excitement and pride. A huge grin broke onto my face. I let myself laugh, because it's been too long.

Yue nudged me with her shoulder, pushing me back, towards my bookshelf. She looked annoyed, as if she was trying to shove herself into a space that was too small for her. My regular village room was not made for a giant dog to play in. "Yue," I grumbled. "Cut it out." But she didn't stop. She pushed me again, and I finally lost my balance. I tried to grab the bookshelf for support but my hand landed on an old book instead, pulling it down with me. A pile of books came tumbling down after that, old novels and hardbacks that I haven't touched in years, all covered in dust and grime. "Now look what you've done," I said angrily, dusting myself off. Yue stared at me calmly before touching one of the books with her nose. Curiously, I bent down to pick it up. As I did, something fell out of it. It was an old photo. I grabbed it and sat on my bed. My eyes closed, I didn't have to look at it to know what it was. A warm tear slid down my cheek. I didn't let myself remember the day my family took that photo. It was the last photo I ever took with my parents. My eyes opened. Yue sat beside me. "How did you know?" I whispered. She watched me with soft, understanding eyes. Then, a question formed in my mind; so obvious I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it earlier. I reached over to pet Yue's head, and she leaned into my palm. "Where did you come from?" I asked her softly, though I knew the answer. She had no family, no house, no place to call home. As if she knew, she stared at me gently, her eyes wide and aware. Maybe her parents died too. Maybe she knew about mine. I smiled. We could be each other's family. We understood each other. We were the same.

Since that day, Yue and I stayed close. I built her a small shed behind our house so she could keep warm on windy days, but covered it when she wasn't using it. Our relationship stayed secret, because I knew that it grandmother ever found out she would never let me keep her. Each day, I would wake early to see Yue and feed her. One morning, grandfather caught me before I bolted out the door. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" he asked in his husky voice.

"I-uh got something to do," I stuttered.

"You've been running out a lot lately," grandmother called from the dining room, frowning. "I've just been busy okay?" I said impatiently.

"We are in charge of you Hailey, we have the right to know where you're going," her fist hit the table. "You're parents would not have let us raise you to be reckless and irresponsible."

"I am not reckless, and leave my parents out of this!" I shouted. I felt tears in my eyes but I didn't know why they were there. "You have no idea what I've been going through these past few years. You never asked. You never cared!"

"Hailey! Of course we care, but you never let us help. Its been so long since the last time we've acted like a true family," grandfather said. He spoke quietly, but I would rather have heard him yell. I didn't want to hear anymore, I didn't want to remember when the last time was. Without responding, I ran out the door and didn't look back.

Yue caught up with me soon after, knowing I was upset, and it didn't take me long to realize she was leading me somewhere. The blocks and traffic lights seemed to race by. As we approached a clearing, sweat trickled down my neck and I heard a roar of moving water. Struggling to catch my breath, I looked up. A small creak sat in front of me, clear water running smoothly down to the massive river around the clearing. Yue had taken me to a part of Pearl River Delta. I was exhausted, but Yue seemed full of energy as she continued to run down a lane of small rocks. She was beautiful, graceful, and free. Stunning, was the word to describe the view. I could have never imagined Pearl River to be so big, its waters so deep, and its surface to be so enchanting. People walked along the coast, calm and happy. I wish I could feel the way they did. A narrow road linked a few of the docks together. Grandmother would have been worried. I wouldn't blame her if she were mad at me. I must have sat there for hours, watching Yue play, thinking about going home, feeling lost and confused. Suddenly, a fisherman hauling a huge bags of ice in a cart passed by. His cart hit a rock and toppled over, the bags tumbled onto the road. Quickly, I ran over to help him tidy up. The bags were wet and cold, my arms felt sore as the last bag was heaved back onto the cart. Yue had returned to my side by then. She didn't seem nervous around the fisherman, as she usually did with strangers. "Thank you," the man said gratefully. "And that's a beautiful dog you have there." I nodded. "Wait," he called as I turned to walk away. "I recognise you, you're Zhuli and David's daughter aren't you?" I stopped.

I spun back, shocked. "I'm sorry," the fisherman continued, "You're parents' were good friends of mine. Your father was my best customer. He was very fond of my family's ricecakes." He sat down on one of the rocks and patted the one next to him. I sat next to him. "Yeah, he was," I winced at the memory. Yue pressed her large head on my shoulder, her fur tickling my collarbone. She was warm. I let her comfort me. "It must be hard," the fisherman said sympathetically. I said nothing. "I'll tell you a secret." I looked at him, puzzled. "See this creek?" he pointed at the calm waters. "It may be only the smallest fragment of so many larger tides, but its small waves travel in great in numbers, and make up a great river." I was still confused. The fisherman smiled and explained, "every day we may see things that remind us of things we've lost, things we've loved, and things we think are gone. It will always be hard, but remember this; Our memories are only reminding us that they're not gone, that they are still connected to us, just as so many smaller streams are connected to Pearl River Delta." I understood now, and smiled back. "Thank you," I said.

"Think openly about your surroundings Hailey. They may hold more than you think," he winked. "There are reasons behind the legends of Pearl River." He placed his hand on Yue's head briefly. "Goodbye Yue. Take good care of your friend." I wondered how he knew Yue's name, I was sure I hadn't mentioned it. But before I could ask, he spoke again. "Remember Hailey, you will need your friends and family to help fill the blanks that your parents' had left. There are some battles that you don't have to fight alone." With that, he walked away.

Under my feet, the soft, cool ripples sprayed my ankles as I stared into crystal waters. The fisherman was right. I'm not alone. I have my grandparents and old friends I had once blocked out of my life. And now, I have Yue. The man was also right about the river. It is clever, with the waves locked in an everlasting cycle: Stream to river to ocean, up the mountain and back to the stream again. The water adapts but never forgets, and at the time when it's ready again, it will flow home.

As will I.



# Fiction

Group 5

# My Big Day Out

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Ching, Matthew - 13*

People holding up banners and signs,  
Tear gas and umbrellas define the lines.  
People waving chanting and singing,  
Barriers and barricades, pulling and pushing.  
Feeling tired and lying on the road,  
Buses got stuck and the traffic was slowed.  
Goggles and cling wrap on my face,  
Have faith and hope for the better days.

## Swimming to Macau

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Lin, Adrian - 9*

One day over the Easter holidays, a boy called Adrian had to go to Macau for his friend, Ella's dress-up birthday Party. On Good Friday, Adrian, mum and dad went to the pier in Sheung Wan and bought three Hong Kong-to-Macau tickets. They took the 12 o'clock ferry. While they were eating plain rice with fried chicken and vegetables on the boat, a big black shark came along and bit the boat into pieces. Everybody on the boat was frightened and fell into the ocean. Adrian and family decided to swim all the way to Macau. It took them one hour to get there. When they finally arrived, they went to check in at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. Adrian quickly took a shower and changed into an Elsa and Anna t-shirt. Adrian's mum wore a white Elsa dress and his dad wore a superman suit. After dressing up, they went to the birthday party in the restaurant at the hotel. Ella had a birthday cake with Anna, Elsa and Olaf from 'Frozen' on it. After that, Adrian felt very tired because it had been a very long day. He went back to the hotel room and quickly went to bed with his mummy and daddy.

The next day, they took the 12 o'clock PM ferry back to Hong Kong. Luckily, there were no sharks this time!

# A Different Occupation

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Mak, Arthur - 12*

I was born in 1925. I was 16 years old when Hong Kong fell to the Japanese, there had been 18 fierce days of fighting and many people were killed during the invasion. The Japanese won and begun their occupation of Hong Kong. There was not enough food to go round so there was starvation and great suffering. My father died because he didn't have enough food and lack of medical care. I was always in hunger. I sometimes went to a relative's home for dinner. This relative worked for the Japanese and had food. We had to walk 2 hours from Sai Ying Pun to Happy Valley and walk 2 hours back afterwards. It was good to have food but it was also very horrible to eat there. This relative lived in the place where the Japanese soldiers had their prison cells and I could hear prisoners screaming from beating and torture while I ate my dinner. I was scared that they would get me. The Japanese wanted people to leave and the allowed people to move out of H.K. I took this chance and went to the mainland to join up with the Chinese army. I ended up working as a liaison officer helping with the American soldiers sent to fight in China. My mother, five brothers and one sister all stayed behind in Hong Kong. They were always in my thoughts. 1329 days after Japan took over Hong Kong, they surrendered. I carried on working in the mainland for three more months. Then I returned home to Hong Kong, except it wasn't home anymore. Everything had changed and it was not the same place as before the Japanese came. Slowly life got back to normal. Food was scarce and we were very poor. My younger sister even had to be married off to a farmer to lessen the family's burden. Hopefully nothing like this will ever happen again.

# Hedgehogs in Macau

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Wai, Kaden - 9*

On the 6th of March, six hedgehogs named Sonic, Blaze, Shadow, Knuckles, Tails and Stella wanted to go to the Macau Grand Prix to watch the annual Formula 1 race. They decided to take a jet ski to Macau. Sonic drove the jet-ski very, very fast and the other hedgehogs enjoyed looking at the coral reef and many other sea creatures in the ocean. They got there in just 30 minutes! After watching the race, they found a colourful house nearby. They went inside and found that there were many animals playing bowling together. The hedgehogs joined in the bowling game and had a good time. Later at night, the hedgehogs invited the other animals in the house for dinner. They drove 5 Lamborghinis to a restaurant and ate yummy seafood like fried fish and steamed crab. The hedgehogs had a good time in Macau.



# Fiction

Group 6

# Up the Peak

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Leung, Nicholas - 15*

The year was 1888 and I was living in Hong Kong. I was working as a builder on the new tram that went from Murray Barracks to the top of the peak. It had not been easy to build the train tracks and some people had died. The day had arrived for the opening of the tram. So I went to the station with my family. There were lots of people in and around the tram station. Everybody had come to see the new tram. People were waving flags and cheering. Then came Sir William Des Voeux who gave a speech and everyone cheered again. Finally the tram set off slowly up the mountain. I wished I could be on the tram. It was made of wood. It was run by coal. I felt sad when it was going up. I looked in the distance as it got smaller and smaller. It was carrying thirty people, why couldn't it take me? I looked at the sedan chairs waiting outside the station. The sedan chair could only take one person at a time. We don't need the sedan chairs to go up anymore. I felt sorry for the sedan chair workers and wondered how they felt about the tram. I witnessed a new page in Hong Kong.

# Occupied

*Korean International Springboard Programme, Mak, Chun Yin - 15*

I am a police officer in Hong Kong. Occupy Central began on the 28th of September, 2014. A lot of people went to Central and Admiralty. They blocked the roads. I put on a helmet and held a shield in front of me. Some police officers were angry at the protesters. We worked very hard and felt very tired at the end of each day.

One day I went to Central to stop the protest. We were told to arrest the protesters. The protesters were angry. Some of them were lying down on the floor. After 79 days, the streets were finally cleared and traffic was opened again. After we cleared the streets we felt very tired, I rested on the floor right away.