



Fiction

Group 1

The Terracotta Dream

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sze, Hayden - 8

Max's class is going to a museum today for their field trip. The museum is exhibiting Terracotta Warriors, which has always intrigued Max. At the museum, while Max was looking at the statues of the Terracotta Warriors, his class moved on to another room that showcases mythologies about the Terracotta Warriors and he got separated. Max wandered and was looking at a nearby Warrior's shield that looked slightly different to the others.

He fiddled with the shield even though the museum sign said "Please Do Not Touch". Hmmmmmm...Max thought. Suddenly, Max felt very itchy, and he fainted.

Max woke up in the corner of a cobblestone tomb. He realised that he was in the First Emperor's Tomb. He could see the Terracotta Warriors fighting tomb robbers! The Warriors were losing the fight! I have to help them, Max thought. He rushed out. He picked up a familiar shield and defended them. A robber tried to punch Max, but he cleverly blocked it. Another robber tried to kick Max, which missed Max's chest within a hair's breadth. Gotta win, gotta win, Max encouraged himself. Max swung his shield around and around and knocked the robbers. The sneaky robbers gave up the fight and ran away. Max helped the Warriors and won! Yeah, good job! Max said to himself.

The leader of the Terracotta Warriors came over. Oh no..., Max thought as he raised his shield. The Terracotta Warrior laughed. "There's no need to be scared, I come in peace!" "You, young man, you have protected the emperor's tomb ever so bravely!" A cheer erupted from the crowd of Terracotta Warriors. "Therefore, I, the leader of the Terracotta Warriors, shall have you join our army!" Another cheer erupted from the crowd of Terracotta Warriors. "And, all because of your bravery, I am appointing you as CAPTAIN!" By now, an ENORMOUS cheer erupted from the crowd of Terracotta Warriors. Max blushed. They then had a huge celebration to honour Max's heroic deed.

Max felt happy, until the leader of the Terracotta Warriors loudly announced: "Max, our great hero, shall stay with us to protect the tomb for...ETERNITY!" clap clap clap clap clap. Oh no...oh no..., the horrified Max thought. I wanted to help them, but I can't stay that long! I need to escape. He then quietly sneaked around the tomb, searching. Then, he accidentally bumped into an armour stand. Thump! The same shield fell on Max's head, knocking him unconscious.

Wake up... WAKE UP!! Max woke up back in the museum, with his teacher staring at him. "What happened to you?" His teacher asked. "Did you touch anything that you were not supposed to?" "Uh...I may have. But I will not do it again." Max said, still a little dazed. "Good, the Terracotta Warriors are very old and special so please respect them. Now hurry along!" Max followed.

He gave one last peek and wondered if he saw the Terracotta Warrior with the shield wink at him.

THE END

A Night with the Warriors

Western Academy of Beijing, Azzopardi, Jeremy - 8

Stephen and Lawrence went to Xian for a family holiday. They were both very excited to see the Terracotta Warriors.

They arrived at the World Heritage Site in the afternoon and met their guide who started a long and detailed explanation about the Warriors.

The brothers were eager to do something else instead of listening to the boring guide.

“Do you want to touch the Warriors? It’ll be as quick as a breeze,” whispered Lawrence.

“Okay,” replied Stephen.

“How are we going to escape?” asked Stephen.

“Let’s just run away quickly,” Lawrence replied.

Their parents were busy taking selfies and didn’t notice that the kids disappeared.

The boys kept walking on into the huge building, and moved from one pit to another. At 7 pm the museum closed and the lights went out. The boys were lost and scared.

They later found the Warriors.

“Amazing,” they both said as they gazed at the Warriors.

“Stephen,” said Lawrence.

“Hi,” whispered one of the Warriors.

“Did you hear that Stephen?” asked Lawrence.

“Yes,” replied his brother in a whispery voice.

“Was that a dream?” asked Lawrence.

“No,” somebody said.

“Who was that?” asked Stephen.

“Me,” said a deep but friendly voice.

Then they realized that it was one of the Warriors. They had come to life!

The boys had many questions to ask the Warriors and soon started firing these questions impatiently.

“How long have you been here?” asked Lawrence.

“I’ve been here for about 2,200 years,” replied the Warrior.

“Did you have any color on you?” asked Stephen.

“Yes, I used to have lots of colors,” replied the Warrior with pride.

“Are you all the same?” asked Lawrence.

“No, in fact every warrior you see is different,” replied the Warrior.

The Warriors and the boys kept talking all night until...

“Huh?” said Stephen.

They found themselves lying on the ground.

“We slept,” replied Lawrence.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Stephen.

They walked to the entrance very slowly.

“Do you think our parents will be mad at us?” said Lawrence in a worried voice.

“Maybe,” replied Stephen.

When they arrived at the entrance they found their parents.

“Where have you guys been? We were trying to find you all night since the museum closed!” said Jenny in a relieved voice.

“Yeah, we went to touch the warriors, and they then came to life,” replied Lawrence with excitement.

Their parents smiled at each other as if they didn’t believe it.

Later on that week, Lawrence was reading the newspaper. A few Terracotta warriors were sent to Egypt for an exhibition about civilization. The newspaper reported how amazingly, one morning, the warriors were found inside one of the pyramids of Giza.

“Stephen, come and see this!” shouted Lawrence.

Stephen ran to his brother and read the headline news. It seems nobody could explain how the warriors found themselves in the famous pyramids...but the boys had quite a good idea how this happened.

They looked at each other and smiled.



Fiction
Group 2

Diary of a Terracotta Soldier

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Tsang, Maddie - 9

The following are excerpts from a diary that was found in the hands of a terracotta foot soldier named Chang Ting. The entries were translated from Chinese calligraphy.

Entry 1

I used to live in a poor village in northern Xi'an. Life there was hard and dull. Every day my fellow villagers and I hiked down the mountain to the rice fields. We worked under the hot sun for hours. One day, my life changed forever when a stranger visited the fields. He rode in on a warhorse and was dressed from head to toe in armor. He asked which one of us wanted to join the army. If we made it back alive, we would receive a fortune. Other villagers said it wasn't worth it, but the thought of money consumed me. I told the man I would join. I ran back to my tiny hut made of clay and hay to pack: a change of clothes and underwear, a small pouch of coins, a brush and ink, and my diary. The man loaded the volunteers onto a cart pulled by muscular brown stallions. I felt excited about the new adventure.

Entry 2

This morning, we finally arrived at the training camp. The generals greeted us with serious faces. It seemed as if fighting in the war had sucked the fun out of them, leaving behind a body without the ability to think and feel joy. I wondered if that would happen to me. We toured the camp and it turns out we have to sleep in tents with nine other people. There is one restroom in the whole entire camp. General Tang, the main commander, told us we would receive new uniforms depending on which type of soldier we become. I wanted to become a charioteer because the chariot design looked so regal. Sadly, I found out that charioteers were for people who had served in the army for a longer period of time. That left foot soldiers and archers. Training starts early tomorrow. I must rest for tomorrow's challenges.

Entry 3

Today was a long day. In the morning, we took a test to identify who would be archers and foot soldiers. In archery, I missed all my shots. The first arrow landed on the grass in front of me; the second hit someone's tent; the third one went into the outhouse and caused someone to come out without even putting his pants on properly! Next, General Tang gave us wooden

swords to fight with each other. It was more terrifying than it sounded. I nearly died in that battle!!! (Okay, maybe not “died”, but how embarrassing it would be severely injured by a wooden sword!!!) I realized that swords are easy to use once you know how. It’s like using a hoe, except the goal is to whack your opponent instead of the fields! I tried my hardest, but I am certainly not the best fighter.

After the training, General Tang barked orders at us: “You go there!” “Don’t you move!” “Get a move on grandma!” Then he made us run around the camp with logs on our backs until we could run no more. I am worried I cannot last. Did I make the right decision leaving my village?

Entry 4

Today, I received the worst news. We are at war with another kingdom. I have been here for less than a week and it’s time go to battle -- for real! I am scared out of my mind. Their army is double the size of ours! General Tang worked us twice as hard. Then everyone heard the Emperor was coming to the camp. At around noon, the Emperor came atop a gallant white horse. Following him was a group of our kingdom’s best artists. I thought that was quite odd. They told us they were going to sketch all of us then make life size clay versions of us and even the horses! They set up a shady area for the artists to sketch and 50 people went at once. The artist drawing me was an old man with a long white beard that nearly touched the ground. He asked me if I had any hobbies. I told him I kept a diary. He smiled and made me pose like I was holding a book. I was secretly pleased that I looked different from the others.

Entry 5

Today, we gathered for a speech by the Emperor. He told us the future of our kingdom is at stake and we must fight to protect our homes and families. My village may be far away from the battlefield, but if we do not win this war, it will be taken over by our rivals. Now I truly know what we are fighting for. I came here for the money, but I now fight with a more important purpose. I will fight to the end to save my kingdom and my home.

Final Entry

War has finally arrived. Everyone is in full gear and ready to roll. I apologize if my writing is sloppy; I am aboard a rickety horse cart on my way to the battlefield. This may be my last entry.

Epilogue:

I’m Tong Bai, the artist. Let me tell you what had happened to Chang. First, please don’t cry, but Chang has departed and hopefully he is in heaven having a foot massage with the other departed soldiers. They sure deserve it! Let me tell you about how Chang died. He was fighting bravely when he saw General Tang in danger. So Chang ran over to help just as the enemy was about to strike his sword on General Tang. Chang took the hit instead and saved the General’s life. To honor Chang’s sacrifice, I will put this diary with Chang’s terracotta soldier. General Tang agreed with this arrangement. May Chang’s stories give life to the terracotta sculptures.

Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

Clearwater Bay School, Yan, Katherine - 10

The thundering sky, which had for so long been dry, hid behind the travelling clouds that threatened the Shaanxi province horizon. The petals in her cupped hands began to wither as she pondered. Who was she? Where was she? Why was she here? The answers to these questions lay deep inside her consciousness. Gongs sounded, signalling the start of the ceremony. Claudia's heart leapt alongside dozens others in her area. Eight thousand painted soldiers alongside seven hundred horses worth of clay began to descend. The late Dragon King's funeral had begun ...

Claudia unsteadily marched in with the other thousands of peasants as they climbed down the entrance. She didn't know why, the trance had overcome her and it also just felt right. As they entered the tunnels, her eyes popped, in front of her was an exceptionally unique sight – a great scholar stood before her, lost, confused and, apparently, invisible. The name, the sacred and respected name of this particular spirit with embroidered silk robes was Confucius – the long assumed dead scholar had achieved an afterlife, something he had not expected, not even believed in. With the sight of the father of sacred teachings Claudia regained a long lost memory, a face, framed with swirling mist, her sister. As Claudia blinked and took a deep breath the figures faded and she was alone again, seemingly a peasant that had taken her time going in.

The very sound of it was terrible, the last entrance, or as should be said – exit, closed, leaving them trapped. Moans broke out as people unwillingly brought out their tools, until then nobody even suspected that keeping the Warriors' secret was such a big deal. Claudia silently moaned and walked to the clay oven, ready to bake the final parts of the soon to be finished clay soldiers. Her eyelids drooped, her energy low even though her day was short. Within seconds, Claudia was fast asleep.

The bustle of the next day had started and Claudia was up at what she suspected was dawn baking the last few hands and feet that weren't baked outside. Other people were mixing pigments and checking the map of where to put everything. All this was done half-heartedly as people knew they only had a few more days to live, they had started early in

vain hope that if they worked hard the officials would somehow let them out. But that hope was slipping. To make matters worse, Claudia was starting to feel homesick, she had regained most of her memories the night before and now she believed that she might never see her beloved farm again. With all this in mind Claudia sighed and continued to work.

Lights out. The day's work of last minute touches completed. The very next day would be sorting the soldiers according to where they would go. And the next? Placing the soldiers. And so on. Claudia thought about the measly dinner she just ate and the tiny amount of food in the storage pile. Just enough to get the work done, she thought. Her stomach growled loudly, joining in the chorus of snores around her. She stood up and walked to the corner where the first lot of placed warriors stood. Curling around the leg of the furthest one, she finally found a place where nobody could find her and, heaving a final, sad, silent sigh, she slept.

Claudia woke as a sudden breeze passed through the dark cavern. A cloaked, cannibalistic, figure swept through. Its pinched in face reminded Claudia of a bloodthirsty ghoul. The last living person drifted towards her, a spike in hand. A brighter figure in silken robes stood behind the nearest warrior, waiting to see what he would do. A hand rapidly swept itself to in front of Claudia's throat but it was too late, the spike had already plunged itself deep into its goal.

Row after row of warriors stood in front of him. Looking down at them he looked at the still fading girl. He fixed a plain stone pendant into her hand as a long stream of words came out of his mumbling mouth. "You may be voiceless, you may be unloved, you may have forgotten yourself, but you must sleep till your time comes. Claudia, the plain girl, you need to experience the time loop. I am sorry I have caused all this trouble."

A face bathed in white light looked at her, it belonged to a body wearing rather similar clothes. The body had a hand attached to it, and the hand held a withering flower the color of a sunset. All of this added up specially, so when the figure disappeared into thin air, Claudia smiled then inspected her surroundings. She just stood up wanting to tell an amazing story and with the first word in her life she yelled her sister's name, loud as lions and clear as water, "Nerissa!"

Epilogue:

50 years later:

An old woman fastened a plain stone pendant onto her grandson's neck as she sat beside her older sister, Nerissa. Her grandson started pleading for another story. "Granny, can you tell me about the warriors again?"

"Sure Martin, sure" Replied the younger sister.

"Yay" Martin got into his favourite position on Claudia's lap.

"Okay. Back when I was still fourteen..." Claudia started to tell the story to the 3-year-old.

The Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

Clearwater Bay School, Zhao, Rou - 8

It was a scorching day in China. Laura was reading in the Terracotta museum. Her mother Lia was busy telling her all about the Terracotta warriors. Laura was just absent-mindedly nodding when suddenly her mother Lia announced pointing to a Terracotta warrior:

“...And that vile, ugly centipede slaughtered your great great great grandfather...”

Laura snapped back into attention.

“A centipede killed my great great great grandfather? But I thought you said a warrior killed him! Not a centipede!”

“That was just an expression!” spluttered Lia.

Laura ignored Lia’s last sentence.

“Tell me the real story!” Laura urged. Lia stared at her. Then, she sighed:

“Okay then, call Jeremy over. It’s worth a story.”

Laura called her best friend Jeremy over and then, they, they sat on a bench and Lia began: “There was a great war. The Terracotta warriors were once alive. Your great great great grandfather was fighting against the leader. Then, finally your grandpa struck the move that wounded the leader enough to kill him. The leader collapsed onto the floor and cursed your grandpa. He swore that his army would turn all the people related to your grandpa and the people fighting in the war into stone statues and all the people who were related to the emperor a nice happy life in a palace if the Terracotta warriors got to live another life. It was told that if you said Killerdragnus! Three times, then the Terracotta warriors would come to life! The end.”

“Cool story! Did you know I’m related to the emperor?” asked Jeremy.

Laura nodded.

“You already told me twice.”

Then Laura’s dad came to bring them back home.

Laura ravenously gulped up her dinner and rushed to the phone.

“Hey Jeremy! Wanna come to play?”

“Sure thing! I’ll come right away. Bye!” A moment later, Jeremy arrived. Laura brought him to her room and immediately said with a grin:

“Do you dare to say Killerdragnus three times?” Jeremy smiled:

“You bet!” then, together they chanted:

“Killerdragnus! Killerdragnus! KILLERDRAGNUS!” Nothing happened.

“Well, guess the saying was wrong!” announced Jeremy.

“Yeah right!” Laura sighed. Then the doorbell rang and Jeremy went away. Meanwhile, in the museum, something mysterious was happening...

The security guard was playing on his phone. When suddenly, there was movement. From the base of the Terracotta warriors, a figure stirred. Then together a mound of statues rose and stormed away...

It was school. Laura was in class doing work, when the Terracotta warriors came into her village and attacked! Just when they left, school finished. Laura went back home and

screamed. Her parents were both stone statues. Unmoving, soulless, gone...

Laura collapsed onto a chair terrified, with her eyes closed. When she opened them again, she was gazing at her Family Tree. She looked at it lovingly and suddenly noticed something. Her picture was gone and in its place was dust. Terracotta dust.

Laura stiffened in her seat. She knew immediately that she was the next statue victim. After Laura calmed down, she ran to Jeremy's house. He wasn't there. Right when Laura wanted to scream, she noticed a castle made out of something familiar.

"Oh, I remember," Laura said bitterly. "He's enjoying a lovely time as a king, leaving me alone." But in fact Jeremy was locked in jail because of a dumb misunderstanding. Suddenly, Laura heard the thumping of stone shoes. Laura peeked out. The Terracotta warriors were advancing. Laura screamed and fled. When she was sure that the Terracotta warriors were gone, she suddenly remembered something. A way, a prophecy to turn all statues that were once human back into humans and once statues back into statues by just sprinkling the right ingredients on the Terracotta warriors. Her mother had told her this when she was five. Laura recited the prophecy in her head:

Dust from the substance that they are made of
 Love for a friend that you've always known,
 A sacrifice for those you once hated,
 Finally, hope and desire.

Laura remembered the castle she had seen.

"That's it!" she cried "The castles made out of statue dust!" Laura raced to the castle, took out a handful of clay from the walls and put it in her pocket. Then, suddenly, Laura heard trumpeting. All the Terracotta warriors stopped mid-work, turned and headed towards Laura.

"Uh oh," she mumbled. Then she scrambled up the castle wall, hiding under a sandy cleft. Miraculously, the wall held her weight. Then, the first warriors appeared dragging along a boy who looked strangely like...

"Jeremy?" whispered Laura. The boy looked up. It was Jeremy! Jeremy grinned and whispered sarcastically:

"Don't mind me and my death trial!"

"Your what?" hissed Laura.

"My death trial." repeated Jeremy slyly.

"Okay then, go into your trial like a good boy!" murmured Laura. "What?" screamed Jeremy, outraged. Laura winked and slid away. The warriors settled down to look at Jeremy's death giving Laura the chance to sprinkle clay on them. Soon, all the warriors were motionless except for the four that were going to kill Jeremy. No matter what, Laura couldn't get near. The leader raised his sword menacingly. That was when Laura understood the prophecy. She had to die.

"Goodbye, Jeremy," she whispered.

Laura closed her eyes, let go of the wall and plummeted

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" screamed Jeremy and the warriors at the same time.

But it was too late. Laura fell onto the warriors. They were turned back into statues leaving Laura dead. Immediately, like magic, all the humans turned back into humans and went to look for the signal of power. They all saw Jeremy cradling the dead body of Laura sobbing. There was hope in Jeremy's eyes. Hope that Laura was still alive. Nothing happened. One of Jeremy's tears fell onto Laura and she stirred. She opened her eyes and whispered:

"W-what happened...?"

The Magic of the Terracotta Warriors

Creative Primary School, Fung, Jessie - 11

“Bye mom, bye dad,” Fiona said as she headed for the hotel room door. “We’re leaving to play at the park now!”

“Bye honey. Remember to come back by seven o’clock, we’re going out for dinner! Have a nice time!” Fiona’s mom replied.

Fiona and her family, including her best friend Samantha, are on a trip to Xi’an to see the Terracotta

Warriors. Fiona and Samantha have learned about the Terracotta Warriors at school and they are

fascinated by the tales told by the teachers. Eagerly, the children await for the museum visit tomorrow to see these extraordinary statues.

Fiona, her little brother Fred, and Samantha skipped down the hotel lobby hand in hand, chit-chatting about all the exciting things they are expecting to see in the Terracotta Museum.

They walked for ten minutes, and reached a park. However, the children were shocked of what they saw. The park was boringly simple with only a set of bug-infested swings and a dry-mudded slide. Disgusted by the facilities there, Fred took off running. Fiona and Samantha started chasing after him, and they came to a set of big metal gate that loomed over them. But Fred could not be found. “Fred? Fred, where are you? Come out at once! Dad and mom would be worried!” The girls kept calling for Fred but he was still nowhere to be seen. After calling for a few minutes, the girls decided that Fred must’ve gone through the metal gates so they pushed through the doors.

“Oh my gosh, so these are the Terracotta Warriors!” Samantha exclaimed. “They look so real, so human-like!” Statues of warriors, horses and chariots stood over them. Suddenly, the girls saw movement in the back of the museum. At first, they thought it was Fred, but then when they looked more closely, they saw that it wasn’t him. It was a moving statue!

Startled, the girls darted behind a large rock. All of the Terracotta Warriors started to come to life and sat down at different tables. It appeared that they are getting ready for their hotpot and barbecue dinner! As the food aroma filled the room, the chili smell irritated Fiona's nose. As much she wanted to stay quiet, a loud sneeze came out. With a split second, the room was in dead silence and more than nine thousand pairs of eyes stared in the direction of the sneeze.

"Who's there?" The General demanded. "Who dare intrude our privacy? Come out at once and show your face!" Fiona and Samantha slowly rose from their positions and Fiona squeaked, "It's us. We've come to look for my little brother. I'm so sorry to interrupt your dinner. We mean absolutely no harm to you or your king." A warrior spoke up, "So you've come to find your little brother, uh? I tell you where he is...in my hot-pot!" Fiona and Samantha gasped. "I'm just kidding! We're all vegetarians!" The room erupted with laughter from the warrior's little hot-pot joke. Fiona and Samantha gave big sighs of relief and smiled. "Get serious Ming-ming!" The general ordered. "Please help these poor children who had such a fright just now find their little brother! Ling-ling you too, help those children. But first, girls you must promise to keep secret of what you saw today."

"We promise," the girls answered truthfully.

Ming-ming used his super-powered eyes to see through brick walls and finally found Fred, who was three miles away in the hotel room. Then Ling-ling used his super-powered ears to hear that Fred had told a lie saying he felt tired and returned to the room for a quick rest and that the girls were still at the park.

Fiona and Samantha thanked the General and the two special powered Terracotta Warriors for their help and started to leave as the sun was starting to set. Hardly containing her excitement, Samantha's arms accidentally pushed forward a chariot that started to roll over the horse's feet. The horse neighed loudly in pain, and violently kicked over the statues behind it. As some of the warriors couldn't get out of the way in time, several of them were injured and fell over. Since the warriors were seated so closely together at the table, they toppled over one another like dominos.

Before the girls could say "watch out", the Terracotta Warriors were shattered and crumbled into piles of stones, sand and dust. The museum was in a big chaos as many of the warriors, horses and chariots were destroyed. Fiona and Samantha panicked and decided that it was the best to leave right away.

The girls found the exit to the museum and ran towards it. Just as they were about to step out, there was a loud "BANG" behind them. Fiona and Samantha quickly turned around and saw the Terracotta Warriors once again in their neatly standing positions. The girls squinted their eyes, looking at the statues just to make sure that the General was really winking at them.

"What was that?" Samantha asked.

"Mabey," Fiona answered. "That is what they mean by the magic of the Terracotta Warriors." The girls smiled at each other and stepped off into the beautiful sunset.

Eternal Return

Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris - 11

Guilin, China, 1969

Tears clouded my eyes as I stepped into my father's bedroom. His breathing was shallow.

His face crinkled into smile. "You have come. Listen to me."

"Promise me. After my death, go to Xi'an and find an old friend of mine. He will look after you, "

He looked at me with a final gasp, and died.

I journeyed through valleys and deserts. When I took a rest at a meadowland, I became aware of someone singing a familiar melody.

The sea is waving at its tide.

The star is shining in the sky.

The soul of the old emperor.

Will soon rise again.

The curse will soon be broken.

Oh! Who will stop his ambition.

Oh! Who will fight his grandiose plan.

And destroy his soul?

It was the lullaby my late father used to sing to me. I walked up to the man, "How did you know this lullaby?"

The man stared at me, "Is your last name Zhang?"

I reeled. "Do I know you?"

The man sighed. "I'm a friend of your great-grand-father, Zhang Luo Ling. Your great-grand-father was a famous general of Qin Dynasty. You look so much like him."

"How do you know I look like my great-grand-father? Have you met him?" I asked.

The man replied, "Yes, I am actually 2210 years old. I was a general of the Qin Dynasty like your great-grand-father." I was stunned. The man went on, "I stole the elixir, a life-prolonging herb, from Qin Shi Huangdi. I thought eternal life would bring me happiness. But it brought sorrow instead. I watched my family and my friends die and I was left to myself."

"You are not alone any more..." I said, "We will have each other from now on."

He turned to me with a puzzled expression.

"My family died from cholera. My father told me that I should come to stay with you."

The moment I spoke, Zhang's face broke into the first true grin. He cried, "Oh, Luo Ling!"

Ever since that moment, I treated him as my father and he took care of me as his daughter.

5 years later

I worked in the fields, the twilight golden in the remaining rays of sunlight. The birds were singing. I whistled to them in my usual four-note tune.

"Nice concert, sweetheart," said Zhang, coming up beside me.

I turned to see his grin, but Zhang wasn't smiling. "What is it?" I asked Zhang.

“The Terracotta Army has been discovered today.” Zhang’s voice was shaky. “Emperor Qin will soon rise and lead the Terracotta Army to conquer the world”

“How can it be possible? Emperor Qin has been dead for more than 2000 years.” I asked.

“Luo Ling, remember I told you about the elixir. The emperor also took the elixir, and I believe he is still living in the tomb. Your great-great-grandfather gave his life for the people and buried himself together with Emperor Qin in the tomb. But your great-great-grandfather didn’t know that Emperor Qin had taken the elixir and he also kept a powerful dragon inside the tomb. The dragon can wake up the Terracotta Army and whoever controls the dragon will rule the world!”

“What can we do?” I asked, trembling.

“Nothing,” Zhang sighed, “We can just hope the tomb will never be discovered.”

That night as I lay in bed, I reflected what Zhang had told me.

Quietly, I slung the bow over my shoulder and grabbed my quiver of arrows. With one last look at Zhang’s sleeping face, I slipped out the door.

The night was cool. I rode through the dark and trotted quickly towards the direction of the Terracotta Army.

I slipped through the gaps of the Terracotta Army and the emperor’s tomb was revealed.

“Greetings, brave girl.” said Emperor Qin. “Move that stone and get me out of the tomb!”

Without thinking, I drew my arrow and sent it flying. It sunk into the emperor’s arm and he screamed in anger. Drawing his sword, we engaged into a duel. I got a few cuts but always managed to dodge his attacks. Some of the arrows hit the emperor’s legs or arms, but always missed the fatal spots.

Finally, my quiver ran out of arrows. Grinning, the emperor slashed his sword through the air and pinned me to the wall, the blood-stained sword at my throat.

“Dare you turn against me?” he purred, “ Against the great Emperor Qin who built the Great Wall and the Terracotta Army! I am the----“

“You are the cruelest ruler in the world.” I interrupted. “You had slaved and slaughtered thousands people. I cannot let you out of this tomb.”

Alarm crossed the emperor’s face, but then it was gone. He raised his sword. I took one last look at the world, then waited for the agony that would end my life.

“WAIT!” A sudden cry made the emperor stop. I recognized the voice. It was Zhang. He burst in, flushed and panting.

Zhang spoke, breathing fast. “You must not kill her.”

What happened next was so fast it was senseless. Zhang pulled out his dagger and stabbed himself in his chest.

The emperor’s grip left me. But my eyes were on Zhang. I crawled to him. “Why did you do this?”

“To kill the emperor,” He gasped. “Look at him!”

That was when I noticed the emperor lying on the floor, blood spurting from his chest exactly where Zhang’s blood was coming from.

“Why?” I asked.

“The elixir was made from the same creature--- an immortal dragon,” whispered Zhang. “While I die, so do the emperor. But don’t worry,” he added, “Living forever isn’t a happy option.” I locked my eyes onto his so he knew I was listening. “What matters most is not living. It is the safety of the ones you love.”

Zhang died. As my tears fell, the birds outside the tomb began to sing my father’s lullaby.

Waiting for Ju

Sha Tin Junior School, Chu, Charlotte - 11

There was a huge gaping hole in the ground newly dug with a shovel planted deep in the soil. Right in the center, there was a rusty, old, wooden door.

“Alright, are you all ready to go in?” father asked, Ming looked to his big brother Huang and they nodded.

All three of them lifted the wooden door and climbed in. As they walked further in down the dusty corridors they heard faint whispers and suddenly there was a voice “Who’s there?” Father looked at Ming and then to Huang, “Did you just say something?” he whispered to them.

“I did,” said the voice again, and out of the dark appeared a young man, he wore dusty, ragged clothes and was barefoot.

“Who are you?” they stammered in fright, “Where did you come from?”

Then a few more people appeared out of the dark behind him,

“I’m Jiang Hui and we’re escapers from China.”

“Escapers you say,” Huang said calmly, “Why?”

“Our emperor Da Jin Long, is a terrible ruler. He took our money, he changed the law, now no one is allowed to create art or play music, He is cruel and everyone must obey him. There are also these statues that we made for the previous emperor, they hold his greatest treasures. When Da Jin Long found out about it, he was furious and wanted all of us slaughtered. So here now we are as refugees hiding in fear as he hunts us down one by one,” He explained. “Most devastatingly, my daughter Ju was lost in all that. She wasn’t killed, but was separated from us during the chaos. I’m just hoping that one day, she will come and find us here,” Jiang Hui said in sorrow.

Huang, Ming and their father went silent, “Don’t worry,” Ming stepped forward “I’ve got a plan, we can help you transport the statues across the border into Mongolia and you’ll all be safe, we’ll get the whole village to help. How’s that?” Huang and father stepped forward, so did all the people behind Jiang Hui.

Jiang Hui stared at Ming, “You’ll really do this for us?” he asked.

“We will.” Huang, Ming and their father said together.

The next day, as Ming was milking the cows, he saw golden flags being waved in the air by strange people, people that he’d never seen before. Then he started to see the villagers gather round and he decided that he should go too.

When he got there, he saw the bizarre looking people wearing heavy armor, holding a shiny shield, and a spear that had a gold ribbon attached to it : “J. Long” It said boldly.

“Oh no, please not him,” Ming thought, “Now the refugees are in trouble, I’ve got to warn them quickly.”

“Greetings,” a tall man riding a black horse said, “I am the General of this army and we were sent by the great Emperor, Da Jin Long, we have come to announce that from now on we will be patrolling here and surveillancing twenty four hours to keep a sharp lookout for these people,” and he clicked his fingers twice.

Two soldiers behind him walked towards the village hall and hammered a poster on the door, everyone crowded round to look. There were two pictures, the first one showed a group of people waving signs and yelling. “These guys must be the rebels,” Ming thought to himself, and then he saw Jiang Hui’s angry face. The second one showed a man behind bars, with a caption: “Qiang caught and jailed after saving a few rebellions and trying to help them reach the Tibetan borders.”

“I have to warn Jiang Hui and the others about this,” Ming thought, “Before it’s too late!”

He shoved his way through the crowds towards home and told Huang and their father, “We’ve got to tell everyone in the village the truth about the emperor. It’s the only way we can save our country and the refugees.”

The next day, the brothers sprinted towards the escapers hideout, they told them everything about Da Jin Long’s army, the posters, from start to finish.

“I’ve decided the plan should commence tonight, we’ve told everyone in the village to help. There will be an orchestra performing to entertain the soldiers for two hours, so we’ll have time to move the statues out and get everyone to safety. It’s about half past seven right now we’ll start moving in half an hour.” Ming explained. They spent the half an hour preparing. “Stand to, stand to,” Ming whispered, “Coast is clear.” They pushed the statues towards the forest, “Keep going guys, we can do it.” Huang encouraged. They finally arrived at the Mongolian border and were unloading the statues. Suddenly there were torches and yelling, then out of the bushes appeared soldiers. There was one more statue to push and Jiang Hui was last, “RUN!” he yelled, “Don’t let them catch you!” Ming and Huang dashed into the shadows, on to the path towards home. The next day, the entire village watched as Jiang Hui was taken away in chains “This is our fault,” Ming whispered. Fighting back tears they stared at Jiang Hui, he looked back and smiled. That day, they had lost a brave, loyal friend and they remembered him for that.

Many years later, Huang and Ming had grown up and built their own farm. One peaceful morning Huang woke up to find a young girl as pretty as an angel at his doorstep, “Hi,” said the girl, “I’m Ju. Do you know where Jiang Hui is?”

“Ju... your father,” Huang said quietly, “He’s... gone. But I knew him, come in.”

They went into the farmhouse and talked about Jiang Hui, Emperor J.Long, the soldiers, the escape.

When they had finished, Huang decided to take Ju to Ming’s farm which wasn’t far away, when they arrived Huang told him at once “Jiang Hui’s daughter has finally arrived.”

The Special Mission

Ying Wa Primary School, Wu, Edmund - 11

Ben worked in the 4th Pit of the Terracotta Warriors. He was an archaeologist’s assistant, but he found the job extremely boring. So, he always sang this song:

“If you found something here
We’ll go and dig it up
When there is treasure down there
We’ll get it up for you
Then we will dust dust dust
the treasure will be kept
And the money-
cling cling cling
rolls into our pockets!”

The archaeologist frowned.

“Stop singing that tedious song for the infinitith time!”

“Okay,” sighed Ben as he turned around and started dusting a warrior model. It was atypically heavy. All of a sudden, the model burst!

“WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!” shrieked the archaeologist in a piercing voice, “YOU’RE—“

Someone came out of the dusty air around the fragments. He was wearing robes of the Emperor—the Qin Dynasty style. He stood and looked at the two.

“—not fired,” muttered the archaeologist.

“Hello everyone,” greeted the Emperor, “allow me to introduce myself. I am the First Emperor from the Qin Dynasty.”

“But...you were passed away a long time ago!” exclaimed Ben.

“I am half-dead,” replied the Emperor. “The other half of me—which was the one gone—was kept after a fight with a devil. The devil made half of my good to be detached from my body, which is kept in a Terracotta Warrior model. And now the half-good...is me.”

The archaeologist and the assistant couldn’t believe their eyes.

“Please,” pleaded the Emperor, “we have a mission to do.”

“What mission?”

“To escort me back to my body, and change the bad things the devil had done. You two will be turned into my most loved concubines to stop the devil.”

“Concubines...WOMEN?” yelled the two. “ARE YOU INSULTING US?!”

“If you two weren’t concubines, you might have your heads off by the devil.”

“Err...okay,” stammered Ben.

The three returned to the Qin Dynasty.

The First Emperor went to his own bed with two ravishing concubines—who actually were Ben and the archaeologist. While the Emperor was talking to them, something black swooshed past them all, leaving a dark trail behind it. It struck the Emperor in his chest. The four-legged scaly creature made the emperor struggle and choke. The other two could not pull it out. Ben ran out, called some strong men in, who successfully removed the creature. It was a dragon—the devil.

The Emperor was exhausted but relieved.

“Thank you,” he said. “There are two models of you two in the Warriors’ Pit. It is a present for you. Goodbye...” He held his hand up, causing a tunnel. Ben and the archaeologist returned to the Pit.

Ten years after they had returned, Ben, the famous archaeologist, found two painted models of beautiful-looking concubines. Above them was a portrait which was the scene of them saving the Emperor.

Ben murmured to himself, “Was that me?”

He dreamily gazed at them.



Fiction

Group 3

New Tales of the Terracotta Warriors: Terra Firma Warriors

British International School Shanghai, Puxi, Choong, Qi Yi - 14

Everyone says I will never find them. They all laugh at me, comparing me to a brainless dog trying to bite its own tail. I don't care what they say; they'll sing a different tune when they see the missing Terracotta Warriors I've been endlessly hunting since college. What began as an academic exercise, to theoretically prove the existence of a new army, turned into my lifelong passion and obsession. Just the mystery of it all, the thrill of the unknown, the majesty of Warriors and what they may be guarding, keeps me up all night, most nights, like tonight.

I've been surfing the web for hours now, with my now blood shot eyes weeping for a break. I observe the board filled with evidence and theories. Many historians say the long-lost Terracotta Warriors have been blessed with endless luck, luck that will be passed to the one who finds them, as a thank-you for bringing the Warriors back to life again. They protect their new master from any and all evil energy, forever surrounding anyone with positive energy.

Now what this energy is useful for has been open to interpretation amongst historians for centuries. I myself believe it will lead to limitless wealth. This for me is the wealth of love. In the past, I was never truly loved. My parents have always adored my little brother, yet never gave me any such attention. In school was no different; I was the only student who was friendless, eating lunch surrounded by empty chairs. Thus, to this day, I have never truly experienced love. I feel as if my whole life has been spent with a dark, grey cloud of loneliness hovering above me, constantly pouring rain. If I could just locate the Warriors, then sunshine would forever be in my life, its radiant rays warming my cold, damp soul.

But how to find the sun? As I look around my study, the piles of history and archaeology books lying on the floor, cracked open in a circle around my chair, I realize that, like the books themselves, I have been going around in circles, getting no closer to my quest than when I began. Perhaps my brother were right after all; I am just a dog trying to bite its own

tail. So, after some minutes, minutes used to summon up courage, I decide to abandon the books forever more. New strategy: think like an Emperor would, a romantic emperor, one with a sense of timelessness. Where would such an emperor place his Positive Luck Army?

I gently begin tapping my forehead, trying to bounce my brain into gear. The action of doing so reminds me of my childhood, when my father used to affectionately do this when he was trying to gently encourage me to think, at the same time asking, “Is this thing on?” From such a memory, I begin to also recall the annual Hong Bao hunt all the kids in our village would take part in, which was maybe the most fun I’ve ever had. While it was fun enough finding the small red envelopes that would contain maybe 10 yuan each, what we all wished for was to discover the mysterious Jin Bao, the golden envelope that was said to contain untold riches. Some years, we would find it, but only by a few of us forming a team and choosing not to hunt for the Hong Bao, choosing to ignore the guaranteed material wealth, for the promise of a potentially higher, more valuable prize.

But, as we discovered, the Jin Bao would always be empty, much to our continued puzzlement. Every year, the man hosting the treasure event would somehow persuade us of the benefit of searching the Jin Bao over the Hong Bao. Perhaps it was the host’s reputation that convinced us, being as he was, the smartest man in the village. He had travelled overseas, had studied at California University, which in that day and age, was extremely rare, giving him a mysterious, Confucian air that we young scholars found enchanting. Yet, as the years passed, and the Jin Bao team continued to return with an empty Jin Bao, the team would increasingly become smaller in size until, finally, I was the only kid still crawling under bushes, and up trees, hunting for it. The first solo year of mine, opening the Jin Bao once again revealed a great amount of nothingness, with disappointment refilling my heart. Solo year 2 though was different; I found that the inside of the envelope was a beautiful, shiny, reflective gold material, which reflected my face when I stared into it.

I awoke from my daydream, realising that the reflective mood it had left me in was, perhaps, the answer to my quest for the missing Warriors. There was a clear connection between the Warriors and the Jin Bao, how my curiosity for curiosity had actually, now that I considered it, been not just the happiest days of my life, but had come to define my life. It made me realize that the Jin Bao, and the missing Warriors were a metaphor for life itself. If you always hunt for what you don’t have, you will always be disappointed, left empty-handed. Treasures, fortunes, experiences, call them what you will, surround us daily. All you need do is step outside, to be in the world.

I stand up. I raise my hand, grabbing the front doorknob tight, a little nervous to open it, to walk back into the sunlight, with this newfound knowledge. With a deep breath, I get my courage and swung open the door. The sunlight shrinks my pupils, forcing me to narrow my eyes. The sun’s rays fall on my cheeks, warming them. As my eyesight readjusts, I see brilliant blues skies, beneath which trees dance with the wind, and dog walkers jog with their dogs. I stare at all these people. Who knew that the missing Warriors were here all along?

New (Tall) Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

Chinese International School, Ewer, Nathan - 13

Nor moon nor sun can reach our tomb,
Encompassed by dirt, no shadows loom,
Eight thousand heads, eight thousand minds,
Forever doomed in earthly binds.
Our spirits wander,
From bodies asunder,
Bringing drought and fright,
To let you know that from earth
Under, we are ready for the fight.

In the drought troubled village of Xi Yang, the sun blazed, relentlessly torching the ground. Every fleck of dirt looked like it had been coughed from a parched man's throat. As the drought grew, so did the people's superstitions. It was said whispers sprouted from the ground like grass, rumours of haunted earth flowed like a river and misery spread through the village like a flood. In time, the sun eventually sucked up the last breadths of water.

Seven feet tall, he boasted, with the strength of five oxen, and the ability to harvest a whole field of potatoes with a single hand. His chest was as tight as coiled steel, he crowed, both legs and arms as thick as tree trunks, a beast of a man said he. Farmer Yang: master of story-telling, chicanery and rumour. Seven pairs of trousers and a layer of plate mail. Bamboo stacked in his heels lending him his unusual height and the "magical" ability to walk on water. This being told, you would never have believed him if he'd told you he had discovered the Terracotta Warriors. But let's take a look at where his story began...

Farmer Yang was sitting inside "Emperor Qin's Dumplings", telling more tales of his exploits while receiving withering and disbelieving looks from his audience.

"We've all heard this one before, Yang!" said a customer.

“His stories are so tall, even he couldn’t reach them!” said another.

“It was the day after I was married,” Yang exclaimed raucously, spindling his finger in a circle to signal the start of his story. “I had just come back from a long day working in the fields and was very thirsty. My throat was as dry as sandpaper and my face as red as the luscious exotic tomatoes I was growing...”

“Tomatoes! I thought they were prunes!” sneered a peasant.

“Quiet! Misfortune for the rest of your life!” Yang’s lip curled in a disparaging smile. “My lovely wife comes up to me with a nice cup of tea – the perfect disguise for poison. But the leaves were not actually leaves, they were snake scales, the water used to make the tea contained 189 different types of poison, each one deadly enough to kill a hundred men! Even Emperor Qin would be taken aback at the brutality of my wife. As soon as I took one sip I was dead!”

Yang’s wife rolled her eyes in mock disbelief.

“I beat my chest with my fists and resuscitated myself. Dead a full five minutes! My wife saw me come back to life and came at me with a broom, beating me mercilessly. I used my iron fighting techniques, didn’t feel a thing!”

“Can you believe him? Lying about his own wife! This idiot drank his hot tea so quickly he choked, fainted and dropped like a sack of rice! I ran quickly to fetch the broom and by the time he had come round I was sweeping the broken cup off the ground. This idiot thought I was attacking him!” screeched Madam Yang. “Iron fighting techniques...eugh!”

“Remember that time Yang tried to make his own snake powder!” asked a peasant.

“Ah! My wondrous snake powder,” Yang said, spindling his finger in a circle and smiling in fond reminiscence. “It was sold to 175 homes! ‘Don’t Make That Mistake! Protect Your House from Snake!’

“It only ended up attracting the snakes!” everyone laughed.

“Hey! I still haven’t gotten my money back!” said a customer.

“No refunds! Don’t have your money!” Yang piped, squirming uncomfortably.

“And the time he chased away all the village buffalo after an argument with his wife,” said another peasant, the mood suddenly turning bitter. “We starved for weeks waiting for this idiot to chase them back!”

“You only bring mischief and misfortune to our village Farmer Yang, I think it’s time for you to do something useful for once!” exclaimed the village elder. “All in agreement, say ‘Dui’.

“Dui,” exclaimed everyone except Yang.

“It is agreed then,” said the village elder severely. “Farmer Yang and his co-operative must dig a well in order to save our village from this drought, or else he and his co-operative will be cursed forever!”

“What! You can’t d...”

“Forever!!!” everyone echoed.

“But, but...”

“Go now! Find water, or by the night you will be struck dead by a thousand lassoes of lightning,” said the village elder seriously. Farmer Yang gave a sidelong glance to his wife, and walked dejectedly from the room, dumplings left steaming on the table.

Hoarse groans from unslaked throats emanated from the hole, while marbles of sweat

rolled down their backs. Each groan punctuated with a dull thud as their shovels tore into the leathery ground. They were up to their necks in dirt, toiling in melancholy madness as the sun beat down on them. Everyone was working, everyone except Farmer Yang.

“Remember! The curse! Can’t you hear it? Can’t you hear the whispers?” Yang whispered loudly. “I can! I can hear the voices! And you know what they tell me?” Yang croaked. The farmers glanced at each other knowingly, exchanging looks of mirth and exasperation. “If I don’t heed their warning, if I break this earth, if I even touch this earth,” Yang ranted, “terrible misfortune will befool --- I mean befall – this village!”

“Trying to, ahem, befool us, eh Yang? Maybe you should be-fall into this pit and get to work!”

By the first strike of his shovel, the earth seemed to split and cracks resonated from the impact. Bending over, he discovered a shard of a Terracotta face. It seemed to bend the light and chill the other farmers’ souls, as though staring at every one of them.

“AAAAH! It’s Yang’s curse! It was true!” said a farmer, his voice already talking to running feet.

“Get away from us Yang! You’re cursed forever!” said the slowest one.

A wry smile slowly inched up the deepest corners of Yang’s face.

★ ★ ★

“As I was saying, President Clinton,” Yang said, spindling his finger in a wide arc, “Once I heard the whispering spirits of the Terracotta Warriors, I knew exactly where to look!”

Yang smiled roguishly at the camera, knowing all too well that the whole village, even the whole world was watching.

New Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

Diocesan Boys' School, Cheng, Ethan - 13

Emperor Qin paced around in his throne room, his heart beating impatiently. Somewhere in the North, his soldiers were fighting against a formidable enemy. If he won, a huge amount of land would be ceded to him, along with a bonus amount of slaves and money. If he lost... Well, he tried not to think of it.

The throne room burst open. Emperor Qin looked around. A procession of medics and messengers was carrying a stretcher, on which a red bloody mound lay, quivering slightly. Emperor Qin wrinkled his nose in disgust, then realized that the mound was a severely injured soldier. On closer inspection, he found out that the soldier was no other than his most trusted General.

He hurried down from his throne, reaching the General hastily. “Victory?” he asked.

The soldier choked. “Defeat, my lord,” he managed to croak. “Half of your army is dead.”

Emperor Qin felt as if he had been plunged into cold water. He nodded curtly, and the soldier carried his bloody colleague out of the room. A servant came in and began to wipe up the floor.

Emperor Qin cursed himself. Why had he been so stupid to fight the Northern Barbarians? He knew that his army was weak. He had already used up much of his resources and people to build the Great Wall of China, but despite this, the Northern Barbarians still continued relentlessly on their attack of the Chinese land. He could feel that his country was growing weaker. People were revolting now and then, even though his military had been quite capable in ending these small-scale protests. His economic reforms and policies were proving to be quite ineffective at times. Even now, his own Royal Officials were smirking behind his back, counting the day of his death. Victory does have a small price to pay, he thought bitterly. He suddenly felt alone and helpless. He couldn't trust anyone... Well, except for one particular person...

He called for a messenger. “Summon Lin-Xu to me. I have... business with him.” Qin said.

The messenger bowed. “Where should I tell him to meet you, my lord?”
Emperor Qin smiled mysteriously. “Oh, he’ll know where to go.”

Emperor Qin swept out of the throne room, his heart pounding. He burst into his private chamber and closed the door. After making sure that no-one was looking, he pressed a jeweled decoration that is inlaid in his floor-length mirror. At once, the surface of the mirror rippled, and the glass slid away to reveal a secret passage, dimly lit by torches. Qin hurried into the passage, pressing another button that closed the mirror behind him. The passage sloped downwards, then opened out into a room.

Yet it wasn’t an ordinary room. It was Emperor Qin’s private laboratory.

Qin had always been fascinated by science and mechanics since he was a child. He used to spend hours every day staring at machines created by famous inventors, fascinated by the gears and physics the machines operated upon. As an adult, this fascination drove him to create this lab, a playground for every aspiring and professional inventor or mechanic.

The whole lab was cluttered with numerous blueprints and drawings of different machines. Gears and motors littered here and there, and several half-finished machines lay strewn across the floor. Every mechanic tool from all over the country were hung neatly on the wall. This was a scene every inventor would die for.

Footsteps echoed behind Emperor Qin. He turned around, and sighed with relief. “Lin-Xu. ‘Long time no see’, my old friend.”

The tiny man with a fine moustache bowed down. He was wearing plain robes, and his face was solemn-looking. “My lord,” he said curtly. “I believe you have summoned me.”

“And so I have,” said Emperor Qin. “You have heard of our recent defeat, haven’t you, Lin?”

Lin nodded. “Ah, yes. Over 11,000 men killed were killed in action. Tut, tut. Pity.”

Emperor Qin nodded gravely. “Yes. And therefore, I would want one last commission from you. One last one, then I would allow you to have your retirement in peace.”

“Very well, my lord. What would you want this time?”

“I want an army of invincible soldiers. I want them to be undefeatable, so as to guarantee against future losses as dreadful as this time.”

Lin-Xu thought for a few moments. Then suddenly, a sly grin crept towards his face. He leaned forwards towards Emperor Qin’s face.

“Have you ever heard of automatons?”

That night, word spread throughout the country. Every craftsman and worker was required to make 10 life-sized terracotta warriors, disassembled and sent to the Capital before the First New Moon of the year. Fearing Emperor Qin’s wrath, all the craftsmen and workers in the vast empire of China, which was of a good number of about 500,000, immediately set to work after the announcement. All over the country, people wondered about the meaning behind this curious request.

* * *

The First New Moon came and went. However, over half of the warriors still haven't been finished. Emperor Qin, as being the patient man that he was, demonstrated the first beheading of a particular craftsman who hadn't completed a single terracotta warrior. All the other craftsmen decided to take their work more seriously from then on, and worked overtime to keep up with the pace of the production of the terracotta warriors.

Every single warrior took four months minimum to finish.

* * *

Emperor Qin was feeling impatient. He was starting to feel spasms from his back and joints, accompanied by frequent bouts of headache and nausea, and knew that he didn't have much time left. Only 8000 of the planned 5,000,000 terracotta soldiers had been fitted with the intricate mechanism that he and Lin-Xu designed together. This mechanism would be activated with a touch of a remote button created by Lin, and the mechanism, if all goes well, should transform the terracotta warriors into an army of indestructible automatons.

Determined to make sure that he would live to see the day his army is activated, Emperor Qin began his notorious journey in search of the legendary Elixir of Life, said to be able to prolong life. Others sneered at his quest for the impossible, yet Qin was determined. He didn't want to see his work go down in flames, forgotten for eternity.

* * *

Emperor Qin was dead.

Rumors surrounded his untimely death. Most speculated that Qin's own son had poisoned him. His body was never found. His magnum opus, the large army of terracotta warriors, was buried in a corpse-less mausoleum.

Lin-Xu hid the terracotta army's activation button in Qin's underground lab and sealed the entrance, and lived out his retirement far away from civilization until his death. No one has ever found the legendary remote controller ever since.

* * *

Centuries later, a little boy was playing with his friends in the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor. His mother had gone off to buy snacks, so he decided to play Catch with his mates.

He was running around, trying to sneak up at his friend without him noticing, when he noticed a glint on the floor. He kneeled down and tried to take a look at the object that caught his eye.

It was a jewel, decorated with gold decorations, shining brightly in the sun as it did centuries ago.

Hung Jian

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Haik, Lily - 12

He didn't want to leave. He didn't want to abandon his sick mother all by herself in the middle of nowhere. His father was once a poor farmer who was killed many years ago by the Emperor and his soldiers. His father would not give them the crops they wanted or needed and made the Emperor pay as an act of justice and equality. The Emperor killed him in front of Hung Jian and his mother's eyes. From then on, the Emperor owned his mother and him.

Hung Jian was a skilled craftsman. At 17, he was built like a fully-grown man. His shoulders were broad and strong. His skin was rough and cracked and he smelt of sweat and salt. He could reach his family home's brown ceiling and towered over his mother. Hung Jian wasn't just strong; he also had the mind of a young genius. Each and everyday since his father past, Hung Jian would wake up at dawn and harvest rice and potatoes and if he was lucky, he would be able to catch fish in the small river at the bottom of the cliff where their small home was. He would carve mini idols from stones he would find in the garden and sell them in the market along with all the crops he had harvested. One by one villagers came to see his beautiful idols some buying one at a time, others multiple at a time.

"Hello, are you Hung Jian?" a plump looking man said. He had a gelled moustache on his upper lip and the slick ends of the moustache reached down to his neck. He wore a red robe that covered his feet and smelt of blossoming flowers. Hung Jian could tell from his robe and his facial features, he worked for the emperor. He had read about this before in a battered book he had found on the street.

"Yes that is me." Hung Jian replied back bowing down respectfully.

"Emperor Qin Shi Huang has sent me here to notify you that he is building a tomb full of terracotta warriors for his afterlife..." The man read from a scroll.

"OK?" Huang Jian said confused. "Qin Shi Huang was only 13 years old and was already preparing for his death," he whispered under his breath confused.

"Well you are a lucky man for since you are so gifted," he picked up one of Huang Jian's idols dusting off the dirt. "He has chosen you to help construct these magnificent warriors, only the best men in the whole of China were chosen. You meet me back here tomorrow with your baggage," he said climbing upon his horse.

"How long will it be? What if I don't want to go? I'm fine here. What if I say no?" Hung Jian asked flabbergasted.

"If you say no?" The man questioned. Hung Jian nodded. "If you say no. If you say no there will be nothing to go home to, no one to talk to, no money, no land."

"My mother!" Hung Jian interrupted. "She is very sick and no one will be able to take care of her."

"We will provide her will Traditional Chinese Medicine that will cure her for your arrival back home. You will be rewarded." He kicked the horse's stomach and cantered off. Hung Jian looked as he had just seen a ghost. He was frozen in shock and fear. He had a decision to make.

It was a long trip to the site. From Baoji all the way to Xi'an was an exhausting trip on

horseback. It took Hung Jian and a couple of other villagers two whole days to make it to the building site lead by the same man who had come and invited him to join well, forced him. The other villagers looked like they were in their mid-30s. They all looked anxious and heartbroken from having to leave their families behind.

Hung Jian arrived at the site exhausted. He had only had 12 hours of sleep and forced himself to stay awake for the rest of the trek. He was starving for they had only been given a bowl of noodles and a steamed bun that was cold.

The site was ginormous. He calculated it must have been around 2,000,000 square feet, a lot bigger than his farm. Many other ordinary people were there with him some had already started working. Blocks of maroon terracotta surrounded the premises. Some were already made into warriors. They worked on the floor. The slaves were covered in bruises and cuts and looked like they hadn't eaten anything or drunk anything for days. Some carved while some covered the beautiful warriors in color. Pigments of cinnabar, charcoal, azurite, iron oxide, barium copper silicate bones and malachite were used to create beautiful colors Hung Jian had never seen before.

He looked around and decided to start building. Hung Jian sighed and picked up a hammer and a block of terracotta. He knelt down and started to build something magnificent, a terracotta warrior.

10 years later

Hung Jian had been through it all. He had completed 7 warriors in the time he had been there. Many had been destroyed after a slight mistake and he had been whipped and hit over and over. Bruises covered his skinny body. His shoulders were no longer broad and strong. He only smelt of sweat and no longer sea salt. He hadn't seen the ocean in 10 years. Hung Jian hadn't grown any taller or stronger. He was as skinny as twigs and had shrunk in size. Him and his co-workers watched the emperor's men stuff their faces with food while they worked, receiving one meal a day and limited water. He had been through it all yet all he could think about was his mother.

Hung Jian had been assigned to craft a chief warrior. This warrior had to be spot on with no mistake. Hung Jian was almost finished and was putting the final touches onto the warrior. Hung Jian was working on the chief's eyes, powerful, strong, determined, and ruthless. He remembered his father. How he was slaughtered by a chief warrior, in front of Hung Jian and his mother's own eyes. He was disturbed from his place of mind when he heard someone shouting his name.

"Hung Jian? I have news for you." A man said. Hung Jian recognized him.

"Yes?" he said, looking up from his work. His eyes were tearing up with water.

"That is one nice warrior you've crafted. Its eyes are beautiful."

"Thank you very much" Hung Jian resumed his work starting to cry.

"Your mother has passed. I'm very sorry." The man started to walk away from the warrior and Hung Jian slowly.

Thoughts rushed through his mind. Anger, sadness, grief, fury. He got up and ran over to the man. His cold broken hands wrapped around his fat neck. Hung Jian could not control his feelings. The man fell to the floor, dead. He felt something on his back, a whip. Hung Jian screamed, "HELP. STOP!" Blood was dripping down his bareback. His face red and scarred. "STOP!" Hung Jian said crouching on the floor. He could hear the emperor's men shouting and laughing. He could see his back dripping with dark red blood.

He could no longer stand. No longer smile. No longer harvest crops or fish. No longer craft his stunning idols or amazing terracotta warriors. No longer speak and no longer love.

The Terracotta Potion

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Kim, Annie – 12

I felt my skin tingle and come alive once again. I tried to move my legs and sighed. It was still rock hard. I breathed out deeply, as I'd been holding my breath for the whole day. The others were starting to stir. It would take a while for my legs to soften up. I turned my gaze to the broken remains of General Huang a few rows in front. I felt sorry for him. His body had been shattered in the process of getting dug up, and now he was nothing but a pile of rubble, his cursed soul doomed to wander the earth forever. Is this what this whole army entirely of clay was made for? This meaningless waiting was getting tiring. My thoughts drifted back to the day when it all began.

I groaned as my leg exploded with pain. Around me in the terrible battlefield, dead and wounded bodies of foes and friends were scattered everywhere, and soldiers' bloods stained the earth. An arrow had gone right through my thigh. I lay still on my side, pretending to be dead. If the enemy's search party came across me, I would be killed on the spot. I didn't know how I was going to get back to camp. I thought about my mother back at home. How will she manage without me caking care of her? She was too old now. I had to get back to her. I gathered courage and stood up slowly, caking care not to hurt my bad leg even more. I swallowed, took a deep breath and screamed, "HELP!" I quickly scanned the landscape. I could see no one. There must be a search party somewhere. The doctor managed to take the arrow out, but they couldn't stop the bleeding. There was nothing they could do for me except giving me some herbs to numb the pain. I was considering asking the doctor to give me something that could kill me painlessly, when a royal official came to visit. He wore a fancy silk robe with beautiful patterns. He was holding a sealed envelope. Emperor's orders. The doctor led the official into his office, where they could talk privately. When they came out, they both looked grim.

Right after the official left, the doctors started to give out a bottle of strange liquid to the wounded soldiers. "What is it?" I asked.

"It'll heal you. Just drink it."

Its colour was a reddish-brown, like terracotta clay, and it tasted sweet but scratchy in my

mouth. As soon as I swallowed it, I felt warm from the inside and couldn't feel the pain on my leg anymore. I watched in fascination as the ugly wound on my leg began to close in the matter of seconds, as good as new. This potion had saved my life! I could go back to my dear mother. My heart leaped in joy.

Suddenly, I clutched my stomach. It felt cold and hard in my body. I glanced at my hands and gasped in terror as the fingers that touched my stomach started to turn to the colour of the potion. It started to harden, and I couldn't move them anymore. I quickly scanned around me, and saw that others were starting to have the same effects. I tried to walk, but my legs had been taken over by clay. I was frozen in spot, slowly being suffocated by terracotta. I tried to call out to the doctor, but my lungs were hardening as well. As I fought for breath during the time I was still alive, I thought: What a horrible way to die. I would have preferred dying heroically in battle, or even better, dying peacefully at home of old age. I regretted being a soldier. Well, I didn't have much choice anyway. My mother and I would have starved to death without the little wages that they gave us every month. I tried to take as much air as I could as my lungs completely hardened. Was this really the end of me? As my vision started to fade, I choked out the last of my breath and blacked out.

I blinked. I could feel my eyes again. What was going on? Everything around me was pitch dark, but I could feel the pitter-patter of rain falling on my head. A little while later my mouth and my lungs were again part of my body, and I could breathe again. My legs buckled under me and I fell on my knees. I breathed in the wonderful smell of wet dirt, in case I could never breathe again. As my eyes got used to the darkness, I could see the outlines of more terracotta statues around me. They probably went through the same things as me. I stood up and tried to look around. At that moment, the sky flashed with lightning, and I caught a glimpse of an amazing but terrible sight. I was standing in a massively wide hole that could fit thousands of acres of farmland. The hole was deeper than any of us. The most dreadful thing that I saw in that millisecond, though, was millions and millions of soldier statues, standing in perfect rows, endlessly extending in all directions. The flash of light wasn't for very long, but it was enough to etch the image in my head for ever.

The Terracotta Warriors

Heep Yunn School, Chong, Yan Hei - 13

“**C**hang! Get up! You’ve been summoned.’
I slowly rolled over, halfheartedly cracking one eye open. It’d probably turn out to be my roommate playing me for a fool again. Rubbing my eyes, I drowsily looked up, ready to tell him off, and nearly fell out of bed. Two blank-faced men stood at the foot of my bed, staring at me.

‘The emperor requires your services. Follow us immediately.’

Instantly alert, I swung my feet out of bed and followed them out, my bare feet pattering on the cold stone. At this point, my training as a member of the Emperor’s elite Imperial Guard had kicked in: “Follow the orders. No questions. Obey or die.” Still, I couldn’t suppress my curiosity. Why had I been summoned?

We descended on tightly spiraling steps deep into the ground. Everything was silent, and my ears strained to pick up any sound which might give me some clues to my fate. Soon, my ears picked up the hum of machinery mixed with ominously-human screams. What would happen to me?

The stairs finally opened out into a huge basement, and with a sickening lurch of my stomach, I saw the cause of the screams. In the middle of the floor, there was what looked like a huge blender, razor-sharp blades spinning, and a ladder balanced against it. As I watched, a man climbed the ladder, closed his eyes, and stepped inside. He wailed, but was soon silenced by the unstoppable, fatally tapered blades. I forced myself to watch, standing motionless, carefully wiping my face blank, as was fitting of a soldier, but dread settled in the pit of my stomach.

One of the men spoke: ‘Are you loyal to Your Emperor?’

I swallowed, heart pounding, and cleared my throat scratchily, ‘Yes.’

‘Would you die for him?’

There was only one viable answer. ‘Yes.’

The men smirked. They signaled to a craftsman, who brought over a terracotta warrior, the kind used in burials. On its forehead was inscribed my name, Chang.

‘Into the vaporizer.’

So that’s what it was called.

I had no choice. If I were to refuse, they’d simply kill off my family until I caved. Slowly, I climbed the ladder, savoring the final moments of life – the very act of breathing, blinking, feeling my heart thumping, my legs trembling and my hands sweating. I allowed a final moment of hesitation before I threw myself in.

Excruciating pain ripped me apart. I tried to cry out, but I had no mouth. Flashes sparked and fizzled in front of my vision. The agony surpassed all I’d ever known.

Darkness.

In the body of the terracotta warrior, I opened my eyes.

The Emperor faced the rows of terracotta warriors.

‘There’s currently a large-scale revolution, and a plan to overthrow and assassinate me. I’m in danger, so I have decided to fake my death and take refuge underground with your protection. When the fighting ends, we’ll rise and I will finally reign as leader of the world. I have taken the elixir of eternal life, so we’ll stay here as long as it takes. Questions?’

Silence fell. We all stared dispassionately at him. Why would I have had questions? I felt nothing except an urge to serve my master, the Emperor. I existed solely to do his bidding. Nothing except his needs concerned me.

‘The cave is being sealed. We will emerge 2,250 years from now. I am retiring to my chambers.’

We waited for centuries in the darkness. The Emperor paced, while we stood hushed and inert in the stagnant silence, ready to spring into action at the merest command. We all patiently bided our time, anticipating the moment when the world would be the domain of the Emperor once more.

2,250 years passed. The day had come for us to rise again.

We emerged into the sunlight, the Emperor wincing as the harsh rays of the long-estranged sun momentarily blinded his eyes. Looking around, I observed that we were surrounded by some very strangely dressed people. They wore tight pants and shirts with the sleeves cut off, and held shovels and brushes. All stood stunned and speechless, gazing upon our glorious Emperor. Why hadn’t they fallen to their knees in reverence? I would gladly have annihilated them for their impudence.

The Emperor strode up to one of the people.

‘Who is your current Emperor?’

The man seemed shell-shocked, and answered haltingly.

‘Um... you mean the President? He’s ... at the White House. Are you ...’

‘I,’ said the Emperor, drawing himself up to his full height, ‘Am the first and only true Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang! Now, bow before me.’

The people began whispering excitedly. They inched closer, as if dying for a closer look to ascertain his authenticity.

‘I can’t believe this! It’s like a dream come true!’ one man jubilantly said.

‘I knew this was the place to dig! We’ll get so much more funding.’

The Emperor looked irritated by their lack of respect. He addressed the man who answered his question.

‘Give me directions to the, ah, White House.’

Everyone tripped over themselves to answer, as well they should have.

‘Right. I’m going to see your ... president. There’s going to be a change in leadership.’

He started to walk away, but turned.

‘Soldiers.’

We snapped to attention.

‘Please take care of ... this lot. I couldn’t stand their showing disrespect to me.’

Instantly, we sprang into action. Cries sounded, begging for mercy, but we carried on, impervious to the wails piercing the air as the Emperor strode away.

I marched into yet another battle, the rumble of cannons and the steady pop of rifles filling the air. Explosives burst uselessly against our clay skin, and bullets were simply deflected. Killing had long since become an automatic action. The people of the world had united against us, but black, brown, or white, it did not matter who we fought. We were unstoppable, a wave of relentless death. As we swept through another enemy rank, I allowed my mind to wander. Hadn’t everybody caught on by now? We were invincible. As our Master lived, we would fight by his side for as long as he required.

The battle ended in minutes. We walked among the fallen; stepping on countless flags, making sure everyone was slain. Our task completed, we immediately assembled in formation, awaiting our next command. Ruthlessly efficient.

Against us, no one stood the slightest chance.

We remained a respectful distance behind the Emperor, leaving him room to admire his countries. Sea and land stretched as far as one cared to look, and it all belonged to our Master.

The Emperor finally turned to face us. His face was as timeless as ever, but his eyes held a hint of weariness.

‘We have finally accomplished the consummate achievement. I’m now Qin Shihuang, Emperor of the whole world!’

He raised his arms in triumph, but the action was mechanical, automatic.

‘Now, we shall ... shall ...’ He faltered, and started speaking softly, almost to himself.

‘What else can we do? I’ve completed my ultimate dream. Nothing I do next will ever top what I’ve already done! My lifelong goal has been fulfilled ...’

He bowed his head for some time, and then lifted his head, almost staring at us, but not quite focusing. His face was etched with fatigue, as if his years had finally caught up to him. He looked distressed and lost.

‘What have I actually done, besides sit back as my soldiers did all the grunt work? What is there for me to do?’

We remained mute, as always. Unfeeling, pitiless, and apathetic even when we were not in battle.

Met by our continually blank countenances, the Emperor resumed muttering under his breath.

‘I have half a mind to end it now, here ... But I can’t do that! I’m immortal! Great. Just great. Nothing for me in this world, the next world forever barred from my access. This is an absolute joke.’

The Emperor repeated his questions.

‘What have I done? What should I do next?’

Silence.

‘TELL ME! WHAT ELSE IS LEFT?’

Panting, The Emperor seemed to realize that we would never answer. He slumped to his knees, looking defeated.

‘You are all useless. Just...completely ineffectual. Go away. I don’t need you.’

With those words, the Emperor – willingly or unwittingly – released us from his service. We were only immortal while we were needed, and now we had been discharged. We started to crack, breaking apart.

In those last moments, my humanity was restored. With a jolt, I recalled my family, friends, and all my loved ones. My heart splintered as I realized they were all long gone. How heartless I must have seemed, leaving with no explanation whatsoever.

As the greatest Emperor of China fell to his knees, broken, the last of the terracotta warriors dissipated in the gentlest breeze.

The New Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

HKUGA College, Tse, Hiu Yan Jodie - 13

Claire tugged her coat tightly around her. The wind sliced through her protruding face and snow slid through her water-proof coat. Her fingers were numb from the chilly air like they were popsicles, and she could see her breath taking the form of mist as she breathed out.

“It’s so chilly here,” Lucy said, breathing through her mittens.

“I know,” Mum said, “but we’ve finally arrived in Xi’an. Haven’t you two been eager to visit Xi’an for a long time?”

“Of course! I heard that there is a lot of historical architecture there. Where are we going first?” Lucy asked eagerly.

“How about the Terracotta Warriors? It’s one of the most famous world heritage sites in Xi’an,” Dad suggested.

“That sounds interesting!” Lucy agreed.

“Claire? Are you okay? You haven’t spoken since we got off the plane,” Mum asked worriedly, interrupting her thoughts.

Claire blinked and murmured, “Huh? Yes, I’m fine.”

It was strange for Claire to stay quiet for so long. She usually talked a lot, especially when it was about suggestions as to where to travel. However, she was silent this time, like someone had drained all the power out of her. It seemed that she was unrelated to the world, gazing upon the distance as if in a trance. Indeed, the moment she got off the plane, she could feel the strange sensation of happiness. Not the happiness she got from travelling, but the happiness she got as if... as if a child finally getting to meet her mother, which felt strange, because her mother was right beside her. From the corner of her eyes, she could see her family walking towards a nearby restaurant. Claire suddenly felt her stomach filling with complaints about the meal on the plane and grumbling with hunger. She ran hurriedly after them, the longing of food filling her mind, pushing off the odd feeling temporarily.

After a satisfying meal in the Chinese restaurant, they walked towards the taxi station,

heading towards the Terracotta Warriors. On the way there, they chatted enthusiastically as to what they could see and about nearby attractions.

“Do you know that there’s a legend about the Terracotta Warriors? Want to hear it?” the taxi driver asked.

“Sure,” Lily replied as she sat with her back straight and leaned forwards.

“This story has been passed from generation to generation for centuries. According to the story, the Terracotta Army had a leader: Qin Shi Huang. However, he died at a young age, and before he died, Qin Shi Huang chose a person to inherit his position. That person died shortly afterwards and became the leader of the Terracotta Army. When he was not welcomed by the Terracotta Army anymore, he chose another leader again, who died shortly and inherited the previous leader’s job. People who were going to become the leader would shortly experience the feeling of affiliation with the Terracotta Warriors and Xi’an. Have you heard of the fourth pit of the Terracotta Warriors? Well, it’s empty. In history, it is told that there was no time to finish it, but in the legend, it is known to be the place for the ceremony of the new leader.”

Everyone was fascinated by the extraordinary and imaginative legend, but Claire’s look showed her horror that could not be expressed by words. She thought of the feeling she had since she got off the airplane. Maybe it was just a coincidence, or was she about to die?

“The Terracotta Warriors were built by Qin Shi Huang, who was the first emperor of China, ruling between 221 BC and 207 BC. He ordered over 700,000 labourers to build the Terracotta Warrior as he wanted to keep his humongous army and indestructible power when he died. The labourers were forced to do excessive work and paid very little, or not even paid! A lot of them died from the abusive use of labour. Some people considered him a tyrant for his excessive use of labour and killing a lot of innocents. However, others acknowledged his contributions and merits towards both ancient and modern China. There are four pits, but only three pits contain soldiers. The fourth pit is empty.” The guide told them the detailed history of the Terracotta Warriors, and everyone was overwhelmed by the interesting information, all but Claire.

“Don’t you think it is interesting, Claire? I mean, the Terracotta Warriors are so impressive, but I don’t like the way Qin Shi Huang forced people to work for him and how they were treated unfairly,” Lucy said thoughtfully.

“I mean, it’s all really cool and amazing, but it does not seem new to me,” Claire replied, “2000 terracotta figures have been evacuated, but archaeologists believe that there are around 8000 of them in the three pits. There are lots of different kinds of figures, including foot soldiers, cavalry, archers, generals, chariots, and also some non-military figures, like civil servants and acrobats.”

“How do you know all of this?” Lucy asked with awe.

“Did you learn about them in school?” mum asked with appreciation.

“I don’t know how I know all this, and no, I am sure I did not learn about them at school. It just, popped into my mind, like it had always been there, that I had always known it.” Claire answered, puzzled.

Suddenly, the words of the taxi driver popped up into her mind. A wave of nausea washed over her as she steadied to keep herself straight. Was it because of the fear, or was it because she was dying? She did not know, but the thought frightened her. Suddenly, her head

felt like it was going to split apart, while her legs felt like jelly. She was shivering from head to toe, and her face turned green. All of a sudden, it seemed, she suddenly felt that her whole body was made up of metal. She could feel herself slowly disconnecting from the world, then everything became black.

★ ★ ★

Claire woke up with light illuminating from the windows, where leaves were swaying slightly from the breeze. Everything was very peaceful. She looked around her. Where were her parents? Where was Lily? Why was she inside an empty pit? Then, everything came back to her. The feelings she got, the legend, and her death. As sudden as all these memories came, the feeling of depression rushed over her. She was only 13 years old, and she had already experienced death. What's more? She still had her soul in her when she died, which gave her the ability to recall the memories that caused sadness and longing to be alive. She was even trusted to be a leader of the Terracotta Warriors; the legend was true. This added fear upon her sadness. Suddenly, light encircled her, and she was lifted up. Facing the Terracotta Warriors, strength and courage surged through her body. From the distance, she could see her family standing in the path, their eyes red from crying for the loss of Claire. But Claire was there; she looked at them, hoping that they could see the circle of light and possibly see her, to announce that she was safe and had a new life – a life with the Terracotta Warriors.

What is True Greatness

Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Kwok, Yuet Yee Kleio – 11

A heart-wrenching sob echoed through the night, sending ghostly shivers down my spine. “He’s gone, gone, gone... forever!” She wailed.

Taking faltering steps towards the sound, I asked, “Hello? Who are you? Why are you crying?” A woman’s tear stained face peered up at me. “They took my husband, and now he’s gone forever,” she snarled, cradling the sack. I gagged as I saw a bony limb sticking out of it.

Blinking hard, my eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. I was standing at the Great Wall. The woman took in my awed expression and said, “The Great Wall is stunning, isn’t it? The Qin Emperor and his army stole my husband and many other men to build this.” Her voice grew louder and angrier. She roared, “Do you hear me, Emperor Qin? You might have built this Great Wall, you might have conquered the Warring States and united China, you might be the greatest Emperor, but you’re nothing without us.” She spat and her lips curled bitterly. “Your so-called greatness comes with a price. It comes with sacrifices, pain, loss and blood...” She lowered her voice in anguish, “It’s us, people like my late husband and me, the commoners who pay for all these. Don’t forget that.” With that came a thunderous groan as the Great Wall crumbled into dust. I was jolted awake, drenched in cold sweat in my hotel room in Xian with the book of Meng Jiang Nü Crying the Great Wall opened beside me.

Lying on my bed dozing off, I saw again the terracotta warriors in the First Emperor’s Mausoleum I’d seen during the day. They came to life in my sleep. They had jet black hair, rosy cheeks, pearly porcelain skin, rich purple robes and with armor shining like the moon on a clear night – like those fully restored warriors I saw on Youtube, powerful and regal.

I heard raucous war cries with the booming of battle drums, the blaring of horns and the rumbling of thousands of soldiers marching. In the smothering dust of battle, I saw the soldiers from Terracotta Warrior Pits One and Two charging under their generals from Pit 3. They advanced in a tight battle formation with the charioteers in the front, cavalry at the flanks and foot soldiers in the middle with the fearsome crossbowmen taking up position at their rear – formidable and impregnable even in the frenzy of battle. Under the deadly showers of darts fired by their crossbowmen, Qin soon annihilated the Qi troops, army of the last Warring State to succumb to Qin.

Nightfall came and I was drawn to the singing and dancing in Terracotta Warriors Pit 1. The warriors were now singing and dancing around a roaring bonfire, celebrating their victories against the Warring States and the invading nomads and the completion of the Great Wall. A cold thought struck me – would these soldiers be the ones who forced the people to work on the Great Wall and the Mausoleum and destroyed their families?

I lapsed back into my oblivious sleep. The pungent smell of smoke hit my nostrils and I saw thick, silvery tendrils curled upwards, causing streaks to appear in the clear blue sky. There was a bonfire with a big pit dug beside it. People were shoved into the pit whilst books were tossed into the fire. Creeping closer, I saw a young scholar with a petrified scream frozen on his face. I shuddered. I closed my eyes and was drowned in a sea of destruction and blood. This was not how I imagined the Great Qin Emperor would be. I heard a soldier laugh heartlessly and rage bubbled inside my stomach. How could he do this to his fellow countrymen?

I was so furious that blood rushed to my head. I wanted to confront the Emperor. I waited until midnight before making my move. I quietly made my way towards his palace in the Mausoleum and soon discovered it was a fortress in disguise. With tall and smooth stone walls, it was impossible to scale without the help of a rope. I counted four lookout towers, each with at least a dozen terracotta warriors and crossbowmen stationed there. My heart sank. There was no way I could get to Emperor Qin without being seen, unless... A bold plan evolved in my mind.

I openly marched to the main gate. The terracotta warrior standing guard in front of it watched me curiously as I tried to open the door. Yanking the keys from his belt, I shoved the door open and let out a sigh of relief. Task number one was completed. Now for task number two: to be captured on purpose so the terracotta warriors would take me to Emperor Qin.

The interior of the fortress was a lot more like a palace. Carved columns of jade marked out the court of the Emperor. The ceiling was generously decorated with jewels and chandeliers. The floor was made up of marble tiles, each with an emblem of Qin in gold. Flags of Qin and portraits of the Emperor adorned the bare grey stone walls. The golden throne with nine dragons in the center dominated the court. I was transfixed by the whole setting. I barely noticed the horde of terracotta warriors until they were right upon me with their swords raised. They pounced on me and I put up no fight. After tying me up, they dragged me to a corner to be questioned.

“Who are you? Why are you here? What do you want?” I offered no answer. The captain became furious. He raised his voice and demanded again for an answer. I said, “I want to see the Emperor.” The captain retorted, “Not everyone can see the Emperor. Who do you think you are?” In the commotion, I heard pounding footsteps. Everyone became hushed. “Who dares to disturb my nap?” boomed the voice. No one dared to answer.

A shadow descended upon the group. A solemn face loomed over me. He radiated power and authority. I cowered. The Emperor commanded, “Who are you? What do you want?” “I need to ask you some questions,” I said. The Emperor demanded, “Who do you think you are? Answer me first. Who are you?” “I am from a place and time afar.” The Emperor sneered scornfully, “Do you know that people need to gain a right of audience before they can see me? If they are not worthy I will chop their head off and throw their body to the dogs.” Seeing that I was not frightened, he changed tactics, “You are lucky. I am in a good mood today. I shall give you a chance. If you solve this riddle I will grant you an audience. If not, you know what will happen to you.”

“The one who makes it sells it, but the one who buys it doesn’t use it. The one who uses it, however, doesn’t know he or she is using it. What is it?” He spoke with a smirk on his face,

waiting for me to commit a blunder. I had no clue what it was, but a thought struck me, “We are in a mausoleum, right? If so, there must be dead bodies...” I looked around and suddenly blurted out with a twinkle in my eyes, “Is it a coffin?” The Emperor looked shocked. He declared, “You are wrong!” There was uproar in the court. Murmurs of disbelief echoed around the court, “No, she’s right!” The Emperor held his hand up for silence. “She is right. I just want to test her.” He then ordered everyone to withdraw from the court except me. He looked straight into my eyes and said, “Now, what is your question?”

“Why are you so cruel to your people?” The Emperor was taken aback and said slowly with deliberation, “Why do you say that?” I answered, “You killed so many innocent people for your personal glory!” “Your stupidity confounds me. Listen carefully. Everything I did is for the good of the people. I built the Great Wall to protect them from invaders. I burned the books and executed the scholars so that my people’s mind won’t be contaminated by them. I conquered the Warring States to stop all wars so that my people can live in a sustainable peace. It was I who built the first highway and canal in China. It was I who standardized the measurements, currency and writing. All these have greatly improved my people’s livelihood.” He paused and pointed at the terracotta warriors, “Can you see that all my warriors are loyal to me? Why? Because I am kind, benevolent, fair and just and treat them well.”

After hearing that, I was dumbstruck. I had never thought of it that way. I knew there was something wrong, but I didn’t know how to refute him. I was lost for words.

New Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

Island School, Kawano, Mary Joy - 13

He wasn't normal. He sees things that he shouldn't see, things he doesn't want to see. He sees souls. In people he talks to, people he passes on the street, in things that the dead used to own. Some bright and seeping through cracks and spilling out and other with black smoke, twisting around their very being, like something completely separate, like another breathing, living, thing. It's all in shades of grey, muted and various.

They were on a school trip to China and they visited the Terracotta Warriors, he was ecstatic when they found out. He couldn't help but smile the entire way there despite his friends telling him how weird it was.

Once he stepped into the space, he gasped at the wonder and scale of it all, it was overwhelming. He breathed in the smell of dust that collected over the years, the smell of clay, the smell of just old. These were the warriors that lived through through horrors and their statues that lived through time. The statues that took longer to create and hide away and even longer to be found. This was one his dreams, to see them for himself. Lined up and looking ready for battle. They are the relics from a time forgotten.

He remembers being younger; writing and reading about the Terracotta Warriors, sometimes even drawing, wishing he were one of them or that he was looking on at the raging battles that they fought. The ones that served their emperor and their nation and teaching those that follow them. They are the ones that have fought great battles along with their general, undeterred by the cloying stench of death and fear, they reaped vast rewards from those defeated. Yet their greatest adventure, their most important trial, is to be found in death. These statues were created to protect, to boast their eternal glory, their triumph. They are the *veni, vidi, vici* of the emperor. The large lit up signs that scream 'power'.

But something wasn't quite... Right about the Terracotta Warriors. He wasn't supposed to see their souls. And they were something he's never seen before. Their souls weren't bright white things that blind him nor were they black and whispering but they were... Everything.

They were red and blue and green and sometimes black and white but he doesn't know why. They were all swirling and entangling with one another and their collective murmurs all mix into one voice yelling the same thing over and over and over again until he couldn't stand to look at the statues. It went quiet once he looked away. Like being held under water and suddenly pulled back up.

He took photos as quickly as he could, trying to memorise as many lines and ridges and shapes from the warriors as he can whilst ignoring their souls. He moved to the back of the group and refused to look at them for too long again.

It was then that he realised why he saw them. To protect. The statues were created to guard the emperor into the afterlife. He recalled what the souls were yelling as a chorus, it was hard to find out what souls are saying. They don't normally speak, but when they do, it sounds like white noise. This, however, was something he didn't understand. He heard them perfectly, no white noise, nothing. They were all saying one thing.

"Go away."

Throughout their trip that lasted for a month, he kept on going back, he couldn't stay away. He needed to know what they were doing there, why they were there in the first place. He'd sneak in at night, when the city was quiet and the only thing he could hear apart from his breathing is the voices resounding in the space.

After they left the trip, he still didn't know anything about them. He dreams of them. Their voices, colours, incomprehensible sounds. It keeps him up until the morning and he doesn't know what to do to make it stop. He looks dead with his dark eyes and hollow cheeks. Everyone's worried.

Then, he decides to speak to them, despite not really seeing where they were. It was in his bed at four in the morning and he's tired. He's had enough of the constant sounds in his head that whisper filth and anger and betrayal and languages he doesn't understand.

"What do you want me to do?" He rasps out. "Go away."

The whispers got louder and louder until they became screams and yells and shouting and it was so loud that it felt like he was developing a migraine. Yet amongst the voices, he heard something, baritone and echoing in the walls of his room. A phantom breeze went through the room sending chills down his spine. A voice that was threatening yet desperate. Answering his question and explaining. The voices hushed, putting the singular murmur in the spotlight.

He knows what to do.

How Emperor Qin Got his Terracotta Army

Renaissance College, Chow, Theodore - 14

Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China, unified all the warring states and created China more than 2000 years ago. He was praised for his work on expanding China's territory, building roads that linked many parts of China together, and setting a standard of the written language to be shared by all ethnic tribes and groups. However, his dark side was also known to everyone in his kingdom. Everyone was scared of him. Everyone knew how ruthless he could be ...

In Qin Shi Huang's kingdom lived a middle-aged man called Ming. A very talented artist, Ming made clay pottery and sculptures for a living. Many officials, including the Emperor himself, favored his work for its beauty and creativity. Although Ming lived a fine life with his family near the palace, he knew what a tyrant Qin was. He saw his scholarly friends being buried alive one by one by Qin simply because of the books they wrote and read. Deep down, Ming hated Emperor Qin.

One day Ming's teenage son contracted a very rare disease. The illness confined him to bed and gave him spiking fevers every night. Seeing his son's condition getting worse, he unwillingly went to the one person whom he knew would have the cure ... Emperor Qin.

"Your Majesty, my son is very sick and only you can save him! Please help him with your precious medicines!" Ming knelt down and begged the Emperor.

The Emperor frowned and replied, "Even I have not found the longevity elixir! How can a commoner's life be more important than the Emperor's?! Ming, I too am dying. My health is getting worse every day. There's nothing that can save me, nor your son."

"Emperor Qin, I would do anything for you. Anything! Please let me have some of your medicine for my boy! I beg you!"

But Emperor Qin was not a generous person. Even though he knew that his medicine could probably save Ming's son, he did not want to give it to him for he thought that only he, the Emperor, deserved a long life.

Not wanting to part with any of his precious drugs, Emperor Qin made the most unbelievable demand. “You have one month to build me a full army of 8000 to protect me in my afterlife, and I will consider giving you the medicine you want. However, if you can’t fulfill my request, not only will you not be able to save your son’s life, but your own life will also be in danger. Understood?”

Ming, blinded by the thought of his son’s condition, promised the Emperor that he would deliver this impossible task in thirty days.

From that day on, in order to save his son, Ming kept making the clay archers, soldiers, fighters days and nights without sleep. He worked from dawn till dusk and skipped breakfast, lunch and dinner. He knew his time was limited and he must not waste any minute. But Ming was a true master. The clay warriors he made was so magnificent that if you took a glance, you might think they were alive. They were all of different sizes and built. Their facial features were all different. Not one of the sculptures had the same clothing, gestures and ornaments.

“Papa, you must rest. You can’t keep working like this for me. I can’t let you do this.” Seeing how his father sacrificed himself, Ming’s teenage son began to cry.

“My boy, Papa will do anything to save you. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be alright. Sleep now.” Ming comforted his boy and went back to work.

Seeing his father’s shadow disappearing, Ming’s son pulled himself out of bed, sank to his knees and prayed. He knew that even completing one clay soldier a day would not be enough. There were only a few days left and he knew very well that both his father and he would die in the hands of Qin. He blamed himself for all these. “Have I doomed my father to death?” whispered the son to himself. Up on the roof, a bald old man with a long white beard, carrying a long knotted staff was listening to his prayers. This old man was not anyone but God Fuxi, the God of Creativity. “This Qin Shi Huang who kills and tortures people with creative talents must taste his own medicine!”

On the last day of the month, Ming, as usual, stayed up all night to work on the soldiers. His eyelids were heavy and he could barely stay awake. He watched the sun rise from behind the trees and mountains as his time, and his son’s time, came to a close. He closed his eyes and tears started to run. All the work that he put in was for nothing. His son would die from this unknown disease and he would die as well for making a stupid deal with Qin. When he looked up at the unfinished soldiers, he stared in shock as he realised that there were many more clay soldiers in front of him. “What? ... How?”

He went outside his home and found even more. “This must have been a feat of the God.” Ming whispered to himself. He stared in awe and closely examined the rows and rows of clay warriors. They were extraordinary. Like the ones he made, the facial features of each of the warriors were slightly different. Some looked young, fresh, and even handsome; some got furrowed brows; some were hatchet-faced; and some were snub-nosed. But something interesting caught Ming’s eyes. Like the ones he created, these faces looked familiar. They were the faces of his dead scholarly friends and those young and old souls murdered by Qin!

After quickly freshening himself up, Ming ran to Emperor Qin immediately and told him about the completion of his side of the deal. Emperor Qin went to see the clay soldiers for himself to make sure that Ming was telling the truth. As the Emperor approached the workshop, he was amazed by Ming’s craftsmen skills.

“I knew you could do this,” Emperor Qin said to Ming.

“Could I please have my medicine now? My son is dying,” asked Ming.

Emperor Qin’s smile disappeared at once. “I don’t have the medicine you need. Guards,

get ready! I'm going back to the palace!" ordered Emperor Qin.

"No, your Majesty! You must have the cure. Please have mercy on us!" Ming begged.

"Why would I want your son to live? No one deserves to live longer than the Emperor."

Emperor Qin left without turning his head.

Ming was pushed down onto the floor by the guards. "What should I do now?" Ming asked himself and sobbed. He trudged his way back to his house, and went straight to his dying son. He knelt next to his bed, held back his tears and told him what happened, "I'm so sorry, son, I couldn't save you." His son was too weak to talk and he patted his father's coarse hands. Seeing his son took the last breath, Ming held his son in his arms and let out a wail.

At that moment, Ming felt a gust of wind. He turned around and saw a bald old man with a long white beard, carrying a long knotted staff. "I am Fuxi, God of Creativity. Ming, I appreciate your creativity and your unconditional love to your only son. I heard your son's prayers. Therefore, I helped you finish all the clay soldiers. Now, let me take a look at your son," God Fuxi stepped forward and tapped the forehead of Ming's son with the head of his staff, which just started to glow.

With a gasp, Ming's son awoke. He slowly sat up and his father quickly pulled him into an embrace. "Thank you, God Fuxi, thank you so much!"

God Fuxi stepped back and let the father and son reunite.

"I cannot thank you enough. You have given me back the most precious thing a father could ever have," Ming kowtowed to God Fuxi.

"Well, it looks like my work here is done," said God Fuxi and in a blink of an eye, the old man was gone.

The next day, in retaliation to Qin, God Fuxi disguised himself as a renowned alchemist and gave Qin two mercury pills, telling him that these pills would make him immortal. Blinded by his impossible wish, Emperor Qin took the pills and died. Emperor Qin was buried with the terra-cotta army that he asked for. However, a secret that Ming and God Fuxi never shared with anyone was that these 8000 clay warriors were actually sculpted after those who were killed by Qin. Unlike what Qin expected, his terra-cotta army would haunt him for eternity.

The Terracotta Guardian

Sha Tin College, Wong, Charmaine - 12

As the lake shone in the beautiful sun of ancient China, two boys ran around playfully in their farm. When their mother, Meilin, watched her two sons play. Her husband, Chenglei shouted from across the farm. “Meilin! Look what I’ve found!”. As she approached, her eyes widened. There in front of them.... was a golden trapdoor! For years, they have been digging in search for precious treasure, and they finally found one.

“Quickly! Lets keep it to ourselves.” She whispered.

“Wait. Have you ever wondered what could be behind that door?” Chenglei whispered back. The boys immediately stopped what they were doing and walked up, curious to see what the fuss was about. The two boys were tall and charming, their hair was as dark as coal like their Mother and they had the same handsome face taken after their Father. “Look what your father found!” Mother exclaimed. The two boys rushed towards the hole and peered carefully inside. Rushing quickly into the house, they looked at each other as if they were thinking the same thing. Jianyu, the braver one of the two said “Okay, since we want to go and explore, we need to be armed”. Jianyu’s brother- Huojin, hurried to get their equipment and prepared themselves for their upcoming big adventure.

As Huojin opened the door to his father’s weapons room, he cautiously peeked inside. Suddenly, he heard footsteps coming down the corridor and heading towards the weapons room! Mother. “Don’t worry mother, he won’t be in the weapons room, let’s look somewhere else!”. Exactly when he shot into his hiding place, Meilin and Jianyu bursted in the room, Meilin looked around and murmured to herself, “Hmm, I thought he would be in here.” After they left the room, Huojin prayed a silent thanks, roughly stuffed a dagger into his pocket and tried to act normal when he entered the dining room. Trying not to be seen, he crawled past into his room.

“Finally!” Jianyu exclaimed. “Now, we just need a foolproof plan”.

“Look, I know you mean well, but I don’t want to get in trouble.” Argued Huojin, “If you want to go, then you’re on your own. I’m sorry.”

“Fine, up to you. I’ll go by myself then.” Jianyu replied calmly. The afternoon slowly dragged by and night finally arrived. Jianyu started preparing for his exciting journey while Huojin silently gazed at his brother worried, he started to question his decision. “Should I let him go alone?” he wondered aloud. When Jianyu started towards the front door, Huojin

grabbed his arm, "Okay, I've changed my mind, I'm coming".

"Oh! Okay..." Jianyu sounded surprised and added quietly, "Well, hurry up and get changed, we're leaving now."

Since Huojin touched the golden handle of the trapdoor, he knew what they were doing was wrong, but he brushed off the feeling. It was pitch-black when they entered the door. Thankfully, he had brought small matches. "Grateful I came prepared, eh?" Jianyu grinned, looking proud.

"Yeah." replied Huojin, trying to sound enthusiastic.

"Right. Now, follow my lead, after all there might be something dangerous in here." Jianyu muttered.

They started to walk down the small, narrow passage, just then... a powerful gust of hot wind blasted them right in their faces! The twins both let out a strangled yelp as they flew backwards. "Careful, I think we have company." Jianyu croaked with fear.

"Quickly! Hide!" Huojin hissed frantically. The two boys darted into their concealed hiding place, a huge shadow loomed over them and growled menacingly, "Come out. I can smell you." Not daring to move a single muscle, Huojin mouthed to his brother, 'What do we do?' Jianyu looked at him as if he was thinking, and put his finger to his lips. Before Huojin could stop him, Jianyu slowly crawled out of his hiding place and faced the thing. "Here I am!" Jianyu shouted out with confidence.

"Aha. I knew someone was here." The thing laughed horribly. Jianyu dug in his pocket for the knife. "No weapon huh?", the thing smirked, "Hmm. Pity."

Suddenly, Jianyu flung the knife towards the creature square in the face. Furiously, the monster dodged the knife and batted it away with its scaly tail, hitting it on the wall behind. The creature glared at him with its beady eyes and swung a blow at Jianyu. BANG. Jianyu's body hit the wall with such force that when he fell to the floor his body broke. Huojin looked at his brother's limp body and was thrown into shock. He could not believe what he had just seen. Running as fast as he could, Huojin dove towards the exit. He ran so fast that he nearly tripped through the front door of the house. The last vision he saw was his parents rushing towards him. Just then he hit his head on the ground, everything went black.

"Huojin! Huojin!" he heard his Mother calling frantically. Trying to move, he twitched helplessly. "Oh! You're alive!" he heard his mother sigh in relief.

"Mother, I need to, to tell you some... something," Huojin croaked painfully. "Jianyu. He's gone, I couldn't save him, he died." Huojin muttered in a barely audible whisper. The room fell silent. "What...how...", She whispered.

A terrible silence met Meilin's words the minute she told her husband about their deceased son. Not a word came out of Cheng lei's mouth for the rest of day till the next morning.

Huojin woke up feeling strangely hollow, he reached over for his brother but realized he wasn't going to be there for him anymore. Suppressing back a wave of sadness and anger, he sat up in bed. His mother then entered the room looking exhausted and bedraggled. As Huojin sobbed with regret, "Shhh..." Meilin cooed while comforting him. Huojin began to tell her everything from start to finish, Meilin was speechless.

"Revenge! That's what we need. I cannot let my son die in vain." Mother hissed as she clenched her teeth. Huojin tried to reason with her, but her fury was beyond logic. "We leave tonight." She declared.

Walking along the dirt road with the other farmers, Mother clutched her spear in one hand and a menacing blade in the other. Standing in front of the group at the golden trap

door, Mother called to the rest of them. “Silence! We don’t know what we are going to face down there; follow my lead.” she hissed fiercely. As everybody closed in a spine-tingling growl sounded from behind. Oh no.... Huojin thought. Red glowing eyes shone in the darkness as the beast rose. “Well well, back again? I’m going to have a decent meal tonight.” the beast grinned.

“Why did you kill him!” Meilin yelled furiously. Pointing to Jianyu’s rotting, fly-invested carcass, the beast growled, “I do whatever I want.” Forgetting about holding her temper, Meilin threw her spear which hit the monster’s shoulder before it could dodge it. Blue, sluggish liquid came oozing out of the wound. “ARGHH! YOU!” the beast spat. Chenglei grabbed her and muttered, “This is getting far too dangerous, don’t you think we should just say sorry and leave?”. CLANG! Something hard fell on Meilin’s foot and she screamed in pain. Chenglei cursed and ran over breathlessly by her side. “Chenglei....did that statue just move?” Meilin whispered weakly. Just before he could turn around, something hard smashed Chenglei on the head and he heard a deep, bellowing laugh behind him. Turning, and just in time to dodge another blow, he twisted out of the way and grabbed the rock statue by the leg and flipped it onto the dusty floor. The monster screamed and dashed towards the broken statue. “YOU! You....” the monster stammered. Dodging another blow from a nearby warrior, Chenglei rolled towards the other villagers and whispered, “Okay, everybody prepare for battle, if you die, you die with honor.” The villagers let out a fierce battle cry, and charged towards the stone warriors. As everyone mindlessly dashed into battle, Huojin desperately tried to find an exit, he scanned the place with precision.

The monster watched the fierce battle in silence like a football game, smiling proudly when the stone warriors killed a villager, but grunted when they got smashed to pieces. The entertainment grew stale for the beast, without warning the monster pierced the air with a roar and with one slash of the claw, the beast sliced open everyone’s body and howled it’s victory.

Huojin was left alone in shock, he could not comprehend the display of massacre. The air was filled with the salty tang of blood and death as he hyperventilated. Stumbling over towards the new found exit, Huojin ran blindly. Unaware that the beast was catching up to him, it raked its bloody claws across his leg. Blood gushed out from the deep wound, he knew that was his last breath. It was over.

Inevitably, the beast howled its victory for the last time.

Possessed

St. Mary's Canossian College, Kwok, Mei Ling Mary – 14

It was a gloomy day and Jeanine felt horrible. She was sitting at the back of her parent's car looking out of the window as the endless plains of wasteland zooms past her. 'How much longer, pa?' her father turned his head to answer 'We're almost there Jeanine, look over there, see the building there? That's where we are heading.' She craned her neck to see over the front seat, and saw a glass and concrete building ahead. Jeanine thought of how strange it is for there to be a building like that in the middle of nowhere. She remembered her mother saying this place was once a glorious city where the emperor had lived, she found it hard to imagine anything but a dry desert on this wasteland.

'We're here.' Her father said as the car came to a halt. Jeanine got out of the car and looked up at the giant building looming over her. Something about it sent chills down her spine. She shuddered and followed her parents as they entered the building which hosts the Terracotta Warriors. It was surprisingly cool in the building.

Jeanine had heard of many things about the Terracotta Warriors, she heard it was a gigantic army of warriors made entirely out of China. Nothing she heard about the Warriors prepared her for what she was seeing. She was first blown away by the sheer numbers of Warriors. Then when she looked closer she was amazed by how fierce the expression of the Warriors were, she tried to find two Warriors that looks the same but she couldn't, every single one of them was as unique as real humans.

'Hey Jeanine, come on let's go.' Jeanine's mother patted Jeanine on the shoulder and motioned her towards the exit. Jeanine wanted to stay and look at the intricate Warriors for a while longer but knew better than to disobey her mother. She took one last glance at the beautiful Terracotta Warriors. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of a strange, almost red shine in one of the Warriors eyes. She blinked and looked at it again but the shine was gone.

On the way home, Jeanine thought about the strange red shine in the Warriors eyes, she can't think of why it would be there, hadn't anyone else seen it? Unable to find an explanation for it she finally decided that it was just a trick of the light.

Jeanine was back at the building with the Terracotta Warriors. She was standing in the middle of the pit containing the Warriors. She felt quick at ease and smiled to herself as she admired the beautiful sculptures. She was walking along the aisle when dark mist started swirling around her feet. Soon she was completely engulfed in it. She looked around but the mist was too thick for her to see anything. She started to panic. In a futile attempt to search for the exit she tripped over something. When she looked up, she saw a bright pair of red lights above her. She saw the silhouette of a man as the red lights neared and realized with horror that the red lights were a pair of eyes. As the silhouette drew near her ears started to ring. Then a deep echoing voiced rang as if it was inside her head. 'Ahh... finally. Oh, how long have I waited for this day.'

'Wh...Who are you? What do you want?' Jeanine stuttered.

'I am a spirit of a Terracotta Warrior and you shall help me escape,' And with that the figure shone bright in a blinding white light. The light then gathered into a ball which zoomed towards Jeanine, aiming right for her heart. She felt a horrible burning sensation as if

there was a fire burning inside her. She screamed and screamed and screamed.

‘Jeanine! Wake up!’ her mother was standing over her hotel bed with a worried expression. Jeanine snapped her eyes open. She was sweating horribly and her heart was beating out of her chest. ‘Are you alright? You shaking and screaming. I thought you were having a fit or something.’ Her mother looked at her, her eyes full of concern. Jeanine turned to tell her she is alright but the moment she saw her she felt a sudden urge to strangle her mother and her vision turned red.

She snarled and spoke in a voice that wasn’t her own ‘How dare you insult me, women.’ She then lashed out her hands, now suddenly full of strength, towards her mother and wrapped it around her neck tightly. Through her red vision, she saw her mother’s eyes fill with terror but found she couldn’t care less. She kept tightening her grip around her neck until she started choking. At that moment her father burst in and saw what was happening. He immediately stepped forward to pull Jeanine away from her mother.

‘Stop it Jeanine! Stop!’ Her father exclaimed as he wrenched Jeanine away from her mother.

Then as suddenly as it came anger and the strength left her body, leaving her as limp and lifeless as a doll. The last thing she felt before passing away was her father shaking her violently. Then everything went black.

Jeanine felt extremely fuzzy and when she tried to move, a sharp pain shot through her head. She felt a warm soft bed underneath her and when she opened her eyes she saw that she was in a hospital. She turned her head and saw her mother sitting at her bedside with her head lolled to one side, apparently fast asleep.

‘Mum?’ Jeanine said as she reached out to wake her mother.

Her mother’s eyes snapped open at the sound of Jeanine’s voice. ‘Wha... Oh, Jeanine! You’re awake. Oh god, I was so worried! The doctor said you were in a coma and... and, oh I was just so scared you wouldn’t wake up! You’ve been unconscious for two days!’ Her mother sobbed as she held her tightly.

At that moment her father and a doctor walked in. Her father saw that Jeanine was awake and immediately went to hug her. Jeanine however was looking at the doctor. He was bald and he was staring at her with a blank expression. He tilted his head slightly as if there was something curious about Jeanine.

‘My name is Gavino BaiYu. You can call me Doctor Bai.’ The doctor has a calm and soothing voice.

‘Yes Dr. Bai, can you please tell us what is wrong with our daughter.’ Her father started. ‘She was completely fine before. Then all of a sudden in the middle of the night she just started screaming. Then she tried to strangle her mother! Please, please tell us what is wrong with her.’

‘I must tell you that your daughter’s case is unusual.’ The doctor said seriously. ‘There is no cause for the coma. I’m sorry but I don’t know what is wrong with her. Well, Jeanine is there anything you can tell me? Anything you remember?’

‘I only remember that everything I saw was in red and I felt extremely angry. I didn’t know what came over me but I swear I didn’t want to hurt my mother.’ Jeanine answered in a croaked voice.

‘If you don’t mind me asking, why were you screaming?’

‘I was having a nightmare.’

‘And can you tell me about this nightmare?’

Jeanine shivered at the thought of her nightmare, even remembering it sent chills down

her spine she took a deep breath and started 'I dreamt that I was back in the place where I saw the Terracotta Warriors earlier that day. It was all fine at first, but then there was mist everywhere and a pair of red eyes came over and told me it was a spirit of the a Terracotta Warrior and I am going to help it escape! I thought I saw something glint in the eyes of a Terracotta Warrior earlier that day but I ignored it.'

Jeanine raised her head to see the doctor's tense expression, she wondered if she had gotten some incurable brain disease. But when the doctor looked her in the eye she knew this was far more complicated than just a disease.

'Well,' Dr. Bai said 'I hate to be daft but I think an evil spirit may have decided to reside in your daughter's body. You see, I am not actually a doctor, I am a monk. I was expelled from the temple which I used to reside in because I started studying dark magic. And I must say you are very lucky to have met me, as I have just said I study dark magic which in this case may help your daughter.'

Everyone stared at him for a while and in the end it was Jeanine's father who broke the silence. 'So you are saying that Jeanine is possessed by an evil spirit and you are going to save her with voodoo and whatnot.'

'Yes.' The doctor looked at Jeanine's father seriously 'Yes, I'm afraid so.'

'What? And you expect me believe you!?' Jeanine's father exclaimed.

'Look sir, I am not joking,' Dr. Bai argued 'this can get out of hand, if we don't perform the exorcism as soon as possible, she may be beyond saving!'

'Well, this is just nonsense!' Jeanine's mother joined in.

Then as if on cue, Jeanine felt her head start to throb in pain, she blinked and then it happened again, her vision had turned red again. Then she was washed over by a wave of anger, thoughts that weren't hers started form in her head. She jump of the bed and landed with a loud thump. This caught the monk's attention.

'Oh no, Oh dear this is very bad. This is the second time the spirit has taken over her in three days. It's going to be much harder to make her return to her original state.' BaiYu said. He indicated the family to back up as Jeanine approached them with an evil grin on her face. BaiYu started to mutter, he didn't move even when Jeanine was just standing two feet away from him. Then, in one swift movement he knocked Jeanine's outstretched hand out of the way and pressed both of his hands on her forehead firmly.

Jeanine thrashed around wildly and tried to back away from his hands but he kept advancing until she was pressed against the wall. For a while, Jeanine felt pain so intense she thought she was going to burst. But then as the pain and her red vision start to recede, her head cleared. She stopped thrashing. BaiYu was still holding his position, except his hands weren't on Jeanine's forehead anymore. They are now tightly clamped around a swirling mass of dust.

'Quickly! Take a jar, a box, anything! We need to trap this little devil.' The monk said excitedly. Jeanine's father immediately snatched up a jar on the table. BaiYu forced the mass of black dust inside and shut the lid tightly.

'What is it?' Jeanine asked shakily.

'This,' BaiYu said proudly 'is a demon from the underworld, it must've been trapped when the Terracotta Warriors were buried. No matter, I'll take it with me. You won't have anything to worry about now. You are completely fine and healthy now. Goodbye.' And with that the monk rushed out of the room holding the jar as if it was a treasure.

The family stood in the room unsure of what to make of what had just happened. And Jeanine was left to wonder if her life will ever be the same again.

Just In Time

St. Mary's Canossian College, Tam, Celine - 13

“My queen, you’re finally back!”
 “I shall leave you in charge of this great army. With the army under your lead, we will conquer the world!”

Irene smiled as she recalled the memories of her extraordinary experience. Not only did it enrich her knowledge in Chinese History, it also gave Irene a chance to take part in history...

As a first-year Chinese History major studying in the University of Hong Kong, 18-year-old Irene held a great interest in knowing about the past, especially the Qin Dynasty.

The Qin Dynasty was the shortest dynasty throughout 5000 years’ worth of Chinese history; it lasted from 221BC to 206BC, for only fifteen years. The emperor most well-known for this dynasty, Qin Shi Huang, had orders for a city-sized mausoleum to be built, along with a life-sized terracotta army whose purpose was to protect the Emperor in his afterlife.

As a result, Irene had dragged two of her friends to Xi-an, China to visit the terracotta warriors. The moment the trio arrived at Xi-an, Irene couldn’t sit still. She was simply overwhelmed with excitement because she was finally going to visit the world-famous terracotta warriors.

“And we’re finally here! Let’s go look at the pits!” Irene chirped when the trio got off at the bus stop. When they entered the museum, they were instantly stunned by how spectacular the formation of the terracotta warriors were. Irene ran closer to have a better look at the warriors. “There’s a couple of archers there, and there’s a soldier with his horse!” Irene exclaimed while pointing at the various statues. While looking around, she found a stone plaque that had some words carved into it. Running her hand over the words, she read them out loud.

“This stone plaque was put up in...” She wrinkled her brows. “That’s just some basic information. Oh well, guess I’ll still have to find the others...” Irene took out her phone and prepared to call her friends, just as the stone plaque began to glow with an eerie yellow light. The light grew brighter and lighter, until it turned into a brilliant white. It engulfed Irene in it, and disappeared. All that was left of her, was the mobile phone that she had intended to use.

As for Irene, she appeared confused when she found out that she wasn't in the museum anymore. Rather, she found herself on a wide, open stretch of land, with a few enormous pits dug behind her. She scrambled over to peek into the pits and was surprised to find people working in the pits. What was strange about the workers was that they appeared to be wearing their hair in buns, and that they weren't wearing jeans or T-shirts, but...

"Isn't that clothing from the Qin Dynasty?" Irene rubbed her eyes to make sure that she wasn't dreaming.

"My goodness, it IS! But...wait a second. Does that mean..." A bleak realization dawned on her and she screamed.

"I'VE GONE BACK TO THE QIN DYNASTY! HELP!"

Unfortunately, her screams attracted the attention of the workers in the pits. They looked up and saw Irene's face, white as a sheet, peering down at them. Almost instantaneously, each and every worker bowed down to Irene, whose expression turned from fear to confusion.

"The queen is back! Long live the queen!"

Irene was terribly confused. Why would the workers call her a "queen"? And "the queen is back"? What does that even mean?

Her mind was blank when the workers whisked her off onto a horse. She was unaware of where she was heading to until she saw a massive structure appearing in front of her. She had only seen the structure once in her notes, and never had she expected Epang Palace, the palace of Qin Shi Huang, to be of such great size.

Irene was busily staring at the architecture of the palace when she was being led to the throne room, therefore she had never noticed the emperor until the second she was pulled into a hug.

"You're finally back, my love! You're finally back from the underworld! I've missed you so much." Irene had to resist the urge to free herself from Qin Shi Huang's grasp, and impatiently waited until the emperor released her. "Give the queen a change of clothes. We shall celebrate the return of the queen," he ordered his servants. At that precise moment, Irene reckoned that it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Out of curiosity, she decided to play along.

Afterwards, Irene was fitted into a queen's robe, and had her hair swept up into a bun, complete with crown. As servants did her makeup, they told her about what had happened after she had "gone".

It turns out that Irene looked exactly like the dead queen, who had passed away just a year ago. The emperor had been searching for an elixir of life, which brings immortality, and he had believed that his queen would soon one day rise from the dead. It was no surprise that Qin Shi Huang would pull her into a hug the moment he saw her.

"So, I have a question for you." Irene addressed one of the servants.

"Yes, your highness," The girl bowed deeply.

"Could you repeat what you were saying earlier? I was thinking and I couldn't hear you just now."

"Yes, your highness. It's about the terracotta army that will protect the emperor in his afterlife."

"The terracotta army? Interesting...Go on, will you."

"So the architects have found out a way to make the soldiers come into life. They can walk, talk, and even follow orders. The emperor plans to use the army to search for the elixir of life."

"I see."

“To my great disappointment, hundreds of thousands of men have gone out in search of the elixir of immortality. None have succeeded. But with help from the heavens, I have the invincible terracotta army. I now send you in search of the elixir. Do not fail me.” Qin Shi Huang told the terracotta army, while Irene stood to the side.

After the army had left, the emperor smiled. “Now we shall wait.”

The army returned after many weeks. What they brought back was a tattered, old scroll, with the recipe of the elixir of life written on it. “ ‘A serving of mercury, mixed with a pinch of jade grinded into powder...Serve three times a day...’My King, are you sure you wish to take this elixir?” Irene, knowing that mercury was a poisonous chemical, asked.

“Do not doubt me, my Queen. I know fully well what will happen.” The emperor smiled. “With this elixir, the Qin Dynasty shall live forever more.”

In the following months, Qin Shi Huang drank the elixir – mercury mixed with jade, three times a day. Slowly, the effects of the mercury took its toll on the emperor. His health condition worsened, but he shook it off, and said that they were the “side effects” of the elixir. Soon after, the emperor died on a tour to eastern China. Irene was later informed that she had to be buried along with the emperor.

But how can I get back to the modern times? She wondered.

When the time came for her to be buried alive, Irene tried to struggle and run away. Unfortunate for her, she was held down and placed inside a wooden coffin. I’m going to be buried alive...Oh well. Her thoughts were interrupted when she started to choke since there was nearly no air inside the coffin. Just as when she thought she was about to die, a flash of light brought her back to the present.

“Oh, Irene, where have you been? You’ve been gone for two hours already! We even went to our hotel to look for you!” Irene was bombarded by questions from her friends just as soon as she appeared in the museum.

“You guys won’t believe what had just happened! But it’s nearly closing time now. I’ll tell you guys in the hotel...”

Freed

Yew Chung International School (Secondary) Hong Kong, Yu, Cynthia - 14

The murky scents of the earth swirled around her in the morning air, and she breathed it in, feeling a satisfying chill on the tip of her tongue. Her path through the mountains was not the forest trail, however was one of her own— she walked straight into the deep green trees, and despite her grandmother’s incessant scolding, she yearned to walk the entire mountain, to discover what secrets lay hidden in this familiar yet mysterious mound. The girl could only imagine what would be hurled at her when she went home with visible signs of dirt on her robes.

Ming-Hua! What have you done?

It was only her imagination, but she shuddered at the thought, putting down her bucket. She rubbed at her arms and knees until they were clean. Her braids slipped over her shoulders as she knelt down.

Stupid Huadai, she thought, annoyed at the plain ribbon draped over her neck, making it nearly impossible to clean any part of her clothing. However, she managed to do so after a few minutes and gazed upwards. The sun was already halfway across the sky, meaning that it was the hottest part of the day. She had to find the waterhole soon.

Ming trekked upwards, appreciating the shade of the branches, and soon came to a peculiar clearing marked with a bamboo sprout in the ground. Swiftly, she moved towards it and directly under the branch was a patch of leaves; she brushed them gently aside, revealing a wooden plank the size of her torso. Then, she heaved it up and set it down to her right.

Her grandmother had always told her to get water from the peak well, but she always refused; there was only one path to get there, and she hadn’t finished exploring the bottom parts of the mountains.

So she dug one of her own.

Who said girls couldn’t do anything, she thought proudly as she carried the plank and moved it aside. The stories told by her grandmother about foot-binding made her angry and she was glad the repulsive practice had stopped only just before her birth. Ming then took her bucket and reached down the hole with her arm as far as she could, and surprised, she only

felt air. She pulled up the bamboo mark from the ground and stabbed it into the waterhole. Seeing that it did nothing, she took it back out and made it sharper with spikes, but at the same time smeared mud all over herself.

“They’re going to kill me,” she muttered disdainfully to herself, but picked it up and thrust it into the mud again. Still nothing.

Ming was already sweating, the mud had sprayed out onto her garments, and she almost regretted coming here. Her frustration gave in, and so she stuck the bamboo stick in the hole again, firmly, then jumped onto the stick and pushed it down with her entire body weight, clinging to it. She felt it sink, and breathed, “Finally.”

The stick sunk a little too far. It gave way and the ground opened up, swallowing Ming, still clutching her tool and falling through empty air.

...

“What is that?”

“Is she alive?”

“Oh heavens, that’s filthy!”

“Now now, gentlemen. Leave her alone. She needs time to come out.” Come out?

Ming opened her eyes. She was in a huge chamber that stretched for miles, and directly up was dirt and nothing more. There were faces staring down at her, pale, almost faded, but still visible. The closest one was a woman, kneeling beside her. She held an instrument in her arm, which Ming immediately recognized as a Pipa. Her face was calm, and her hair was covered by tinkling garments that changed color as she moved. Her clothes were...ancient. Ming’s stomach churned uneasily. This did not feel like home.

The woman’s face was calm, but there was no hint of warmth in her face. She was at a loss for words, at the weirdness that she was experiencing.

“Get up, girl.” A rough voice pierced the silky voice that the woman had been. Ming looked at the other face, a man. His eyebrows were thin and his eyes were narrowed, but in the dim light, his features were difficult to distinguish. His tone held a hint of authority, and Ming assumed he was some kind of leader.

She stood up, and looked back down at her body, laying motionless on the ground.

Body?

“Am I...dead?” she muttered to herself and looked up at the man.

“You’re in the so-called afterlife.” the man answered coldly. He donned a bronze suit of armor with ridges running down the sides, and his dark hair was tied in a blood red ribbon. To Ming, it looked like he was the general of an army.

“Why are you here?” Ming hesitantly asked, scared that she would offend the commander. “I could ask the same thing,” he grunted, looked skeptically at the woman, who Ming again assumed was a musician. “There are many of us, and only one of you.” “Many? What?”

“Look around you.” he responded softly. Ming did so and nearly screamed out loud. The chamber was filled with stone statues in neat lines, and pale figures drifted all around. The statues were lined up like an army, with a mound of dirt as a barrier between...cohorts?

Where am I?

“Sir, she’s just a girl.” It was said with good intentions, but Ming felt stung with that comment, and glared at the speaker. Just a girl. It was a boy who looked sixteen, about her age, and he smiled apologetically. “Sorry. I mean-” Ming forgave him silently and nodded curtly, hoping he got the message. The general sniffed. “She’s no older than you are.” “Sir,” Ming said quickly, before anyone could interrupt her. “Where is this place?” He looked

down at her, as if she was not worthy of asking her this question, and then looked at the boy. “Shu, kindly explain. And I want to find an escape plan soon. This place is going to fall apart soon.” Shu took her aside and smiled at her reassuringly. “Don’t worry about him. He’s just worried. This place is the home of the terracotta warriors. When they made us, the Emperor secretly sent out an order to capture a part of our souls and place it inside our statues, except for the horses.”

“How?”

He shook his head lightly. “I do not know. But the parts of our souls acted as a beacon so that we would wake up here instead of in the upper world. We are condemned here, forever to drift, but never to visit our families or friends among humanity, like other ghosts.” Shu paused, looking wistful. “And then you fell down here. Like my commander says, this place is going to collapse. We need a way out.”

Ming suddenly felt a wave of hopelessness build up inside. She didn’t know what to do. She was dead, and she couldn’t do anything. What was she to do for the rest of eternity. The boy, Shu, must’ve seen the anxious look in her eyes. “Just stick with me. Assuming we get out of here, you won’t be drifting aimlessly alone.” “If you’re quite finished over there—” the general cleared his throat loudly and pointedly. “Have you come up with a plan?” Shu looked like he was holding back laughter, winking at Ming. “It’s pretty obvious isn’t it? We escape through where she— what is your name?” “Ming-Hua is my name, but people call me Ming.” she answered, and then remembered. “Or used to.” “Anyway, Ming here—she fell down through a hole. We can escape through there.”

A rumbling interrupted Shu, and there was dirt falling down an earthquake. Shu’s smile disappeared instantly. “We need to get out of here.” he told the general and the musician. The rest of the spirits in the chamber were raising their voices, panicking at the commotion.

The general called out to his army, strangely calm and confident. “We need to move. Go line by line. Out as fast as we can.” His voice echoed through the thousands of statues in the chamber. The ghosts sped up as fast as they can, and the rumbling grew more insistent. “What about us?” Ming asked, slightly marveling at the sight of the great pit coming down. “Go with Shu and Mei!” the commander shouted over the noise.

Before Ming could ask about the general himself, she was swooped up and into the air, going through the water hole she’d dug, and out into the sunlight. Her eyes started to water with the sudden glare of the brightness.

“The commander...” Ming told Shu helplessly. The boy shook his head. “He’ll get out.”

“Tell me something. Be honest.” she insisted, grabbing his hand. He turned around and looked at her intently.

“Did I cause all this?”

“No. You freed us.”



Fiction

Group 4

The Second Dig

Good Hope School, Chik, Eva - 16

We passed the playground, went up and down alongside with the village's skyline. At my doorstep, Keung pulled out a ring. I was just 20 back then, young enough to bear life without complaining. I knew that in following him I would somehow suffer, it's only a matter of time. But I love him. I still do.

In the 1970s, no one was particularly rich or poor. But he, bless his soul—really wanted to be rich. He used to say, "It is not fair that a man like me, so intelligent, to be stuck in Xi'an earning so little. The country never did anything to improve our lives. Trust me, honey, they look at us like we are cheap labours. They kill us off for fun, with the unrests and all that jazz." I just laughed. Really, I thought it was ridiculous. "You're delusional, shut up before they come and get you."

I would never forget the year 1974. On one fateful day, some farmers from our village have finally found something to compensate the country's former destruction of heritage by digging a well. Suddenly everyone was an archaeologist. Everyone's digging day and night, trying to find a piece of remain and sell it to the authorities in secrecy. I haven't seen these people working in solidarity without a gun pointing to their temples for years. And so they dig and dig, but nothing except polluted soil were touched by light.

In the midst of all this digging hype, Keung came up with this quixotic idea. Now, one should always know that this is exactly the kind of stuff that will cost one's life.

One day, Keung was sitting on a wooden chair that he'd imagine a sofa, munching on an ice lolly. He bit a corner off the state produced heat-relieve sweet, and stopped my sewing work.

"Mei. Am I not the most brilliant man in the whole of China?"

With an expression of mockery, I said "Chairman Mao is."

Keung rolled his eyes. "Anyway...a brilliant idea just struck me."

"Darling no. Not again." Truly, I am quite fed up with all his mad ideas.

"But! Hear me out—I am a freaking genius. See, everyone's digging those Qin warriors. That's hard labour, I'm not doing it even if I get a million bucks. So, my dearest Mei, I

thought we'd make fake ones and sell it to the authorities. We get everything out of nothing. Isn't this all too amazing?"

"What? That's fraud! We'll go to jail!"

"What? It's genius. We'll start on the project tomorrow. It's not fraud if no one knows. Just as long as we don't speak about it, no one will ever know. And oh, think about this: we sell the warriors to the authorities, we get our names in the contributor's list. Imagine: 'CHEUNG KEUNG AND CHEUNG MEI—contributors to the museum of the terracotta warriors.' Honey, we only live forever in the lights we make—we're in this together, right?"

I stood there, staring at the melting ice lolly in his hands. If Keung's going to melt from this, I might as well do the same. I sighed.

"Yes. Of course."

He gave me a peck on the cheek and left.

"When diamonds fall from the sky, it is a sin not to collect them. Look out the window, Mei, the sky's raining diamonds. Here, I have all the tools we need, let's start!"

We sculpted day and night, rubbing dirt and chipping off angles for some realism. By the end of the week, we made three of those warriors.

We strapped one warrior on the trolley and brought it to the site. Rubbing some fresh dirt on it, we unladed the warrior and dragged it to the authorities.

"Sir, me and my wife found this near the site."

"Good, good, good..." The man said as he handed us a receipt to collect the return. Keung flashed a smug smile at me, and we went home to build more of those warriors.

Every other day, we bring these clay dolls to the authorities and get our reward. I was just getting used to this "fake it till you make it" attitude and the rich man's life when what I have always feared came true.

"Good day, sir, me and my wife—"

Before Keung could even finish, the man snapped his fingers and we were dragged a small room. He made us sit down. There was no coffee on the table like how the urban legends has it; there was only dirt and more dirt.

"The Cheungs, is it? We know you are committing fraud."

"Wait—I could explain—"

Seeing Keung's gesture of exasperation, I pulled out 20 dollars and gave it to the man. He nodded with understanding and we were released. Since then, we bribe the authorities every time when warriors are brought to them. Day after day, we give and we take and we make and we break—until one fine morning, it just wasn't enough. We can no longer afford the price—and so, we were arrested for fraud.

With the sound of the hammer, our fate is sealed. We were sentenced to 3 years in the village jail. We were separated, with Keung in the men's quarters and me on the women's quarters. At the very edge of the prison courtyard, we can see the site and the warriors that led us to this place. Every day, Keung and I would meet at the prison's courtyard at 3 in the afternoon. Although there was a thin wire fence between us, we can still touch each other's fingers. It was nice. The other inmates make fun of us, saying that eventually our love would fade and sooner or later, as we spend so much time with the same sex, we will file for divorce and embrace our new found homosexuality. In truth, I don't think a person could be gay just by spending time with people of the same sex. I ignored them, and continued to touch fingers with Keung every day. On the first day of spring, Keung and I met at the wire fence as usual. He gave me a flower that he picked at his side of the prison and I put it in my hair.

"Mei, I got a job. There's no payment, but it's better than being hit on every day."

“I can’t believe you’re saying prison labour is better than sitting around.”

“Firstly, I was made to do it. Secondly, I was asked nicely by the guards to go dig out the warriors.”

“Wait—so you’re going to dig real terracotta warriors?”

“Yeah, cool, right?”

The bell rings. We touched our fingers one last time for the day.

The flower Keung gave me start to wither. Still, I kept it in my pocket. Every day, Keung would speak about his adventures and the knowledge he gained at the digging site. We’d sit on the ground, back to back, and he’d talk non-stop until the bell rings. But Keung was Keung all right, and after some time he suggested another insane plan.

It was our wedding anniversary. The authorities, with all the kindness they possess, gave us a night alone in a small room in the prison. Switching between looking at me and the moon, Keung had a sleazy expression on his face. I knew that face speaks trouble, but I’m in jail already—I can’t think of anything worse that could happen.

“Mei, I love you. I just wanted to say even if we are apart, we’ll always be looking at the same moon.” Keung puts his hands on my shoulders.

“Every time when you say that there’s bad news.”

“Well, the bad news is,” he whispered in my ear, “we are going to escape from prison.”

“Keung, I’m tired of your antics. Can’t you be patient and wait for another year?”

“But Mei, I can’t take it anymore! I have the skills and I can smuggle the tools from the warrior site, come on, we’ll definitely succeed this time. Mei, after we’re out of here we can go to somewhere else, we can start again—“

“Keung, do you even have any considerations for what comes next if we really do...?”

“I don’t know yet, but if we could escape prison we’re invincible!”

I sighed. But as a wife in those days, what could I do? All I could do was nod. Keung was so happy he hugged and kissed and petted me. The rest belongs to the history of that night.

After that night, Keung started to smuggle tools into prison with every chance he got. Within a few days, he started digging at the edge of the prison. He never gave up even when rain falls and those that he once thought were diamonds became the hurdle in his work. To avoid suspicion, he only digs beneath a moonless sky. I don’t know how he does it, but he did. About 3 weeks into this plan, Keung still haven’t finished digging his escape tunnel. Instead, he dug up a piece of artefact.

“Mei! Mei!” he was so ecstatic, it seems to be villainous to spoil the mood. “Mei! Come with me, I want to show you this thing I found!”

He led me to the edge of the prison and there, in all its ancient glory, was a head that belongs to the terracotta warriors. “Honey, I found this when I was digging the tunnel. Do you think we’ll be able to get out early with this in our hands?”

Affected by his enthusiasm, my rationality was bounded. All I could see is a real warrior’s head, an artefact, a symbol of our culture, and most importantly, Keung’s one proud achievement in his life.

“Darling, don’t throw away your shot.”

Keung flashed a smile at me. That was the last time I saw his face.

Gathering from what I have heard, Keung reported to the guards that he had found a genuine warrior’s head. While he expected to leave jail early and get some reward, he was charged with attempted escape. Gossips about Keung and the warrior’s head filled the prison with more energy than ever. From one inmate to another, the characters formed sentences and filled the rest of my days in prison with incomprehensible sorrow.

I walk along the wire fence.

One inmate said, “I heard he was in for fraud, of course the guards won’t believe him.”

I touched the fence.

Another inmate said, “But isn’t he a real man? He completely denied that his wife knew any of that...”

I still had the withered flower in my pocket.

I have never seen Keung since. I supposed he was transferred to another jail. I begged and begged the guards to tell me where he is, but they refused to say a word. Yet, without Keung, life goes on. I held on tight to the flower, I held on tight to the memories we had. Some nights, I look up to the moon, and remembered that age old saying of “even if we are apart, we’ll always be looking at the same moon”. Every night, I look at the rotting ceiling and ask, dear Keung, why do you have to be so impatient? Dear Keung, why have you leave me alone? Dear Keung, I wish I had stopped you...then we wouldn’t be apart.

Some seasons passed by with the silence of the wind. I got out of jail. As they say, in a new place you could be a new man. I left Xi’an without ever looking back. The only thing I kept with me from Xi’an, is the withered flower and my wedding ring.

It had been 20 years since I have left Xi’an. It had also been 20 years since I heard from Keung. Maybe he’s dead already, I don’t know. Although I once promised myself to never look back, I still did. I went back to Xi’an and visited the place that started it all.

The digging site have been transformed into a museum. There are so many guards now, and the contributor’s names erected themselves with pride on the stone walls. I walked around in the museum, and suddenly I see it—the head that Keung discovered at the edge of the prison yard. With a shining gold plate, the words “discovered by CHEUNG KEUNG” were engraved there forever. My time with Keung might be limited, but he was right—you only live forever in the lights you make. I reached into my pocket and took out the flower. I preserved it alright. As reverend as ever, I put it next to his name.

From the reflection of my face on the glass, I see a droplet fell on the golden plate.

My Terracotta Warrior

Hangzhou Chinese International School, Oh, Benjamin - 14

Last Wednesday, I found a Terracotta Warrior in my apartment. I woke up on the third ring of my alarm, as always, shaved, brushed my teeth, took a hot shower, and watered the potted plant on my desk. It may sound strange to you, but that's my morning routine that I go through everyday, and there's never a day that I miss it. To tell you the truth, I don't really know why I do it. I suppose it's just one of those things that you do out of habit, even though you don't know where you got that habit from.

So anyway, as I walked to the kitchen to make tea, I noticed the Terracotta Warrior. It was just standing there, staring out the picture window.

Naturally, I was worried about how this happened. Obviously someone had driven it to my building, dragged it up six flights of stairs, unlocked my door and placed it in front of the window. There was no logical alternative. But nothing had been moved or stolen, and the door was still as it was last night – firmly bolted. Whoever did it would have had to slip in and out without a sound, put everything back to its original place, and lock the door. From the outside. It simply wasn't possible. And anyways, why would someone even want to do such a thing? I couldn't think of a reasonable motive. My apartment was pretty close to the Terracotta Museum, but I had never been there before and there wasn't anything to connect the two places. Was it even a real Terracotta warrior? I had no idea. The whole thing was very puzzling, like an equation with an ever-increasing number of unknowns.

Upon closer inspection, apart from a bit of paint flaking off its face, it was in perfect condition. You could tell it was recently cleaned, and the clay was smooth and cold to the touch. It seemed very well crafted, a perfect replica of the real thing. I considered bringing it down to the police station at once, but who would've believed that this Terracotta warrior just appeared. At any rate, I could barely lift it myself, so I decided to just wait and see. Someone was bound to report a missing Terracotta warrior.

I lifted it onto a small carpet and dragged it to a suitable place in my kitchen. Then I made myself a cup of tea.

If you want to know, I used to really hate tea. For a while (actually most of my life), I couldn't understand why anyone would want to drink a soup of flowers and water. It just

seemed like the most pointless and inane thing to do. It didn't even taste nice.

Then when I was twenty-one or so, I met this guy who was just really into it. We were both living along the same street, and every morning we'd wait for the same 8.15 bus. One day, out of the blue, he walked over to talk me.

"Hey, how you doing?" he asked casually.

"I'm fine," I replied non-committedly.

"That's good," he said, and we bonded in easy silence.

He invited me over to his place a few times. It was a small cozy place with a warm carpeted floor and soft comfy sofas. He'd always offer some of his bohemian tea before reluctantly passing a chilled beer.

"You really should try some. It's pretty good, you know," he'd always say. He loved tea.

I was fine with beer and soft drinks.

We weren't that great friends, so when I moved our neighborly friendship slowly dissolved. Just before I left, he asked if we could meet up to say goodbye, but it was too inconvenient and we all had our own lives to lead.

A few years later, I heard that he had killed himself. As I said, I didn't know him too well, so I didn't mourn for him or anything like that. I did feel a little sad though, like unread letters swept into a pile somewhere and forgotten. That kind of sad.

I often wonder if I could have done anything to stop him. Sometimes, I regret not saying goodbye. I guess all he needed was someone to talk to. Perhaps if I did he would still be alive right now. That would be nice.

After his death, I developed a strange affinity for tea. I bought a small hand-made ceramic teapot, and boxes and boxes of all sorts of exotic teas. Egyptian chamomile, European peppermint, Chinese Oolong, Indian chai... a tea for every mood, every emotion. A blend of spices, fruits, and flowers circulated in the air, breathing into the walls of my apartment.

I don't think you'll be able to understand, but tea was my drug, my myth that I believed in with all my heart. Each satchel was a fresh gust of nostalgia, rumination, and yearning all fused into one. It was as if the tendrils of steam would transform into someone of my past and sit down to sip tea with me. Sometimes it would be a forgotten friend, other times an estranged relative, usually it was that guy who loved tea. But who it was never really mattered - I'd just be glad for the company.

Then the tea would go cold and the steam would disperse and disappear forever.

As I sipped the hot apple cinnamon I stared into the deep brooding eyes of the Terracotta Warrior. The silence lingered, but it was pleasant.

"Tea's pretty good," I half expected it to say.

I was making tea once again when a police officer came. It was around 5 p.m. in the evening and the sun had already set. I don't mean it in a shallow or objectifying way, but she was genuinely pretty. I don't really know how to describe her, and to be honest I can't remember what she looks like, but I'm sure she had large, childlike eyes and round, rosy cheeks. She was young and earnest, and I can't explain why, but she just looked friendly, the type of person you'd want to be friends with and would want to be your friend back.

"Hey officer, what's this about?" I asked as I opened the door.

"Good evening sir! Sorry to bother you, but last night there was a break-in at the Terracotta Warrior Museum. One Terracotta Warrior was reported missing."

"A break-in?" I asked curiously.

"Well I'm not supposed to reveal too much of an on-going investigation, but it's a strange case. There aren't any signs of anyone entering, and there's no evidence to be found. Even

the CCTV didn't pick up anything. One moment the Terracotta Warrior was there, and there next second it was gone. And the funny thing is that it was in the center of a pit and impossible to reach. It's almost as if it disappeared. Pretty strange, huh?"

"Yeah I guess. So how can I help?"

"We've just been going around conducting door-to-door enquires. Do you know anything about what happened?"

"No," I lied.

By then I knew that the Terracotta Warrior in my kitchen was the one missing. But I just couldn't tell her that I had it. Not that I didn't want to help; I really wanted her to be able to solve her case and be happy, but there'd just be too many problems to deal with. She'd interrogate me about it, and then they'd all come in to take it away, and then I'd be questioned further, and then they wouldn't believe me, and then I could be charged, and then, and then, and then.... I didn't want any trouble and it was simpler to just keep quiet about it.

"Did you hear any suspicious sounds last night?"

"No, none that I can think of."

"Oh, well, thank you for your time," she said, slightly crestfallen.

"Hey wait a second!" I said as she pressed the elevator button. "Do you want to come in for a while? Just to have a cup of tea or something?"

She looked at me curiously, "I'm sorry, but I can't. I'm still working and I've got a few more buildings to cover tonight."

"It'll be quick, I promise. Plus, I just boiled water."

"I'm really sorry, but it's against regulations," she said with a note of finality.

"That's fine."

"And I don't even like tea," she added.

"Goodnight then," I said.

"Goodnight."

Sometimes, I regret not telling her about the Terracotta Warrior. Perhaps if I did she would have come in for a while. That would have been nice.

The Authentic Journal of a Terracotta Warrior

Heep Yunn School, Chew, Adan - 15

Prologue

This story began in the twenty fifth year of Emperor Qinshi's reign and was a mythical legend that was kept as a family secret. It was passed on for thousands of generations before my mother told me to translate this to prevent such magnificent story to be lost in time. The author was one of my ancestors who was a general in the Emperor's army. He was an educated individual disguised as a brave warrior. The following records his several journal entries written during the time of war, when the Qin people were about to conquer the whole of China during the Warring States.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 3, Day 26

Today was the day I bid farewell to my family, and also the day I finally become a real man. I saw my wife waving sadly with my newborn son in her arms. My one other son rushed over and wrapped his arms around me. I told him to stay well and be good to his mother while I was away. I swept my eyes over my home once more, the shack I used to play in when I was young and the seeds I had just planted yesterday on the paddy fields. I tried my best to blink away the tears because a real man never cried, as my father used to say.

Slinging my cloth bundle onto my shoulders, I turned and walked away from my home. I met up with the rest of the conscripted soldiers in my village.

We set off and trekked for the whole day without any word from the General. Sweat trickled off my back every once in a while. That was the bad thing about the climate in Shaolong, it's scorching in the afternoon but freezing at night. When night fell, I wrapped the blanket around my shoulders. I surveyed my surroundings; there was not a camp in sight. With fear creeping in my mind, I was not surprised when the General said that we'd have to camp in the middle of nowhere. They set up the nomadic homes – the white circular tents as

we soldiers settled down with a cloth mat.

Dinner was a single serving of bland and cold congee, which was not at all filling. Most of us sat around on the ground, devouring the congee in one big gulp. Everyone was nervous, because everyone was newcomers. I summoned up my courage and asked my neighbor.

“Where’re you from?”

“The mountains.” The young, bulky man replied as he sipped his congee.

“You a father?”

“Sure.” He looked at me. “It’s Qing. You?”

“Ziyi. Looks like it’s going to be quite a long journey.”

Qing nodded and continued to eat.

I wrote this when everyone had slept except those guards on duty. They couldn’t see me. I laid down and tried to sleep, but the enormity of war I’d have to deal with kept me wide awake. I wriggled my mud-caked toes and looked to the sky. I could see numerous stars, but they weren’t as bright tonight.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 3, Day 27

I woke up in the morning, charged with energy, to the sound of echoed rooster calls. The sun wasn’t even up, and the General called for a briefing after we packed our cloth bundles.

“Morning, comrades. I want to first talk about some rules on our camp. No objections – I want absolute and silent obedience. Nobody is going to care or ask for your opinion, so keep your mouths shut. Respect me and my scribe and we’ll respect you. Call us misters and we’ll refrain from decorating your name with profanities. Now, I’d like ten teams of fifteen people. NOW.” General Mister announced. He was a tall and well-built man, with tanned brown skin and a moustache that looked more like a rotten scar. He also had a deep gash under his right eye to the bottom left cheek.

I found Qing and joined his group. The whole formation of our troop was lined up quickly.

“Very well, comrades. I shall now take attendance.” He called out each name, and the list was as long as the Yangtze River.

It was afternoon we left camp. We were bound for the capital Xianyang, and it would take around 2 weeks to get there by foot. It’s at least shorter than my journey to the midwife when my wife was having pre-labor complications, that took me 3 weeks on horseback!

By the time we settled down at late night, my cloth shoes were tattered and worn.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 4, Day 15

I heaved a great sigh as we finally arrived at the capital of Xianyang. General Mister praised us for our ‘silent obedience’ and treated us to a local delicacy – marinated frog (Translator’s note: he used a less degrading term for it, *tianji*, which literally translates as the chicken of the farm). The feeling of finally being able to taste! It was a moment to rejoice after more than 2 weeks of bland congee! I gobbled up the side dishes and the soup until I felt like I was about to throw up. Before long, us comrades were all raising our wine cups and filled ourselves with the rice wine, drinking way too much.

Although my memory of what happened last night was fragmented, I remembered throwing up at least 5 times in the bathhouses. I was overwhelmed by the euphoria of the wine I forgot that I’d have to be dealing with the hangover tomorrow.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 4, Day 17

General Mister gave us 2 days of rest after our long journey. Some sought for food and some sought for wine. Most of us, including me, sought for neither but to stay at our ‘dorm houses’

to give ourselves a good rest.

“Comrades, you’ve all gave yourselves a break in these two days. I plan to set off this afternoon, where the sun starts to become at ease, to our battlefield. I’ll be giving everyone these hours to get yourselves ready. Of course, I suggest you stick with your troops. We meet here at the Shen Hour (Translator’s note: This is around 1500-1700 24-hour-time). That is all.” He swept his crimson cape and left us.

I heaved a sigh when Qing pat me on the shoulder with our troop members behind.

“Let’s go, buddy.”

“Do we know where we’re going?”

“I know of a good blacksmith around these parts, follow me.”

It turned out that the blacksmith was Qing’s uncle. He gave us nice rigid shoes for our future trek. I dipped my head in gratitude and we turned and left.

On our way, a man ran over to us. His chubby face was crimson and coughed a few times.

“cuse me,” He panted. “The both of you must be in the General’s army.” Qing and I nodded in unison. “I have an urgent message – do you know where I can find him?”

Qing nodded and ran to the direction of our meeting place – the Changlong Mansion. The messenger rushed in and announced his presence in the dining room.

General Mister nodded his head for the messenger to deliver the message.

“Our camp was attacked in the Eastern border by the Qi State. We... Had a lot of casualties. The General requests your assistance.”

The General slowly nodded, sipping his tea. “Prove that you’re not a spy from Qi then.”

25th Qinshi Year, Month 5, Day 1

We were on our second week heading to the border. I was amazed at my transformation – me in my heavy metal armor, with a great spear by my side. We were back to eating bland congee every day. Occasionally some soldiers would be able to catch some game, considering it was forests that we went through.

There was still about a day’s journey till we get there. I’m famished.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 5, Day 3

We arrived at dawn, as we slept once every 3 days. The soldiers were all worn out. I heard faint sounds of clashing swords. I didn’t know how to fight, except for a brief training they’d given us a few days earlier.

And then the forest came to a vast clearing, perfect for a battle, as the General said. We camped here for the night, doing last-minute fighting practice. To be honest, it was fun.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 5, Day 7

The attacks came at night, when we were all soundly sleeping. Some of the soldiers that kept watch yelled to wake us up. We were required to sleep in armor with weapons placed at our sides.

I felt my heart racing, as quick as the enemy’s footsteps. The General yelled, “For the Qin!” as he maimed a person with a spear. Hollers of pain almost sounded immediately after the General had cut the rope.

I rushed forth, hands still shaking, and desperately tried to wound an older, taller man. He swept me off my feet in one single blow of his sword. I fell over, shivering; he raised his sword to stab me. Eyes wide, I could only still until the moment he pushed shoved his sword down. I rolled sideways and ran off into the woods.

There, I felt it. The merciless and the barbaric side of war and the burden of what I will need to do to stay alive and to see my family again. I couldn't evade it – I wouldn't be a real man. I'd have to battle and triumph against it – just like how I battled the murderous man.

I raised my spear, and sprinted towards the sounds of clanging metal.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 11, Day 2

It's been a long time since I've had time to write my journal again, because I've been too busy going on with several other aftershocks of the betrayal of the Qi province. Apparently the Court was on good terms with them, but they attacked us anyway, so as I later learned. Of course, before long we had silenced them by slaying almost all of their majesties. It had been a... bloodbath.

Qing and my troops were both heading to the final battle to silence the people of Qi once and for all. He was taking the southern route, while I took the northern route, so we could corner them from both ways.

I anticipate our victory, but still am a tiny bit afraid of the screaming, to be honest.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 12, Day 28

Today we came across a few rural villages as we approached their capital, Linzi. I commanded my troops to wipe out every single one of the elderly older than 50. After all, I was just following orders. It's way too cowardly to be distracted by our sense of morality.

I strolled into the village, trying to enjoy the screams of pain and denial. I just hope I can manifest a heart of steel soon – it's just really painful. I tried my best not to show the mild grimace I had despite the wars I had went through. I ordered my troops to scavenge for food and tools and weapons.

25th Qinshi Year, Month 12, Day 30

I just received a message from Qing's side telling us to attack at the Yin hour tomorrow (Translator's note: This is about 0300–0500 24-hour-time). No sleep tonight.

26th Qinshi Year, Month 1, Day 1

Our stampede rushed into the city. I told my troops to do whatever they wanted with the city. I led the procession, riding on my great stallion. The Qi people anticipated us and were guarding the city gate. We took out at least a hundred people because they all dozed off at the wee hours of the morning. You see – this was how ambushing worked – taking the upper hand from the very beginning.

We fought for hours and hours. I could hear the Southern part of the city ringing up, too. The Qi people were weakened by a recent famine, so we took the road to the palace at midnight.

26th Qinshi Year, Month 1, Day 2

We reached the palace. The palace guards were much stronger, taking out at least 5 of my soldiers along with their deaths. We far outnumbered them, though. I maimed and dodged and pierced, I felt like I had been panting from the city gate to here.

As I silenced the last soldier, the great throne room loomed over us. I pointed my blood-stained spear towards the door and nodded at Qing.

“Charge!” With our strengthened morale, we dashed forth, with thousands of others echoing the battle cry. We knocked down the palace doors, despite their heavy barricade,

took away their valued processions and broke their jade vases.

“Tianjian!” I hollered for the King of Qi. “Give yourself up. It is over.”

“Not quite.” A deep voiced boomed. An arrow shot out from the darkness behind the throne, I heard a great groan. I swept around.

Qing was on the ground, an arrow in his heart.

I gritted my teeth. “Show yourself, coward!” I yell in the loudest, sternest voice. I crouched forth in a stalked quietly to the throne. Raising my spear, I slammed it down on the throne. Then I listened closely. A twitch just there. In a single moment, I whirled around and jabbed my spear to the dark corner of the room. The spear was in flesh.

“Weakling.” I spat to Tianjian as he gasped in shock. I twist my stabbed spear as he yelled in pain.

“You don’t deserve to live.” I took out the spear and drove the spear into his heart again.

Growing limp, he fell back as his irises turned white.

I took deep breaths to calm my palpitating heart. I turned around and rushed over to where Qing was.

I cradled him as the soldiers started to cheer behind us.

“Your feelings?” I asked.

He coughed. “You were great. I...am going to a better place...”

I breathed. “Qing, don’t you die on me.”

He shook his head. “We’ve... triumphed – and that’s what matters...”

“We’ll get you to a healer. I promise. Please, hang on.”

I barked orders for a carriage and we went to the healer back at the camp. Qing breathed in and out, the arrow was taken out. I hoped, I hoped the arrow was just an arrow.

Qing heaved his last breath when we were at the healer’s door. I closed his eyes and wrapped him up in a white cloth.

Was I supposed to be happy that we’d conquered the whole of China? My one and only comrade had died in the hands of a cowardly king. I should’ve killed him and diced him up when we kicked the doors open.

30th Qinshi Year, Month 1, Day 2

Qin was now officially a country after centuries of wars. I was promoted to a General at the Court with respect to my deeds at Linzi. Today was a day of announcements as usual. I dragged myself out of my bed and got changed for the Court Meeting today.

“Long live Emperor Qinshi!” Officers from all the Court chanted this saying when the Emperor took His throne.

“Li Si, daily reports.” The Emperor summoned.

“Your Majesty, I have reports of...”

Li Si’s daily reports are another kind of boring. He likes to rant on and on about the tiniest things that happen in different provinces.

“General Ziyi.” The call of my name snapped me out of dreamland. Thank God I wasn’t spotted by the Emperor.

“I am here, Your Majesty.” I did my bows and knelt in front of Him.

“Meet me at the Court of Dancing Lilies after this.” He told me.

I dipped my head and retreated to my space.

“Four years ago today, General, you took the whole of China. Without you, there wouldn’t be the thriving economy we have now. Do you have any wish? I can grant you one. Whatever you like.”

Kneeling, I dipped my head at the guard. “I would like to go back to my hometown, Your Majesty.”

He laughed. “Of course. But there is one last thing you must do for me before you leave.” I nodded cautiously.

“You deserve to help me build my Terracotta Warriors.”

“Terracotta Warriors, Your Majesty?” I asked.

“Only those that are worthy can protect me after I die. Are you up for the task?” He asked.

“Your Majesty, I really cannot, I am unworthy of this place.”

“You are, General Ziyi. I reward those that paid their blood and sweat to the country, my Terracotta Warrior. Ah, and the other General who died in battle, too.”

“Then I am honoured to assist Your Majesty.” I kowtowed three times, a sign of gratitude and quietly left his room.

33th Qinshi Year, Month 8, Day 15

The muscles I had during my youthful days came back to me again. Making the Terracotta Warriors was no joke. We spent five years digging a mausoleum for the Emperor. It’s about time we were done with the figures. I molded my face into the clay and put it out to dry.

Speaking of which, white hair has started growing on my head. I cannot even fathom what labour we will be going through when we set the figures in place.

Epilogue

The records of General Ziyi ended here. Notes on the translations are included in the text. His death and whether or not he could return to his hometown still remains a mystery. From these numerous diary entries, we could see that Ziyi was a man of principles. Commended for his bravery, he and his friend Qing were two of the Terracotta Warriors that stood in the frontlines of Emperor Qinshi’s tomb. I hope that his bravery and his political sacrifice will continue to inspire us all to look beyond ourselves.

It Wasn't Just The Emperor

International College Hong Kong, Chan, Alison - 14

Li Si arched an eyebrow in question as I entered the room with my robe being dragged on the smooth floor and gave a low cordial bow to Qin Shi Huang, “My emperor,” I murmured as I bowed, with both hands by my side.

The chubby man gave me a small respectful but cold smile in response, “Zhao Gao,” he replied, “My loyal politician.” I returned the smile as warmly as I possibly could before I walked slowly over to Li Si and nodded, barely a tilt of the head so no one would suspect a thing, as an answer to his silent fatal question. We glanced at each other with a hint of a smile as we heard frantic footsteps parading out in the corridor and counted down in our heads.

‘3...2...1...’

Hu Hai bursted into the room, “Father!” He said urgently.

I bit down on the cushiony part of my cheek so my smile would be hid.

“Son?” The emperor asked with no warmth in his eyes.

“I must speak to the politician and chancellor this instant!”

The emperor turned to us with an inquisitive expression and we merely shrugged so we would have gave the impression of cluelessness.

The emperor sighed wearily, used to his son’s crazy antics and gestured at us to leave, glancing at the stack of documents on his intricately carved desk. We nodded and faked a sympathetic smile as we were marched briskly out the room by Hu Hai. The three of us stepped into the corridor of the palace, passing several of the emperors concubines, and slowed down to stroll out to the courtyard.

In the courtyard, Hu Hai turned to me, his innocent facade long gone, “So, when is father’s next big tour?” He muttered quietly while he glanced around in fright. I couldn’t blame the boy- what we were talking about could get us executed.

“This winter,” I responded quietly, the cement met our soft shoe soles harshly as we quickened our pace.

Li Si nodded gleefully, “He’s looked very worn out the past several days,” he told me with approval.

“I told you I could do it, didn’t I?” I teasingly rubbed salt into the wound smugly. I received an eye roll and a small grin in return.

“You did,” he told me grudgingly, acknowledging my victory.

“I don’t understand why you doubted me in first place—”

“Enough!” He barked gruffly, his face turned red like an awful sunburn as Hu Hai and I stifled our laughter.

We rounded the next corner and just when I was about to tease Li Si again, I was stopped short by frustrated screams and angry shouts from outside the palace walls. The three of us walked to the nearest barrier and peeped out the small hole of a window.

On the other side of the wall were scrawny and poorly dressed farmers, sweating despite the cool Autumn breeze. We watched with matching frowns as the soldiers who were patrolling began to beat the giant group of rebels. There wasn’t a need to exchange words. We knew exactly why this was happening. Our emperor was extremely hated by his people. His attitude was harsh and unforgiving. He treats his concubines with no respect. He put many through building the Great Wall of China from scratch. That painful labour didn’t ride past many that well.

Including us.

“Should we do something? Intervene? Tell them we’ll take care of it?” Li Si wondered worriedly as several of the starving farmers began to drop one by one on the floor unconscious, but I shook my head firmly with what I’m sure was a devastated expression, “It will only make us seem more suspicious. And those people hate us anyway, our connection with the emperor is too strong; we can’t help them out without giving it all away.”

We fell silent and simply watched for a good while.

Hu Hai was the first to speak, “We can’t mess this up. We’ve worked so hard for this moment and if my father continues his regime any longer, Lord knows what’s going to happen to our empire.”

It was cold and the snow was falling heavily, coating the palace tops and trees. If it were day, it would be glistening beautifully but this had to be done in the dull night. Hu Hai, Li Si and I trudged up the small hill we would have had no problem scaling during the summer time shivering with chattering teeth to meet up with Fu Su, the emperor’s other son. He lived a town away in a small private temple because he asked his father for some space, Hu Hai told us he would only visit on occasion and Fu Su would use his free time to study medicine. Though it won’t give him the throne, it was his passion and he would choose it over anything else. Hu Hai loved him dearly and told us both that he trusted him with his life and we needn’t worry about him telling anybody of our plans to murder the king.

The palace was a long way away at this point and we were headed to meet Fu Su right by the woods.

As we approached, we saw a man with a long beard and thick sideburns and a toothy grin, “Fu Su!” Hu Hai exclaimed as we drew near enough for him to hear.

“Hu Hai!” He answered with equal enthusiasm, “My loving brother, how have you been? It’s been a while.”

Hu Hai nodded in agreement as they embraced, “It’s been a couple years.”

Fu Su took a look at Li Si and I, a knowing look apparent in his bright eyes, “You’re the friends Hu Hai’s been talking about?”

We both shot Hu Hai a curious expression, but he simply laughed and nodded, “Yes, Fu Su, they are.”

He let out a cheerful chuckle and we couldn’t help but join in.

“Alright,” he said and rubbed his hands together, “So, you want something to kill the king?” He asked in such a casual way that Li Si and I couldn’t help but have snapped our heads up and stared for a few seconds in shock. Hu Hai simply smiled. He probably was already aware of how blunt Fu Su was. A heads up would have been nice, though.

I was the first to recover and nodded, “Basically,” I said, with hopes I sounded just as nonchalant. With another contagious grin, Fu Su pulled out several different small bottles from his loose trousers and handed them over to me. I took them with narrowed eyes and waited for an explanation.

“Just mix these all up in his tea and he should be dead within the next 12 hours,” he smirked.

I gave Li Si a panicked look as Hu Hai was about to express his thanks, and Li Si rushed to explain, “We can’t just have him die like this!” He started, “The emperor seems perfectly healthy, it would be suspicious if he just died.”

Fu Su nodded, “Well, if you want, you can splash two drops from each bottle in his drinks and it’ll weaken him and slowly kill him.”

“How long would that take?” Li Si inquired.

Fu Su winced regretfully, “Next summer.”

We all glanced at each other and reluctantly nodded, “It’s better than an immediate death,” I tell him with a grateful smile, “You did what you could.”

Fu Su shrugged, “I guess,” he said with a half-hearted grin, sad that he couldn’t do more to help. With a small bow to us he turned around and began to trudge through the woods.

“Thank you very much!” Hu Hai called after him.

“I hope to see you again!” Li Si shouted.

Fu Su turned to wave with another grin, spun around once more and continued his stroll without another glance back.

“Brother, have you missed me?” A familiar voice echoed down the corridor. It had been a week after we had met up with Fu Su. Hu Hai jumped up from our table of tea and rushed to the door to greet him as the I arched my eyebrows in surprise.

“Didn’t Hu Hai say he rarely visited? Last week the first time I even met the man for crying out loud!”

“What are you doing here, Fu Su?” He asked with a hint of urgency apparent in his tone of voice as Li Si and I exchanged worried looks.

“Is this about the poison?” Was the silent question we were demanding an answer to. We didn’t know when the next tour was, and if it would be long to enough to fake an illness for the emperor.

Thankfully, Fu Su shook his head reassuringly with a smile and patted his brother on the shoulder as he ambled in the room, “Father?” He called.

This was getting more and more confusing by the minute.

The emperor made his way to Fu Su, almost a minute after, his smile warm, for once, with his arms open, “Son!” He said almost cheerfully, “How have you been?”

Fu Su nodded and sauntered toward his father as he reached out for a hug. It was stiff and awkward but it was the most emotion I’ve seen out of the emperor. Even Hu Hai looked surprised.

“What are you all staring for?” The emperor snapped meanly, “We have to get going for the tour!”

Without another word, the three of us headed to our bedrooms to grab what we packed.

“Fu Su,” I began when we all reached the exit and watched him pick up his massive luggage we didn’t see by the door curiously, “You’re coming with us?”

He nodded, almost wearily, “Duty calls,” he told us simply.

“Duties?” Hu Hai asked with grin before he teasingly grilled, “Since when did you have to be responsible for anything?”

Fu Su didn’t smile back as he replied soberly, “Since father requested for me to be the next emperor.”

We didn’t say another word until we got into our carriages- one for the four of us and one for the emperor-shivering from the freezing cold, despite our layers of clothes, “You don’t seem too happy, want to talk about it?” I asked with an empathetic smile.

Fu Su sighed, seemingly sad for the first time I’ve ever seen, “I just didn’t want to take responsibility for everything, you know? It wasn’t what I wanted to do, ruling, I mean. I’ve never been that kind of person.”

Li Si smirked, “I think we’ve gathered that,” he told him.

We all chuckled in response. Fu Su even cracked a small smile.

Spring was near and we were ahead of schedule, which was great. We’ve already made five more destinations than expected. Fu Su laughed and I turned around to look away from the grassy view to find him and the emperor smiling at each other by the carriage. Strange. It didn’t seem like Fu Su was forcing himself to enjoy his father’s company. He was great at pretending, sure, but I thought I really got to know him over the past couple months and I could usually tell when he was faking something or not.

He caught me staring and gave me a smile. I nodded and returned his care free expression with a tight lipped smile. Maybe he was just feeling a little more grander than usual today. I can’t blame him for that, it’s been a couple days since he last genuinely smiled and we never figured out the reason for his second mood change. I shouldn’t overthink things.

I looked around, taking in the view, and a patch pale yellow coloured flowers caught my eye. Fu Su told me yellow was his favourite colour and the flowers were so fresh and beautiful. I couldn’t help but have gravitated toward them. I yanked several of the flowers by it’s roots and stomped over to Fu Su, who was now alone. The emperor was probably off greeting some of his citizens by this point. We should be done in several hours, then we’ll be able to have proper restroom break and some dinner.

“Where’s my brother and Li Si?” Fu Su asked as I drew nearer.

“They headed off to the forrest to take a pee,” I said crudely, laughing.

Fu Su gasped at my language use and their audacity before joining in with my fit of chuckles.

I handed the flowers to him as our laughter died down, “Here,” I told him gently, “Figured this might cheer you up.”

Fu Su took them with an awestruck face, “They’re really beautiful!” He told me earnestly with gratitude and I smiled it response.

Everything had been going according to plan. The emperor had been feeling more and more faint and everybody who knew him is saying it’s because of the crazy weather change he hadn’t adapted to and the emperor claimed it’s the people who protested against him during all our tour destinations that was making him feel sick. The sun was beating down on us ridiculously hard as we reached our final stop before we headed home. According to Fu Su, it should only take another week or so before his body can no longer take the poison and shut down.

All of us had been tending to the emperor while finding ways to slip him even more of the poison through tea and medicines. By the time we got back to the palace, the emperor was rushed to his bed and he was to rest. However, our victorious grins faded as we approached the emperor’s bed the next day.

We all approached him nervously, for he had called for the four of us, and he was sporting a malicious smile. “I am dying,” he stated weakly but with authority, “And when I leave, I want to be protected.”

We nodded, unsure of where this was going, “I want an army.” He said simply.

I furrowed my brows, “Your majesty,” I blurted out, “You want us to sacrifice an entire army for you?” I asked irrediculously, unable to contain myself.

He arched his brows, challenging me to argue, “Yes,” he told me, an evil glint in his eye, “In fact,” his eyes lit up, another idea catching on, “I want them to eternally protect me. You will kill them by making clay moulds out of them. If you don’t by the time I die, you will be executed. I will have Fu Su make sure of that.”

So that was my punishment for smart-mouthing him. I’m not even surprised.

I nodded and glanced at the others and they all held back a smile with the knowledge that Fu Su wouldn’t actually do that, but Fu Su’s expression was ashy and grey that none of the others caught. I shot him an inquisitive expression and he shakes his head.

At that, we all exited.

The second we sprinted out the palace, Li Su began laughing uncontrollably, “I can’t,” he said between laughter, “Believe that the emperor actually believes that Fu Su would do such a thing to you.”

We all, with the exception of Fu Su, began to laugh.

“Fu Su,” Hu Hai asked, “Are you feeling okay?”

Fu Su looked at us with a cold expression we had seen countless times on his father, “I’m afraid I will have to kill you if you don’t do as he says.”

Nervous laughter erupted from my stomach, “You’re kidding, right?” I asked as I waited for his hard face to soften to the Fu Su I used to know.

“Fu Su?” Hu Hai hedged.

His expression didn’t waver as he said, “I am now the emperor and I have to take responsibility and respect my father’s dying wish. I don’t have time for silly games anymore.”

I stared hollowly at the cell wall I was trapped in. I had to finish with the army before I was released. Another man was thrown into the dirty chamber and tied up before I approached. He didn’t say a word and stared at me with a defiant expression and pure hatred in his eyes.

‘I tried,’ I wanted to tell him, but I knew he wouldn’t listen. Like all the other soldiers before. As I began to apply the clay, Fu Su walked to the cell door.

“Tired yet?”

I didn’t respond.

“Well, I’m just giving you a heads up but this is only the beginning.”

And the end of a dysfunctional friendship that, I suppose, just wasn’t meant to be.

Belief

Island School, Laul, Mallika - 14

Some say that death is the greatest illusion of all. I didn't believe in the afterlife, I didn't want to fear hell, or fear heaven even more. How naive of me.

I didn't know how I got there, but it was the sky that compelled me to stay. The stalagmites of Shaanxi were a rather unusual variety – they appeared to be made of rounded, irregular, hollow cones, which drew concave upwards. Loose stones littered the floor as I pulled myself up towards the rock face. I shone the beam of my torch and the cavern entrance came into view, so I took my first ginger steps towards what I thought to be safety.

To enter the cavern was to become enveloped in a chilling blackness of breeze; it sent a shiver down my spine. The absence of light was the invisible reminder of its warming touch. Underfoot the loose stones shifted and the only sound that met my straining ears was my own echoing footsteps, the noise of the disturbed rocks reverberating off the dense stone walls. As afraid as I was, I just kept walking. All of a sudden, flaming torches sparked to life, lighting up the tunnel ahead and bathing the entire cavern in a flickering orange glow.

This wasn't supposed to happen, I mean after all this is just an abandoned cave in the middle of nowhere. I was mistaken, but I'm not one to explore. I decided to stay at the mouth of the cave, just inside enough to be shielded from the rain. I got into my sleeping bag and for hours, just watched the dancing shadows created by the flickering torches. Still, I couldn't help thinking; what is in there? When I was just about to drift off, my eyes half open; everything went pitch black. The droning sounds of the crickets had stopped and the world was silent, for a minute. From the distance came a strange grinding sound, slowly becoming louder and louder; it developed into a sort of repeated drum beat and I couldn't help myself anymore. It was coming from the depths of the cave.

I made my way through the darkness, feeling my way through the winding nodular walls. The cave curved right and left for I don't know how long, until it arrived at what I perceived to be a door. I pressed my ear up against the jagged surface in an attempt to hear something from the other side, but there was no sound. I took a deep breath and then started pounding. I had to know.

I was in, but still I couldn't see anything. Bang. I turned around and the 'door' had shut. I went back to check, but as I feared I couldn't open it again. I was trapped. What I didn't know was that this would be the single most terrifying night of my life and I would come out a changed person by the morning.

I turned on my torch and began to look around. There was nothing on the ground, but as I raised the light; I came to see a large looming figure. I walked ahead to see it's face. It had a mouth, a moustache, it had armour; but it wasn't real. It was made of some kind of stone. The room lit up with a cold glow, and then I saw it. There wasn't just one of these 'statues'; there were row after row lined up. These were put here. I looked back at the door, and I looked back at the figure in front of me. It had moved. We were now face to face.

I walked backwards, keeping my eyes on them at all times, kicking stones in my way. But when I stepped, I heard a small clinking sound. It wasn't a pebble. There was a small light being reflected into my eyes, there at my feet was a small; diamond. My back was now pinned to the door, and by now all of them were now facing me. The last one came to a grinding stop, turning its head in a 180 degree turn first and then moving the rest of its 'body'.

After that, everything happened so fast. My fists were pounding at the door, all of them were marching towards me, I began running but there was no escape. They were alive. My palms were sweating, my legs tensing up; I could feel the beads of sweat forming on my forehead. They were chanting something, but I was unable to discern what they were saying; it was something in mandarin. I saw a small jagged hole in the wall and I ran for it. I dove in and the grinding stopped. I knew they were outside, I knew I was trapped and I knew they were watching me.

I began to get a feel of my surroundings. It was the same cold damp walls that enveloped me in this 'hole', yet they were sharp. Sharp enough to cut. I shone my torch on the walls, someone had carved into them; a message. The writing had aged and faded with the cave, but it was still easily legible. It read; 'the afterlife is a strange and dangerous place. These warriors are mine. Here to protect me in my afterlife. I am the first emperor. I am dead, yet alive. Leave without taking and you will leave untouched. Attempt to take, and this night will be your last'

A shiver ran down my spine. The first emperor, the afterlife; It was all real. This was all so surreal. Believing in the afterlife, rather not believing; was the fundamental belief that had shaped my life until then. In one night, it had been snatched away from me. I wasn't going to dwell, I had to get out of there; but if this was real and I hadn't taken anything, they should allow me out.

But I had. The diamond!

I acted quickly, dropped it and kicked it outside the hole. I watched as the looming figure stopped to pick it up, his eyes piercing me as he grasped it in his hand. Terracotta. That's what they were made out of - the terracotta warriors.

They moved aside, creating a clear path for me. I took that as my cue to leave and I had no wish to stay. The water dripping from the ceiling had begun to create a musty smell, making it difficult to breathe. It was that simple, they were here to protect him and his riches. Leave without taking, and you leave untouched. They were here, they were not human, but they could listen, see smell; they were real. They had changed me and what I believed in - the Terracotta Warriors.

Stillness

King George V School, Sen, Samanwita - 15

There was something I always liked about the rain. Maybe it was the way droplets trickled down the window panes, the way the entire world was hushed into silence as delicate jewels drizzled down on slick roads, or the gentle, pitter-patter as droplets shattered into a million shimmering pieces on paved paths.

Maybe it was the way a tender, almost intangible stillness hung in the air.

You liked the rain too. I remember you did.

I remember the way your eyes gazed longingly out the window, the way the deep, hazel brown hues shifted and settled as the beaded jewels danced with grace against the glistening glass.

I would walk into that small shed, hidden and engulfed by the darkness of the lingering night sky, I'd watch the shadows tangling and unfurling themselves as you bent over your work, painstakingly working away at minute details. I would watch as your calloused hands, creased by the crinkles of old age, caressed the fine clay, as your fingers intertwined with the chisel and paintbrush, your movements accompanied the exasperated sighs of the creaking floorboards.

You never did care much for how you looked, did you? Your unruly hair was never combed back, and elegant silver threads coursed through its black terrain. When was the last time I had seen your apron without a fine layer of dust coating its tattered edges?

And then there were your eyes. Your eyes seemed as if the entire, intricate threads of the universe were hidden amongst its depths. God, you had the kindest eyes. Every time you found something compelling, something interesting, something frustrating, your brows would furrow into a frown and wrinkles would form around the dark rings circling your eyes. I would ask you repeatedly what had happened, after which that beaming voice of yours would rasp through like a clap of thunder, and you'd simply say, "Another story to be told!"

You always loved solving mysteries. You always told the best stories. I saw the passion that burned within your eyes, the determination which ignited them, the way your eyes enlarged and how each hoarse, deep breath you drew became heavier, faster, and stronger with every discovery.

Do you remember that one time, when you picked me up with those big, rough hands of yours and took me out in the rain to play? Your eyes had the same passionate glint then.

"Any new stories, Dad?"

"There are stories everywhere, kiddo."

I watched the way your hands stroked the rough, battered clay, the delicate movements of your fingers. You put your heart into everything you did.

"What do you think he was like? The First Emperor?"

Your lips creased into the most wondrous smile at that moment. You dropped the clay

ever so gently, and turned to look at me.

“Well kiddo, you know what it says in old history books?”

“Well, that’s really what I’m asking you.”

You laughed. Your voice had shifted to one that was bold, audacious and magnificent.

“The First Emperor had arched and long eyes, he had a chest as great as a hawk’s and his thunderous voice had the sharp, vicious edge of a jackal,” you exclaimed.

I stared in awe, utterly entranced and rapt by your performance. I adored the way you gestured your hands, the way your chest stuck out and your flamboyant movements all weaved together into a magical performance.

“He had the cold, bitter heart of a tiger.”

I gasped. “Was he really that cruel?”

“Certainly a magnificent warrior! A simple crack of the whip, and the entire universe would bow before him. His lash summoned the world, his might shook the four seas!”

“He sounds terrifying!”

“Ah, even the heavens disapproved of him! Did you ever hear the story of the nine cauldrons?”

“The what?”

“You don’t know about the nine cauldrons?”

“You never told me, Dad.”

“Fair enough. The ancient sage emperor Yu had built nine legendary cauldrons, all of which were handed down through generations, because they weren’t just simple cauldrons. They were a symbol of righteous reign!”

“And?”

“The problem was the cauldrons were long gone before Ying Zheng became First Emperor. People believed the cauldrons had been sunk into the rivers!”

“Why would anyone do that?”

“I guess we’ll never find out, huh? Knowing how determined the First Emperor was, he decided to find the cauldrons to prove his greatness as the ruler of a nation that once had circumstances so dire, so severe, that without his guidance, a unified China might never have been possible.”

“Really?”

“Of course! On one of the many tours of the empire, his desire to prove his power was so great that he insisted his crew of men to dive into the river and haul the cauldrons back to the surface. Oh, how they toiled, how they suffered—”

“Oh, come on, what happened next?”

“As they struggled to heave the cauldrons onto boats with ropes, a magical dragon had miraculously emerged from one of the bronze cauldrons and completely torn the ropes!”

“Really?” I asked, my mouth agape.

“Of course! A dragon, the very emblem of Heaven’s will, disapproved of the First Emperor himself!”

“I don’t believe it!”

“Too bad, if the emperor finds out of your disloyalty, he’ll eat you up! He’s very powerful, you know, why else do you think he has an entire army of warriors guarding his body?”

“How do you know so much?”

“Kiddo, dads know everything there is to know. Except when it comes to mothers. Don’t tell your mother I said that.”

I giggled, and just then, rain droplets had started gently beating against the small window in the wall adjacent to your desk, dappled by the soothing, fierce glow of your flickering oil lamp.

A smile folds into my cheeks as the colours of the memory fade. I know now where you got your stories from. Sima Qian. I wonder why you never told me.

I look at out the blur of people scurrying in the rain, their heavy breaths drawing out into the murmur of the night air, the sound of traffic rumbling off into the distance, the light scintillating in the distance. For some reason, it just didn't feel the same.

You had picked me up and sat me on your lap, the sharp scent of lacquer was emanating from your apron, and your embrace felt warm and familiar. Your large, stubby fingers were stroking through my hair, and you stared out the window as your thoughtful eyes followed the droplets gradually trickling down the frosty glass.

"Do you think he was scared?" I had asked, my voice barely a whisper, another drizzle morphing into the rhythm of the whispering rain. You simply took my small hand in yours, lifted me up into the air, and carried me out of the shed into the welcoming kisses of the rain drops. You were laughing, waving your hands around in the air. The creases still crinkled your eyes, your smile was still lopsided, yet the twinkle of your eyes was somehow brighter, your movements somehow more youthful.

I felt the stillness in the air then too.

The glaring glow of streetlights had been softened and blurred, until the radiant colours spilled their emotions onto sidewalks and streets. I remember listening to the entire world around me, the anxious footsteps of people rushing to get home, the roar of car engines, the long, shivering breaths of people huddling for warmth. A sudden serenity had seeped into my blood, seizing my senses. Despite the incessant noise that kept the city awake, I felt calm. Peaceful. I stood there and let the rain soak through my clothes and drench my skin, let my hair cling to my face as cool bursts of rain stroked my cheeks, and let you lift me up. Just then I had wondered whether the emperor himself had ever felt like this, whether he wanted to capture all that was beautiful about his life in the figures of eight thousand terracotta warriors.

Your eyes. They gleamed like the rain.

I wished time would have stopped then and there.

That night, you had sat my small, lean frame on the stocky build of your knees by the comforting, crisp glow of the oil lamp. The droplets of rain continued to glimmer against the window panes, and our figures had cast large, playful shadows on the walls. You held and guided my hand as we painted away on the armour of a newly excavated warrior, trying to unearth its original colours.

"That's a nice colour, Dad."

"It's Chinese purple."

I contorted my features into a funny face. "Chinese purple? Colours get named after their countries?"

You laughed. "It's not a natural colour, kiddo. It was made by Chinese alchemists about 2000 years ago when they were trying to make jade."

"Why were they trying to make jade?"

"People believed jade could make you live forever. They paid alchemists to find a formula to make jade. But, being the sneaky people they were, the alchemists didn't actually make jade. They made a jade lookalike which they so creatively happened to call Chinese glass."

"They wanted to live forever?"

"Hmmm. Don't you think that's incredible? All because someone was looking for the

secrets of immortality, a completely new colour had been created. It's a pity they never made the colour again."

"Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think he was scared? Of dying?"

"I think he was incredibly lonely. I don't think he wanted to feel forgotten"

"Then why did he make so many people create warriors for him rather than becoming their friend?"

You smiled at me. "I guess we'll never know. Some things are best kept secrets."

"Are you scared? I mean...of being forgotten?"

"Hopefully I'll have imparted something on the work I leave behind. Besides, I'm not going anywhere soon! You can't forget me, kiddo."

My lips broke into a grin.

You gently patted my shoulder, held my chin up and laughed that benign, exuberant smile. "I think that's enough for today. But kiddo, just know that I'm lucky enough not to feel alone in this world."

I wish that had been true. I look around at the rows of terracotta warriors standing in combat formation. I wonder whether I had ever made you feel alone, whether you had felt abandoned, whether you had felt betrayed. As the days passed, I simply lost interest, my friend's parents would take them to amusement parks for their birthdays, and I was tired that all you ever did was take me to another exhibition. I didn't want to learn about Chinese history—at least, that's what I told myself. I wanted to explore, I wanted adventure.

That was when the door to your shed started closing, when you had buried yourself in your work, and I had my own problems to worry about.

I look to my left and see a terracotta warrior being loaded onto a truck, and note the sharp arch of its eyebrows, the smooth curves of its face, the half-hearted smile and the emptiness that is the canvas of its eyes.

"Now, will you look at that?! Every single face is different, you don't see a single one more than twice." I was sitting on your shoulder blades as you walked around the museum, breathless and smiling at the sight of each warrior.

"How do people know how to craft so many different faces?"

I smile as I recall what you told me next.

"Everything has its own individual story. The terracotta army wouldn't be a true army if it didn't represent all the different stories of China, would it?"

"Everything?"

"You've just got to have the heart to listen."

I sigh as the memory dissolves into the crevices of my mind. You taught me many things, you loved teaching me everything you knew. I look at the chariots you had sat me down on, the weapons you had let me hold, and the armour we had painted together.

I'm sorry the one thing I didn't learn was your own story.

As I look at the entire breadth and scope of the warriors which stood before me, I suddenly remember that it used to be tradition for the entire army to go to the grave when the emperor died, in order to serve him in the afterlife. The First Emperor didn't follow tradition, but he still tried to substitute every living companion with figurines made from terracotta. A thought strikes me: either the emperor was afraid of death—or appreciated life so much he decided to die alone.

Were you afraid?

I hear the rumble of truck engines, the grinding of wheels scraping against the hard road. I scoff. “You wouldn’t like them taking the warriors away Dad, would you? But you’re gone, so there’s nothing we can do about it, can we?”

I don’t know why, but I start running after the truck. A frenzy of thoughts enter my mind, but I just keep running. I start thinking how ridiculous it is—how unfair it is, that the emperor got an entire army to protect him, that his tomb contained streambeds contoured to symbolize the Yellow and Yangtze River flowing with luminous, silky mercury that resembled flowing water. It wasn’t fair that he had bronze chariots and waterfowl and 8,000 different warriors by his side, it just wasn’t—not when you had to do it all by yourself.

“Come back!” I yell. “WHY WON’T YOU JUST COME BACK?”

I don’t think I was yelling at the truck.

My knees skid across the surface of the road, and before I know it, I’m on the floor, a hot stream of tears roll down my cheeks. I feel a soft hand touch my shoulder, and a second later, I’m looking into the dark, bleary eyes of my mother. “I think that’s enough for today.”

I never realized how smooth and supple my mother’s hands were. They must have missed your hands.

She leads me back home. I notice a small opening in the shed door, and enter the tired, old room. The weary walls groan, the floorboards sigh and heave under the weight of our frail bodies, and the lamp lies forlornly in the corner of the room. My eyes feel heavy, my body is so tired.

I gaze up, and my jaw drops. How could I have forgotten that the terracotta warrior we had painted together was still in the shed? The colours have faded into the threads of the past, yet even in its desolation, the warrior stands magnificent and glorious. I approach the figure, my fingers numb and trembling from the rain, and stroke its edges, its curves. The surface is cold, but for some reason, a bud of warmth seems to blossom in my heart. As my fingers softly brush the lacquer, I somehow feel the delicate, soft touch of calloused hands, the innocent rays of the evening sun, the gentle strokes of a 6 year old boy.

“He never gave it to the museum. He wanted to keep it.”

I turn around and see my mother’s face, beaten down by experience and grief. Her worn out eyes are a shade I can’t quite describe—is it sadness? Is it love? Perhaps it’s a mixture of everything. Like Dad said, some things are best kept secrets.

“I didn’t stay with him—“

“You did.”

“I should’ve spent more time with him.”

“The only thing he cared about was you being happy.”

“I didn’t—“

“He loved you more than anything else. That’s why he kept the warrior.”

“I thought his job was stupid—I hurt his feelings.”

She took my head in her hands. “That’s not what mattered to him. What mattered is that you kept learning every day. You never stopped, did you? You went to the shed every day—“

“I stopped.”

“Not because you lost interest. Even the best of us lose ourselves sometimes. You still read up on Chinese history. He knew.”

I gulped.

“You made him so proud.”

“He’s going to be alright, right?”

She smiles, then turns me around to face the terracotta warrior once again. “The emperor

took with him jewels, treasures, and thousands of warriors to his grave. He tried in vain to compensate for the loneliness and fear he felt. Your father, he might've gone empty handed, but he had something much, much more special to take with him." She squeezes my hand, and suddenly, I feel my body relax as a wave of warmth rushes over me.

The rain continues to drizzle outside. As the soft, pale hues of evening suddenly ignite into a crescendo of blazing brush strokes, blending into the ushering countours of the night sky, I feel that same feeling of wonder, of intrigue, from the night in the rain. I look out of the small window, and lead my mother outside, silently letting the rain seep through my clothes and soak my skin. My mother doesn't utter a single word, but only follows.

You had taught me many things. You had taught me that behind each terracotta statue, there had been a face, a life, a story to be taught and learned. You had taught me the best stories were still mysteries. There was-and is-a story behind your loving eyes too, an abyss of mysteries I was still solving on the last day we had spent together.

You loved us. More than anything, you taught me the ways of a very big mystery.

You're gone, but you were right. I can't forget you. People just have a way of imparting themselves in their work.

I sigh as I glance through the window at the terracotta warrior.

"You knew everything," I whisper.

The ushering rain continues to patter, the sound of traffic is drowned out by rushing footsteps and long, winding breaths. Streetlights blur in the distance. I feel like a boy again.

I feel a sudden sense of tranquility.

Maybe it's because there's a stillness in the air.

The Real Army

Marymount Secondary School, Lowe, Kate – 15

If it's a tragic backstory you're looking for, I guess I fit the bill. But to tell you the truth, one becomes quite numb to the pain after two millennia encased in clay. Terracotta is a poor conductor of emotion. All those legends of ancient spirits still out for revenge after eons sealed in a jar? Nonsense. We ancient spirits have had plenty of time to lick our wounds. Our surviving compulsions are as varied as our identities were in life, but they've all been dulled to the same degree- like the paint on my armor irreparably peeling in the dry Xi'an air; like an ever-slowing heartbeat.

It's been long enough. These days all I crave is sleep.

-

My father's hands left blood on odd surfaces in our draughty village home. The back of my coat when he hugged me; the planes of the pillow he grabbed feverishly onto in his sleep; my mother's face.

He was part of a legion of folk artisans recruited to construct Emperor Qin Shihuang's mausoleum. His job, specifically, was to craft the Emperor's eternal protectors- the terracotta warriors. For all I know, his blood-streaked hands shaped the very soldier whose body I occupy now, but I'll never be sure. The details of his work were always shrouded in mystery, but when he came home at night, he told the best stories.

I can see him now, huddled up next to me by the light of a candle, twice my size but never imposing. The smell of his sweat after a long day of work and the metallic trace of his hands would permeate the air, but when he spoke, his breath was always sweet with excitement.

Just before I drifted completely off to sleep, I would be sent on my way by the woosh of him blowing out the candle.

-

My mother's tears were a strange lacquer over the streaks of blood my father had left. They flowed for seemingly days on end- I would watch her through hooded eyes every night, as she paced, and wept, and paced, and wept. She cried silently, and never knew that it

kept me up. But how could I sleep now by the ceaseless flickering of that candle? Eventually, a draught would put it out, and I would turn away from my mother's silhouette, and be overtaken by sleep.

We had been expecting my father back for weeks, and he'd sent no word to explain his absence.

"He was just telling me before he last left- the work is close to finished," my mother insisted at first. "They must just be keeping him one day longer to make sure."

After countless one-days longer, word began to spread that the workers in the Emperor's tomb were never to return. As soon as work had been completed on the tomb, it was ordained that the exits be sealed, all craftsmen trapped inside. My father had never let slip a word about the contents of the tomb, but he'd been deemed untrustworthy. He was buried alive, the secrets of the mausoleum buried with him.

I was fourteen. The day we found out, I watched one of my mother's teardrops travel down her cheek. I needed to know what marvelous secrets that tomb could have held, what could have justified killing my father without any warning. I needed revenge.

I was sent on my way by the woosh of the wind sealing the shiny trail of that teardrop violently in place.

-

It is hard to recall the thrill of the rebellion these days, but the feeling is not totally forgotten. Once in a while, between 300-year naps, it caresses my numb clay walls like a passing breeze. If only I could describe it in its full glory still -

The day of my downfall felt in the morning as though it would be one of my best.

Bright and early, I stood upon the ground around the Emperor's mausoleum, my father's grave, supervising the digging of a man-sized hole. The air was dry and clear, and the outline of every speck of dirt we misplaced burned itself into my vision.

My small pack of thieves and I dropped one by one through the hole into a pit of terracotta warriors. The civil war was in full swing, and we were looting the fully functional weapons of the warriors for the use of a small chapter of the resistance. This was how I sought to avenge my father - through the beautiful irony of beating down a government with an element of its last leader's attempt at immortality.

This was by no means the first pit we had robbed - the marks of arson debated now by modern archaeologists had been our doing as well. Watching the fruits of my father's labor go up in flames didn't hurt one bit - he'd never been doing it for himself. It had always been for a vain emperor, under the duress of harsh central government-employed supervisors who worked him until he'd bloodied his hands every day.

We were prepared to work by the light of a lamp that we would throw back into the pit after ourselves - but today, the second my feet hit dirt - woosh.

-

I spent the first three years of my entrapment intermittently awake, trying to piece together what had happened. Based on the fact that all my men had mysteriously disappeared into thin air as well, and that the blackened lamp had reappeared in the tight clay grasp of one of the warriors, I began to put together the truth. Our souls had all been sucked into the clay bodies of the terracotta warriors- as had those of all the craftsmen who'd been buried alive. It was the secret of the tomb, and the curse of anyone who came too close to finding it out.

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It was two thousand years before we were unearthed, two thousand years before the truth was confirmed to me through the repeated whisperings of that same ancient legend by the

villagers, archaeologists, and tourists who came to see us. Whenever anything too close to the truth was uttered, the whole tomb seemed to rumble in a way that only I could feel through my terracotta feet.

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I spent many years wanting revenge.

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I spent many years asleep.

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I spent many years alone.

-

I spent many years forgetting.

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Emperor Qin Shihuang would never have been content with an army of clay. His hunger for immortality was real - hence the thousands of craftsmen, the secrecy surrounding what they did. He did not want rumor to escape and be passed on as the legend it eventually became anyway. Every man involved in the building of the terracotta warriors was trapped alive - but in the literal bodies of their creations. The emperor wanted the protection of real men after death, an army that would never leave him. I wonder whether his spirit is still alive itself. I wonder whether it has had time, over the past two millennia, to contemplate the families it tore apart, the men it has trapped forever. I hope, over the past two millennia, it has had the decency to feel protected.

-

It's been long enough. These days all I crave is sleep.

My Duty

Maryknoll Convent School, Tse, Rie - 15

The first thing I noticed was that I was much heavier than I remembered. When I woke up, my arms wouldn't budge an inch, it took me a while to even get them to remotely move. My body felt cemented into place, I couldn't even control my own limbs or turn my head, much less walk around. I made an attempt to curl my fingers, and, like when I try moving the rest of myself, it gave off a loud scraping sound, like raking pottery against the ground. Flakes of clay fell from my hands, and I slowly gained a bit more autonomy.

By the time I had managed to freely move all my joints, it had been...hours? Days? Years? I had completely lost my perception of time by now. Everything was absolutely silent, and as far as I was aware, there was no sign of activity or life anywhere around here. When I woke up, I realized that the only thing in front of me was a wall and I was utterly immobile. There could be someone behind me and I wouldn't know, maybe someone who would ask why I'm staring at a wall. But my instincts tell me, with my back exposed, I'm laid bare to any and all attacks. Throughout the time I've tried to move, I've stayed on high alert and kept an ear out for anything, or anyone.

But nobody came.

As I stepped out of the small rubble of clay flakes that surrounded my feet, I began to examine myself. At first, I thought I was in my regular old body, but with all the flakes worn away, I could see the colours on me were painted on. Underneath the bright red and pink, the blue and brown, and everything in between, my armor, even my skin are a dull umber colour. I was finally able to walk, but my movements are incredibly sluggish. I looked back and the small pile of clay that flaked off from my body. I didn't understand. Was I coated in a layer of clay? No, otherwise I wouldn't be able to see. Neither did it explain why I was adorned with armor. I couldn't remember a thing from before I woke up here. Am I made of clay? That can't be right...

I finally turned around.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I was going to see. I had considered some worst case scenarios, but never in my imagination had I anticipated this.

I was at the far edge of an underground cavern. Rows of clay warriors stood before me. A vast army was spread across the chamber. There were hundreds, if not thousands more, all stood in line. Still stunned, I hesitantly went up to them. The detail on each figure was stupendous. Each warrior had different, unique facial features from the other. The craftsmanship was unprecedented, it felt as though they could open their eyes any second. Each warrior was standing tall, silently awaiting orders, it all felt so familiar...

Memories came rushing back. I stood there, shell shocked as I tried to process my newfound memories, the clay army, my situation.

I am...was a soldier in Qin Shi Huang's army. We were fighting, we thought we had the upper hand, proudly slashing down our foes and shouting battle cries of victory, charged at the enemy, and fell right into their trap. A smart tactic, if I must confess. They lured in a large portion of the army, with us being cocky and planning to stampede the rest of the enemy. Their panic-stricken facade suddenly broke, just like our spirits. A fire set off, and we all panicked. We scattered and tried to run for our lives, but there was no escape. The last thing I heard were the screams of agony from my fellow warriors as we were engulfed in the fire.

And then I appeared here.

This isn't possible. How long have I been asleep? It couldn't have been that long, right? And if I'm supposed to be dead, how am I here? And why am I made of clay?

I was overwhelming myself with questions, but a thought struck me. If I died and appeared here, then everyone else at the fire should be here too.

Just like that, my distress was replaced with determination. Perhaps the others are still struggling to move. They could be scattered around the thousands of soldiers here. We may not know why we were brought here, but the reassurance that we can find the answer together gave me the dauntlessness I needed. As a soldier, I can't back down. We fight until the last breath. If we are to find each other, I had better get a head start.

I soon found the flaw in my plan. The clay soldiers weighed a ton, or maybe the clay body I had was much weaker than my human body. I couldn't maneuver my way through the soldiers either, I was much too stiff and lethargic to move through them. I tried calling out to let the others know someone else was here, but I couldn't make a sound. The only sound there was was the scraping sounds from my body, continuously echoing throughout the chamber.

There wasn't much I could do, but I couldn't just stand here forever. I needed answers. Something must have brought me here, but what?

I paced around the limited space that I had, trying to figure out something. I was so engrossed in my thoughts, I didn't notice the sound of shuffling in the wall right next to me. Only when the wall started to budge and flake clay did I stop and stare.

A portion of the wall soon collapsed and gave way to a tunnel. Standing there were three men, actual men with flesh and blood. They were covered with dirt and grime from head to toe, carrying shovels and pickaxes, and stood aghast as they gawked at me.

Everything was silent. We were just as still as the clay soldiers surrounding us. It felt like centuries until one of them moved. I noticed the glint in his eye, then he raised his pickaxe and brought it down.

Surprisingly, with my slowed movements, I dodged, but only barely. It chipped off a part of my head, but there was no pain. Suddenly, there was a loud ringing in my ears, and a

thought echoed in my mind.

"Intruder. Your duty. Protect. For glory."

I raised my arm, while his guard was still down, surprised I was still standing, I landed a punch on him. The bulky clay body must have added to my strength, the man was immediately knocked off his feet, dropping his pickaxe. His head crashed against the wall, and with an audible crack, he slumped over. Eyes still open, he lay there as his soul wisped away from his listless body. Words were still echoing in my head.

"Protect the chamber. Guard the grave. Defend the treasure. Your duty."

I tried to jab at another, but he was far more agile than I was. In a flash, he scooped up the pickaxe, and with an expression of pure fury and hatred, brought down the pickaxe right on the top of my head.

I felt my entire body slowly break apart. Cracks appeared on the surface of my body, and in a matter of seconds, I crumbled. I laid at the bottom of their feet, and could only watch as he prepared another blow to finish the job.

Just then, sounds of crackles reverberated across the chamber. Everything started to tremble, and the man's expression shifted from rage to dread in an instant. Exchanging glances at the other man, they turned and made a running start towards the tunnel, only to find a clay soldier standing at the opening, preventing any escape. The other soldiers encircling us started to shift, gradually stretching their arms, taking steps towards the two remaining intruders. As my vision started to fade, I finally understood.

My purpose, my duty, to guard the chamber. My king lies here, with his soldiers created to protect him even in death. The reason I woke up here, my soul inhabiting these clay warriors, to fight against the infiltrators, as I have sworn to defend the king no matter what, and I have fought until the bitter end. My promise fulfilled, I can ascend to the afterlife. I embraced my true death, but the same cannot be said for the intruders. The soldiers had a firm grasp around their throat, inevitably choking them. They struggle, but to no avail. As I left this world, the last thing I saw was the horror on their faces as their bodies gradually went lifeless.

Where Is He?

Sha Tin College, Chan, Elin – 15

“Hurry up! Move! Paint them inside! MOVE!!!” screamed one soldier.
“SHUT UP AND GET THEM IN HERE! HURRY UP!” hollered another.

Everything was chaotic, with sounds of screaming soldiers shoving and forcing carvers into our vault. Whoever struggled or attempted to escape was knocked out of consciousness and left on the cold dirt ground. All of a sudden our world started getting darker... Anyone awake or alive at this point was banging on the gate and shouting frantically for their lives.

“LET ME OUT, PLEASE! OPEN THE DOOR! OPEN THE DOOR!”

The light in the vault dimmed as the fortified stone gate was gradually lowered from the top; the cries of hysteria got desperate. As the last of our sunlight vanished, the screams slowly morphed into hopeless sobs. Finally the gate hit the ground with a loud dooming thump.

The room stood still in pitch-blackness.

Our vault was sealed, trapping all those who had served our emperor, the emperor who had united China and given us warriors a purpose, inside. No one was allowed to know where we were hidden, so all the soldiers and workers who had worked on and known how to enter the vault were either shut inside or executed. From inside my vault chamber, I could still hear the petrified cries of the peasants who, too, would be trapped in the vault for the rest of eternity as far as we knew.

My best friend Ren Fang and I exchanged a nod. We understood how hopeless a human could feel inside this stygian vault but we needed to prepare for our mission. I patted Yin Qin, my warhorse, soothing her to stay in line. Then I walked to one of the most distressed carvers and tried to calm him down.

“It’s all right,” I said. “You won’t be in here forever. We just have to wait for our emperor to awake from his death-like sleep. He had travelled far and wide to find an elixir for immortality. He will come back in his next life stronger, wiser and more powerful than ever.”

My name is Zhuang Xiao Ling and I am a horseman in the Terracotta Army, the oldest army that still serves as a unit. We were created, trained and disciplined a very long time ago when our emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di, was ill and needed an army to fight for him when he awoke in his second lifetime. We have telepathic powers to read people’s mind and incredible

eyes that allow us to move in darkness until the day our emperor summons us to fight for his kingdom and conquer the world. There is one little catch, though. Our life source relies solely on our emperor. He has given us the power to move around freely until our vault is opened and we are exposed to light and humanity again. Once that happens, we will lose our powers to move until our emperor empowers us again.

Day after day we waited. We lost all concepts of time, especially in the absence of sunrises or sunsets inside the sealed vault. The time we were trapped in complete darkness tested our resolve... a few warriors had lost their minds and attempted to escape, but to no avail. We continued our lives underground, waiting patiently for our emperor to return. We planned and plotted as many war scenarios as we possibly could. We prepared ourselves by improving our agility, co-ordination and control. Yet, we had no way of finding out what was going on in the world outside. Ren Fang told us that he had once heard rumours that everything was to be destroyed after our emperor had died, so, in all likelihood, there was no outside world anymore and that the underground world is all that is left.

Time passed endlessly underground.

Suddenly we heard voices. At first, we thought it was all a figment of our imagination, but we soon found out that those voices were real. We ran back into our war formation promptly.

“Our supreme emperor has finally returned! Remember our solemn oath to fight and protect our emperor through his second life? Men! Warriors! Horses! Stand with pride as we greet our emperor once more!” roared Ren Fang.

We chimed in excitement; this was the day we had been thinking about since we were created! The voices got louder and louder; just as the sounds of shovels and pickaxes got closer and closer, all the chatter stopped.

I stroked Yin Qin one last time and kissed her on her nozzle, “Stay energetic, my beautiful warrior.”

Almost on cue, a strand of blinding sunlight flooded the vault. This was the first time we had seen light in a very long time.

It was immensely painful for my eyes just to look at the light from the small hole in the ceiling of the vault, but slowly, I adapted. I had almost forgotten about all our colours, the bright colours that brought us to life, the secret colours that were created to be used only on us, the most enriched purple that could not be found anywhere else on earth, the most royal reds, greens and yellows. I looked down at myself, remembering how exquisite my creators had painted me. I was wearing an elegant purple robe with a hard armour painted with lacquer so it would stay black and shiny. I looked at Ren Fang; he was wearing bright red clothing and sharp green bottoms, with a lacquered layer of red detailed armour. His hair was wrapped neatly and tied with a piece of red cloth.

For the first time in uncountable years, I breathed fresh air. I closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of the cool air around me. I waited for our emperor to refill our power.

But for a while, I did not hear the emperor’s voice and I could not move! When I opened my eyes again, my heart skipped a beat and I nearly fainted.

“Ren Fang, w-w-wh-where are a-a-al-all my colours?!” I fumbled for the right words.

Ren Fang was shocked too; he looked as though he had seen a ghost as he watched himself fading back into his earth form.

The beautiful colours that had made us come alive had completely flaked off; we were left standing there with only our naked grayish-red earth colour for the world to see. I felt exposed and embarrassed to stand there. No, the emperor can’t see us like this! He would

be ashamed! The most powerful emperor should have a colourful army ready to help him conquer the world!

But where is our emperor? He has promised us that when he returns, he will need his army to conquer the world. Is there a war outside? Is he being threatened and we are being summoned to protect him and his underground palace? There is no one calling for us, just strangely-attired people inspecting us and placing some of our broken friends back together... Where has our emperor gone? Without him, we serve no purpose! Has he given orders to free us? But that cannot be... our orders have been to await his return and fight for the greatest emperor yet.

We felt perplexed. We had a million questions but we did not know where to begin. At least we could witness the sunrises and sunsets again, witness all of us being dug out, witness people building a cover above us, witness all that has changed since we were buried: people dressing differently, tools and equipment being more powerful, surroundings being completely alien. Every night all the terracotta warriors would say a silent prayer for our emperor to return.

"I find myself totally useless; I don't think our emperor will ever return," I told Ren Fang pessimistically.

Yin Qin nodded in agreement as she nudged my arm gently.

"You need to have faith in our emperor, Xiao Ling! We need to find a way to get our power back so we can move around again and perform our duties," Ren Fang tried to convince me.

"But how will we get back our power without our emperor?"

"There must be a way, let's think... I see people getting power of the light by clicking a button... maybe there's a button for us too."

"You're right, I see our caretakers performing all their tasks by clicking button after button. That seems easy enough!"

"We need to use our telepathic powers to find out where our button -"

"It must be the big red one which nobody has touched," Yin Qin interrupted suddenly. "I know what to do! Sometimes I have the power to control a kid's mind. Let me try!" she said enthusiastically.

A determined Yin Qin focused her mind on a little boy who was held up over the fences on the viewing platform by his father. YES, the boy stared at Yin Qin eye to eye, seemingly understanding Yin Qin's intentions. He pressed the button by the door with his little hand.

A deafening sound rang; everybody stopped moving. If it were not for their awkward appearance, they would be able to blend in with us considering how still they stood.

"Oops, I'm sorry..." Yin Qin turned her face away to conceal her embarrassment.

One distinct day, very early in the morning, I awoke to screams of panic.

"Xiao Ling! Wake up!" Ren Fang was calling madly from the middle of the lane.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know; they're trying to move me and nineteen others into the wooden crates."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure, but if I die, I want to die by our emperor. To die on the battlefield is to die with honour. To die in a wooden crate would be..."

Before I could respond, the worker had already moved him further down the lane.

"Xiao Ling my dearest friend, we may not meet again. Our emperor once told us the world would never be the same. Stay strong!" Ren Fang was almost out of the door now.

I did not know how to react. All at once, before it was too late, I shouted after him, "A

good friend is like the sun, not always visible, but always there. Whenever you feel lonely, just think of me. I will do the same till we meet again! Find our powers!”

None of us knew what would happen to us. Has the emperor finally returned and required twenty of our warriors? But why have they been placed in wooden crates...

For three whole weeks I did not speak; I just stood quietly in the row, in solitude. Weeping inside, I said nothing to anyone, not even to Yin Qin.

Hearing others discuss at night about what could have happened made me feel even more depressed,

“They’re probably dead or destroyed by now... best we stay here, where there is still hope.”

I closed my eyes, reminiscing about all the time Ren Fang and I had spent together in front of our emperor and the time we had endured together in complete darkness. For thousands of years, we had never been apart. I only hoped our friends would someday find their way back to the army.

We continued to stand there day in and day out. I looked up at the white arc above our heads, which blocked the view of the sky. I missed Ren Fang.

One night, Yin Qin tried to comfort me, “We have survived for thousands of years. Ren Fang is an excellent warrior; he will return bearing our powers to move! There is hope!”

“What hope is there for us?” I scoffed in dismay.

Hope has become all but a word to me. I have lost all hope some time back; I do not even know what it feels like to hope anymore.

Once again, time passed endlessly. I watched people walk in and out of our site every day. I gathered what little courage that remained in me to endure this adversity and forlornness.

Then, one fine morning...

Our friends! They’re back! One by one, the wooden crates were taken apart and our friends were put back into their places in our army formation. From the vibes they had given off and the way they held themselves, they looked oddly happy. Where had they been? I was thrilled, yet baffled. I almost ran from my spot when I finally saw Ren Fang emerge from his crate. I heaved a sigh of relief knowing he was back home safe with us. He glanced around the room as he smiled.

Finally, night time came around, when all the visitors and caretakers had left. As soon as the lights were off, we bombarded all the returned warriors with questions. I ran up to Ren Fang; we looked into each other’s eyes for a while without saying any words. The others gathered around our returning friends to listen to their adventures. It was a real homecoming.

“The first time we were taken out of the boxes, we were in a white and colourful circular building. There were people shouting orders, pointing this way or that and then moving us to specific spots. When they finally finished, they left us alone,” explained one warrior.

“Yes! And don’t forget the dome! Oh, the dome! They put us in one circular room; it was painted so nice–” continued another, before he was cut off.

“It was painted yellow and blue, not sharp and dark like our faded colours, but rather soft and beautiful. Very western,” a third added fervently.

The second warrior continued, “They covered the windows with some white cloth though, and sometimes the cloth would move around and we would see portraits of ourselves and our emperor.”

At this point, everyone was ecstatic. I could tell that their adventures had inspired a lot of us to want to escape and see the world for ourselves, while a few sat at the far end of the vault, seemingly soulful that they were not the ones chosen to travel outside the vault. We listened intently.

Suddenly, a quiet voice from the back spoke up, “I have carefully observed all the places we have been to; from reading the minds of people, I believe we had travelled very far.” The soldier paused to collect his thoughts.

“The first place we went to was called London; it’s a city in the west inside a country called England. They speak a weird language that I don’t really understand. However, from the facial expressions and tones of voices of all the visitors, I knew that they were admiring us.”

For the first time in a very long time, genuine laughter filled our vault. We had stood here waiting for our emperor for so long we had forgotten what happiness felt like. For the rest of the night, they spoke about their journey around the outside world, starting from London, to San Francisco, Houston, Washington D.C, Hong Kong and many more places.

“One particular place we visited interested me a lot... We saw two warriors like us but with brilliant colours!”

“But how is that possible?” I asked. “We lost all of our colours when our vault was opened!” Sharing my confusion, the warriors around me mumbled in agreement.

Luckily, Ren Fang spoke up. “They aren’t real. They have all our colours but no life. We may have lost our colours but we represent power and courage. They look almost exactly like us but there are only two of them, and they lack the life force we were given when we were made... I think someone wanted to create another army of us but couldn’t find a way to make them alive like us so they stopped after creating two.”

The next day, as the sun started to rise and all the warriors had gone back to their positions, everything returned to the silence we had stood in for as long as the vault had opened. I turned to Yin Qing quietly, telling her my thoughts,

“We stood here thinking there was no more world outside,” I pondered for a moment. “If someone is trying to replicate us and they can’t replicate our life force, that means the secret ingredient has been lost, and no one can truly make anyone like us... Yin Qing!”

Suddenly, I had an epiphany!

“We have been so closed-minded that all we were concerned about was the whereabouts of our emperor! But how can we conquer the world if no one even remembers who we are, or rather who we were? For all we’ve heard, the world doesn’t even know of the life gift we were given all those years ago. Oh, Yin Qing, I don’t know when our emperor will come back, or if he will ever, but we can’t just wait like lost puppies...”

“It is true that the world outside is no longer the same; all of our relics and ancient cultures have disappeared from society and exist solely in glass boxes. We must teach them the honour and codes of being a robust warrior,” said Ren Fang thoughtfully.

“We may not have any powers anymore, but we will continue to wait for our emperor while showing these citizens the beauty and mysteries of our culture. We shall unite as a brotherhood, for we represent what it is to be a warrior in the strongest army known to mankind!”

The placing of all our belief in our emperor is what gave us an identity. Without him, we were lost, but we eventually found our own identity, one that is separate from our emperor. We are what we define ourselves. We cannot depend on just one simple task of waiting for a ghost; we must find our own purpose. We will stand here, with pride and dignity, for as long as it will take, mysteriously representing the culture that has long been forgotten.

Our story does not end here; a new chapter has only just begun....

Words of Wisdom

Sha Tin College, Choy, Valerie - 15

In the year 236 BCE, in the land we now call Xi'An, China, there lived a young man named Li An. He grew up with a father who loved him dearly, as his mother sacrificed her life giving birth to this gem. His father always held high hopes for him, as he was nothing short of a child prodigy, but fate was never on his side. On the year he turned 11, neighbours told him that his father had died constructing the Terracotta Army. They were every man's dream, every man's duty, every man's hope, but Li An failed to see that.

Once a boy turned 16, he would serve the Emperor by being a part of this construction. After his father's death, Li An was left alone to face the terrors of the world. Every night, he would face the brown, stone walls that seemed to tower over him menacingly, mocking his vulnerability, as he lulled himself into a restless sleep. What was once a child prodigy gradually became dull and lifeless, as the glinting, silver monster that rested high up in the night sky, stole away his will to live and tore his life apart piece by piece...

His eyes opened a crack as the rain lashed against the brambles that surrounded his little hut. He flinched as the thunder roared, making the leaves quiver in fear. He tumbled out of bed, mentally preparing himself for his first day at work. It was the day that introduced young blood into the world of Terracotta Warriors. As he slid into his faded yellow, linen robe, he attempted a weak smile at the thought of seeing the legendary army up close, but his mouth was frozen solid. It refused even the slightest twitch of emotion.

Dawn had not yet broken through. The streets of his minuscule town were illuminated by dimly lit torches, allowing his neighbours to bustle about, starting another day's routine like robots with the occasional grumpy man cursing the weather. His footsteps were light, brisk, almost as if he was trying to escape from his own shadow. Only when the incessant shuffling of footsteps and mutterings of curse words faded to a soft hum, did his footsteps slow down to a steady rhythm. He knew he was getting closer to his destination, the distant memory of a visit with his father some years ago, when the construction of the Terracotta Army had just begun were fighting its way into his mind. He dismissed it with a disgruntled shake of his head, not allowing anything to invade his otherwise emotionless being.

A crowd of young men came into view as they started moving into a rectangular formation. Once again, he quickened his pace, unwilling to be the last to arrive. He found an empty space on the sandy ground towards the side, and slithered into the spot unnoticed. He let his eyes wander around, gathering basic information about his current location. He was squeezed in between two burly youngsters of his age; he noted about 50 other people surrounded him as he struggled to breathe. The young man to his left stood stock still, clearly wanting to impress, while the one to his right looked down at him and lifted the corners of his mouth in a genuine smile. Li An rolled his eyes, wondering when the boy's face would split in two from all the grinning. The boy's smile faltered when he realised he was not getting any response; Li An almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

Suddenly a booming voice sliced through the air. The boys diverted their eyes back to the front where the voice came from, the previous awkward atmosphere temporarily forgotten as the powerful voice captivated them. The man their eyes were met with had an authoritative aura surrounding him, distinguishing him from the rest of the world. A bronze armour hugged his body loyally as the intricately carved patterns rippled along his torso while he shifted ever so slightly to fully fix his gaze on the boys. A hardened leather helmet was secured around his head, shielding him from potential danger. A metallic thigh protector clasped onto his lower body, leading down to his perfectly squared boots that seemed so stiff that a bow would ricochet off it. His steely gaze swept over the boys as he roared out commands.

The boys were split into groups of five, each with a mentor. The group went through a round of introductions, with Li An simply tipping his head slightly as a show of respect and stating his name. The annoying boy took a place next to him, and jumped at the opportunity to introduce himself as Han Dong. Their mentor wasted no time talking as he started the tour around the construction grounds. He gestured the vast expanse of land used for the construction. A quarter of it was outdoors, where most orders were given, and the remaining area was shielded by a bamboo shed to protect the warriors from the whipping rain. Their workplace was a perfect rectangular field with the back completely occupied by clay that had been stretched out to fit the whole space. Towards the centre, the warriors were lined up; standing shoulder to shoulder, heads held high in pride.

While Li An's eyes scoured the army, their mentor had begun a demonstration. He ran his hands along the clay, face scrunched up in concentration as he pushed and pulled at the clay to form a head. It looked nothing like a head to Li An, as the left side of it was concaved, and the right was jutting out. It looked as if someone had thrown a rock and lodged it inside its head. After what seemed like a lifetime, their mentor held out a finished mould.

The boys gawked at the sight upon them. How the mould turned into a perfectly shaped ovoid, they would never know. Their mentor ran his rough hands down his stained yellow robe, the patterns on it long gone as it hid under the streaks of grey running from top to bottom, like a lonely widow's tears.

Their mentor ordered the other three boys to fetch some clay as he summoned Li An and Han Dong over. Han Dong's eyes sparkled at the thought of working as he rambled on to Li An, previous tension forgotten. He secretly admired the boy for being so forgiving. While padding over to their mentor, a particular warrior caught Li An's eye. It reminded him of his father. He had not noticed it standing there before. He shrugged it off as a coincidence.

"You two will be helping me mould the shapes of the heads." He motioned to a mountain of clay by his foot. "First mould the shape of the head, then we can proceed onto the details. Can you see the difference between this warrior," he gestured to a square-

faced warrior five steps in front of them, “and the one beside it? The one beside it has high cheekbones, thick eyebrows, a high nose and a narrow-shaped face.” Their mentor nodded towards the warrior that caught Li An’s eye previously. “I moulded him three years ago...” Their mentor trailed off as he snuck a subtle glance at Li An.

Han Dong tilted his head in confusion, as he attempted to pick out the minor details that managed to alter the appearance of a warrior, but Li An could no longer focus. Why did this warrior remind him so much of his father? He shook his head to clear his thoughts, praying that the emotions were not slowly creeping back into him. He could not let that happen. He turned away, collecting himself. He had to start working, had to keep his mind off the warrior, had to stop the memories from coming back... He fumbled about for the clay, not stopping to look at his mentor for confirmation as he started to mould.

Half the day had passed, and not a patch of skin was visible on Li An’s hands, as they were covered with dried cracks of clay. He glared at the lumps of mould that looked like a disfigured ball as thoughts raced through his mind.

“I’m slipping. The emotions are coming back.” His hands trembled in a useless attempt to stop the frustration from building. Han Dong had disappeared to fetch more clay, and for the first time, Li An envied the boy for being so carefree. He wished he could be the same.

Lost in thought, he did not realise the force pulling him towards the warrior until he was elevated off the ground, feet dangling awkwardly in midair. His eyes widened in shock, fear slithering up his spine. This was unreal. The warrior was made of clay, there was no way he could move, let alone control him. He shook his head in disbelief, hoping that this was just one of the millions of nightmares he has had, but he felt himself being sucked into the warrior’s eyes. He tried to look away, but he couldn’t. He tried to move his head, but the force was too strong. There was no escape, no way out.

He tried to speak, but no words came out. He looked around, but they were all alone on muddy land that seemed to stretch out into infinity.

“Hush child, I will do you no harm. It is my duty to protect the emperor, and by doing so, I shall protect his people. You have entered a dark phase in your life, but it is not the end for you, and it is my duty to guide you. To show you the way.”

His mind was telling him not to trust the warrior, that this was all a dream. He had been in the dark for too long, it was too late to change now. But his heart was telling him that this was his only chance to change, to open himself, to see the light again. To his surprise, he nodded, mouth still refusing to cooperate with him.

The warrior gave him a warm, lop-sided grin that seemed to comfort him. The warrior extended an arm delicately, almost as if afraid that any sudden movement would shatter the magical moment. It brushed a rigid finger across his forehead, stopping at his temple and gave it a gentle prod. All of a sudden, Li An was soaring, his body free and light as a feather as he travelled back to the time when he was born. Images of him as a baby popped up in front of him, but disappeared as abruptly as they appeared. With a flick of his finger, the warrior brought Li An to the first time his father brought him to see the Terracotta Warriors. Tears were forming in his eyes, but he forced himself to push them down. He was meant to be emotionless. Emotions made people weak.

The warrior swiped an icy hand down Li An’s face, and suddenly, the frozen images in front of him started to move animatedly. Laughter filled the air and echoed in his ears, as his face formed a slight smile at the long-lost melody.

“Father! Father! I want to be those warriors! One day, I will be a hero, and I will serve this country. Mother will be watching from the sky, and she will be proud.”

His mind had always refused to let him remember that day, but now, the memories were crashing down on him. His eyes brimmed with tears as he extended a shaky arm hesitantly. He didn't want to break the moment. The tears rolled down his cheeks, burning them in its trail. He no longer had the power to stop them, nor did he want to. Little did he know, the warrior was standing behind him, smiling fondly as Li An's innocence appeared clear as day. The boy had suppressed his free soul for too long; allowing his emotions out was like knocking down a dam and letting all the water crash down onto land.

The warrior zoomed through a selection of memories that Li An didn't know existed. His mind screamed for the warrior to stop the agony coursing through his veins as he wept at the images of his father that he kept buried deep inside his mind. Just when Li An's knees buckled, the warrior glided to his side, supporting him with a stony arm around his shoulder.

"My child, this is the last one I will show you. Relish this moment and let it stay by you for the rest of your life." The warrior reached out, as if grasping something. A frozen image of the his mentor appeared in front of his eyes.

"That's my mentor... and my father!" Li An finally found his raspy voice. The warrior motioned for the memory to play. "I... I don't understand."

"Hush child... Watch, and you will."

Li An's father was stood by his mentor, in front of a warrior as they carved the final touches onto its armour. His mentor reminded him of Han Dong, the mischievous glint evident in his eyes. To say it surprised him would be an understatement. He watched as his father smacked a finger onto the warrior's helmet to smoothen out the odd smudge on the top of its head.

"Perfect. Look at this beauty. He will serve our country and our emperor. I'm sure of it!"

"Let's move on to our next warrior, we'll make him even more mighty! You and I Li Xin, partners forever." Li An watched as his mentor grinned at his own words, but noticed that his father's smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

They fell into a comfortable silence and by the time Li Xin had spoken, a new warrior's head was already moulded.

"Chen Wei, I'm sick."

"Do you need to take a day off today? I can manage on my own, we accomplish--"

"No... I don't have long to live."

"I don't understand."

"I visited the doctor. He diagnosed me with an illness that cannot be cured. I don't have long to live." Li Xin smiled sadly.

"What about your son?"

"He's what I'm worried about. He's bright and independent, but I don't know if he'll cope without me. He's grown up without a mother, I don't want him to lose his father to a disease. I don't want him to see me as such a weakling. As a man who couldn't win a battle against his own body!" Tears of indigence had started forming in his eyes. "I want him to think of me as a man he can look up to. A man who died for his country, his emperor, his people. When he grows up, I want him to be stronger than me, braver than me, more loving than me, so that he can form a perfect family and teach them well. I want him to learn the power of love, of trust. But these are words I cannot tell. Please my friend, will you help me?"

The warrior placed a feathery touch on Li An's temple. "It is time for you to return."

"No please. I can't leave, I need to say goodbye..." Li An shuddered, as his voice quivered with hurt. Shoulders hunched, he let the tears free-fall down his cheeks. "Please..."

The Terracotta Warrior gazed at him, an affectionate smile playing on his lips. "You still

have a whole life ahead of you, young child. You must open your heart. Let the ones who are willing to know you in. Let them show you a part of themselves, and in return, you can show them a special part of you. Don't push them away anymore. They care for you, but you're hurting them. Learn to embrace them, to love them, and to listen to your heart. This is the only protection that can fend off all evil. It is time to move on. Just believe in yourself... It is my time to go, and your time to shine now. My job here is done." With that, the warrior prodded at the left side of Li An's temple with a soft "farewell" as everything vanished into darkness.

"Li An! Li An! What happened to you? You're awake!" Han Dong's nasally voice would be recognisable from a mile away.

"My father..." Li An croaked.

Towering over him was Han Dong and his mentor, who tried but failed to mask his concern with indifference.

"You... You knew my father." Fresh tears were starting to form in his eyes again.

His mentor's throat went dry. "Yes, he was my friend."

"Did you build that warrior?"

"Yes."

"He looks like my father."

"It was built so that the memory of your father will live on." Silence hung heavily in the air.

His mentor opened his mouth to speak again. "Li An, you resemble your father too much, I could not bear to look at you." He looked at his toes in shame. Li An had never seen a man look so pained, yet his intentions so pure.

Another silence filled the air. "It's okay. I understand now. I need to give my life a chance. Thank you for building him. Thank you for making me understand."

He turned to Han Dong and turned the corners of his mouth up in a weak smile. "Han Dong, I'm sorry for not acknowledging your presence. I know we just met, but you tolerated my appalling attitude, and I would like to give our friendship a chance. Would you accept?"

Han Dong did not hesitate to nod.

As he looked outside, he saw the sun peeking out timidly from the clouds. He knew this would not be easy, but this was a new beginning. His new beginning, because a Terracotta Warrior's wise words are what Li An will live by for the rest of his life...

New Tales of the Terracotta Warriors

St. Joseph's College, Kwan, Dik Hin David – 17

It all began with a drop of Blood.

Legend has it that the Life Force, Qi, resides within the crimson that flows in our veins. In ancient China, popular belief was that Blood is the source of Life itself. Ancient emperors devoured meat and with it Blood hoping to preserve youth, but the inevitable came for generations after generations. Amid those emperors, one decided not only would he stay alive forever, but also extend his reign to the Underworld. To achieve this, he ordered the production of lifeless clay soldiers, believing they would protect him throughout his journey to conquer the Underworld. These soldiers were produced in massive numbers, taking the lives of countless peasants due to inhumane labour work. Sculptors kept their noses to the grindstone, trembling under the whips behind their back. Later known as Terra Cottas, every bone and limb of these soldiers marked the lives of peasants under the reign of a ruthless tyrant.

However, as it turns out, one would be different among the Terra Cottas. One would turn his back to the master he was supposed to serve. One would mark the fall of a vile evil. One would stare into the eyes of Fate and fight back.

The only Terra Cotta with a name is called Atlas.

Present Day - Awakening

An explosion knocked a cloaked figure off his balance while he was checking out Atlas, who was lying against the altar at the end of the tomb. Atlas snapped open his eyes and saw three Terra Cottas bashing through the sand walls. “They are protecting the tomb. Someone broke in.” Atlas realized. One of them had a loaded bow fixed at the hooded figure just a few feet next to him. Quick as a flash, Atlas leapt forward, letting his instincts take over, and pushed the cloaked figure out of harm’s way with his outstretched left arm. A blade of silver sliced through the air and impaled itself into Atlas’ arm, pinning it firmly to the stone wall behind him. Atlas turned just in time to catch a glimpse of the Terra Cottas coming at him, with bronze spears and shields. Without a second of hesitation, Atlas grabbed his left arm with his

right hand, and spun his whole body in an anti-clockwise motion, tearing off his left arm while he immediately steadied himself by skidding his left leg downwards midair, in the trail of a crescent moon. The cloaked figure seemed to be dazed and was struggling to get up, but there was no time to spare. Atlas immediately went into a sprint and within a few strides reached where the cloaked figure was. With his remaining arm Atlas grabbed the hooded figure by the waist in one fell swoop. A surge of energy, a crack of lightning, jumped from the hooded figure to Atlas' palm, catching Atlas off-guard. The world swirled around him, and his legs gave way. The hooded figure, now on his feet and was shaking Atlas' shoulders, seemed to be distant, a mirage. Atlas' consciousness drifted away, and amid all the darkness, something resurfaced, a view of an old furnace glowing red-hot in flames now flooded his mind.

2000 years ago, Qin Dynasty

Blood trickled down the lean arms of an old sculptor as he poked the white-hot coal under the furnace, paying no attention to the sparks that flew out of the fire and the burning sensation in his arm. The air smelled of rust. Was it from the iron or the Blood? He couldn't tell. Behind him, a warden smiled wickedly and raised his whip, bringing it down in yet another swift slash. A trail of blood joined others across the bare back of the old sculptor as he grunted, hands working furiously. The fire roared on, veiling the huge clay block right above it in dense fumes. The old sculptor grabbed a blunt hammer to the left of him, and with both hands, raised it high above his head. A single drop of Blood dripped from between his fingers and started to descend. The old sculptor heaved a great sigh as he watched the drop of Blood drop in slow motion halfway down, and with all strength inside his fragile body, he struck down the hammer. Accompanied with a loud cracking noise, the drop of Blood disappeared beneath the newly formed slit across the clay block, revealing a part of torso within. "Atlas, my last Work, carry on my blessing and protect them..." The old sculptor breathed his last, and collapsed on the floor. The image rippled, and Atlas sank into another swirl of pale blue light.

Under the midnight moon, the Emperor raised another cup of wine and drank greedily, trails of red gushing from the sides of his mouth and onto the floor. A strange lightheadedness clouded his eyes, and he felt as if the moon itself was bowing towards him. "As you should," muttered the Emperor. "Soon I will be ruling over everything, life and death, even nature." He started his descend down the grand staircase of his throne, and, perhaps by chance, perhaps by fate, misjudged his step. Down went the Emperor, landing headfirst onto the sharp edge of the stairs, which was stained red by the cup of wine he spilled. The pale moonlight gazed motionless at the now lifeless corpse at the base of the throne, a grave witness for a man devoured by his own greed. Shortly afterwards, the Terra Cottas, including Atlas with the drop of Blood engraved in his body, followed the Emperor into his grave. They were still bound by the ancient duty – to protect the Emperor in the Underworld.

The Terra Cottas never made it there.

Present Day – two days before Awakening

Two thousand years later, after the weather of time, the vegetation around the tomb withered and died, where only sand remained. An earthquake tore through the rocks guarding the grave's entrance, and the Terra Cottas saw once more the blazing glare of the sun. They were indeed masterpieces, handsome features carved from clay and hardened, skin toned to that of smooth yellow colour, easily mistaken for real skin. Sand slithered around the bodies of the Terra Cottas like snakes tightening around them, reminding them of their duty and slowly, gradually choking them back into the void they were created from. From

the awakening of the Terra Cottas came the roaring moan of a thousand soldiers from the endless slumber. There at the entrance stood a man in a three-piece suit and striped black tie, wearing a crooked smile on his face. The Terra Cottas could feel it. This was their master. The emperor's blood coursed in the man's veins. The ground trembled with fear as these frenzied machines made their way out of their graves. Amongst them walked Atlas. There was something wrong with him. The drop of Blood engraved inside him resisted the calling of his duty. He tripped and fell. Behind him, another Terra Cotta caught Atlas by the waist and, with incredible strength, flung him out of its way. Atlas crashed headfirst into an altar at the end of the tomb, where he fell unconscious. The Terra Cottas seemed to take no notice of Atlas. They climbed out of the tomb one by one as they followed the man, each a sandstorm set out to wreak havoc.

Present Day

Atlas opened his eyes, straining to focus his now blurry and disoriented vision. He seemed to be lying down in some kind of cave, with a layer of straw beneath him – a makeshift bed. A few feet beside him, the hooded figure sat with his back against the wall, head hung low and appeared to be dozing off. Atlas started to hoist himself up with his arms, only to fall on his left side with a soft thud. That was when he remembered the escape from the tomb, along with his lost arm. The noise Atlas made clearly startled the hooded figure, and his head snapped up, revealing the face underneath the hood. Atlas sat there motionless, staring straight ahead, every thought in his head now frozen with awe.

Beneath the hood was the face of a young maiden. She had a heart-shaped face, skin sparkling in the golden sunlight coming in from the opening of the cave. The sunlight drew shades on her face which added to the contrast of her soft nose, adding to her athlete look radiating with vitality. Pointed ears hid behind the hood, peering out just a bit. Wavy hair slid down her forehead, like a chestnut-brown waterfall veiling half of her face. Her aristocratic features were so perfect, as if the Creator has carved each curve by himself. The most special feature she had was her innocent, almond eyes that were staring back at Atlas. They seemed to possess some kind of allure, though Atlas knew not what it was. For a split second, Atlas thought he saw a streak of crimson spark across her iris, and immediately Atlas felt an immense need to kneel in front of her. Deep within his chest, the drop of Blood echoed with unison, Blood of the ancestor to the descendant. The Blood in Atlas and the blood of the girl came from the same origin. They were connected, but how?

“Em...Your arm...” The young girl pointed at Atlas' left arm and smiled apologetically, a shallow dimple appearing on her face. “I think it was torn off when you fought off the other mercenaries, and I bandaged it as best as I could. There was a lot of blood, though they had this weird sandy texture...” Atlas followed her long and slim fingers and saw his bandaged arm, an empty space where his left arm once was. Atlas started to speak, but only fragments of words left his mouth. “Water...sand...need water.” As he struggled to get up, the girl slid under his right arm and helped him, guiding him step after step to a piece of flat, layered rock where she left Atlas sitting beside it. “Wait here, you'll be safe in this cave. I'll go get you water from the well.” With that, the girl left the cave promptly, only to return a few minutes later with a moist watersack in her hand, drops of water dripping out from it. She started to raise the watersack to Atlas' lips, but Atlas stopped her by holding out his right hand and gently, taking extra care not to touch her to avoid another painful flashback, took it out of her hands. “Thank...you.” Atlas laid the watersack upright by the flat rock, and started to work. Beside him, the girl crossed her legs and sat down.

“I’m Athena,” Athena shrugged her shoulders and asked, “What’s your name?” Atlas grabbed fistfuls of sand from the ground and spread them over the rock, where he spread a thin layer of water on from time to time. “A...At...las” He struggled with his name, with his eyes locked onto the moist mold of clay swirling between his fingers. How long has it been since he spoke to anyone? “Atlas? That’s a nice name.” Athena said, looking at the shape of the clay now taking form. “I’m an archeologist studying the tomb we were in, it’s the tomb of the infamous Qin Shi Huang Di! Are you also an archaeologist after this exciting discovery? You don’t seem like the mercenaries that chased us.” Athena’s voice raised. “Those mercenaries were trying to steal the artifacts for the Black Market. They don’t have any respect for the historical values of the relics!” She thumped the wall with her fist. “I was really worried when I saw you fainted at the corner next to the altar. What were you doing there? It’s not very professional of you to try on the armor for the Terra Cottas, I couldn’t remove them after dragging you here.” Atlas eyed the girl with suspicion, for women were not as outgoing and certainly did not ask that many questions back in his days. He did not respond and kept on with his work, leaving a life-sized clay arm on the rock in no time.

“Wow, you’re really good with your hands,” Athena brightened up and complimented him. “Well, your hand, excuse me.” She chuckled lightly and then caught herself. “I’m sorry, I can’t imagine how hard it is for you to lose an arm, but making a clay one won’t bring it back...” Atlas said nothing. He took out a small pouch hanging around his neck and spread the contents, a reddish brown powder, all over his newly made arm. Before Athena could stop him, Atlas tore out his bandage with his right arm and, grunting, rubbed the cross-section with the remaining powder in his palm. He immediately connected the new arm and said to Athena, “Stay back.” Atlas pressed his right thumb and index finger near the new arm, and with a quick stroke, lit a small spark. The spark spread across Atlas’ arm as quick and fierce as a prairie fire. Tremendous heat began to erupt from his arm, blinding Athena temporarily with the white-hot flame. After the flames receded, Athena opened her eyes, jaw-dropped, to see Atlas checking out his now functioning left arm. “Thermite powder,” muttered Atlas, “perfect for quick repairs.”

“How’d you...” Stammered Athena, flabbergasted.

“I learnt sculpting before...I think?” Atlas carefully curled his fingers one by one as a cloud of sand wrapped around his new hand, restoring any cracks that were made by the bending, until all movement were as smooth as silk.

“No, I mean...You just made an arm from clay and recovered...” Athena’s eyes suddenly twinkled with fascination. “You’re a Terra Cotta! Oh my God, I don’t believe it! I’ve dealt with hundreds of artifacts before, but you, you’re by far the most intriguing one I’ve ever seen. An artifact that’s alive!” She raised her head upwards and laughed entrancingly, a melody that mesmerized Atlas. “Do you have memories of the past? Do you eat? What is your power source?” Athena started asking random questions.

“You are not afraid of me? I am no different from the others that attacked you.” asked Atlas. “Why would I be afraid of you? You saved me, after all. I know you have a heart, and that’s all I need to know.” laughed Athena. Deep within Atlas, the drop of Blood started to swirl after all these years, beating and pounding once more. Athena’s cellphone rang suddenly, which she took. “Wait a second. Slow down and tell me what’s happening...” Her face darkened as she spoke, and Atlas observed in silence. “All right, I’ll be there as soon as I can. He can’t be allowed to sell those artifacts for his own profit.” Athena hung up and sighed, before turning back to Atlas. “Have you seen this man before?” Athena pointed at her phone, and on the screen was a picture of the man Atlas saw at the entrance the night the

tomb reemerged. Atlas' chest heaved, and inside his torso the drop of Blood was choked by the surrounding clay tightly. "That is my master." Atlas said in an erratic, cold tone. "I must serve him."

"What? He is a businessman and an atrocious criminal! He is planning to sell the relics of your tomb on the black market, and your friends as well!" Athena widened her eyes and said. "I do not believe you." Atlas said matter-of-factly. "Our master shall honor our loyalty. You are trying to sway my loyalty for my master. Why is that?" Athena frowned and said, "I'm telling the truth. My sources are saying that the bid will take place in an abandoned warehouse in the city next Friday, three days from now. If we hurry we might make it in time to stop them." She eyed Atlas, who kept a blank face, and continued. "You may come with me to find out for yourself if you want to, but if we're going to do that, you'll need some new clothes. The ancient armor you're in won't do."

Athena led Atlas out of the cave, seeing that he had fully recovered and was as fit as a fiddle. After a half-an-hour walk, they arrived at a black jeep parked between two sand dunes. Athena grabbed a backpack from the trunk and gave it to Atlas. "Here, try these on. They're unisex so don't be embarrassed." She laughed. Atlas ignored the attempt on humor, took the bag and disappeared behind one of the sand dunes. After a long while of straining to get the clothes on, Atlas reappeared wearing a plain black t-shirt and a pair of khakis. "Hop on, cowboy." said Athena, climbing onto the jeep after packing Atlas' armor neatly and storing it into the trunk. Atlas glared at the gigantic beast in front of him, and a drop of sweat trickled down his face. "There is no way I am riding this bizzare chariot." He thought.

Within an hour, Atlas was on his way to the city, resorting to fetal position in the passenger seat in front. Grasping the handle by the door firmly, he told his story to Athena, who listened attentively with her hand behind the wheel. The more he talked, the more he felt like a living being, as if humanity had sprouted out in his mind like fresh lilies in the spring breeze. Athena asked him questions, guided him to discover the humanity residing deep within the drop of Blood inside him. He never knew when he was born. The only memory of his birth was of the old sculptor, and the ancient duty in his mind that ordered him to obey the bloodline of the emperor. "That is the sole purpose of my being." Atlas said. "I don't know," replied Athena, rubbing her chin, "I think your life means more than merely that." Atlas stared right ahead and fell silent. The drop of Blood in his chest agreed with Athena. It told Atlas he could leave this war. He could break the chains of his duty. He could live his life freely. But who is he to think that he could be free from his duty? The sand python that repaired his body now wrapped around it, threatening to crush him into a pulp if he were to disobey a single command from the emperor's descendant. Atlas closed his eyes and slept, leaving Athena to the humming of the engines.

A knock on the shoulder woke Atlas. Night has fallen. Through his squinted eyes, Atlas saw a large, worn warehouse standing in solace. It was surrounded by tall buildings, but somehow seemed to be an oasis in a concrete jungle. Beside him Athena parked the jeep. Although everything seemed new to Atlas, he did not pay much attention to his surroundings, for the calling of the emperor was strong as ever. "Come with me, and stay quiet." Athena was on high alert after she saw the dark-green helicopter on the roof of the warehouse. She surveyed the surroundings, and sneaked to the back of the warehouse with Atlas following closely behind. With a few strides and thrusts up the wall, Athena and Atlas were peering into the warehouse from a side window, a soft frail light coming out of it that shone upon their faces.

The first thing Atlas saw was the emperor's descendant. In the black suit, he looked

surprisingly familiar to the Qin Shi Huang Di, with his crooked nose and a sly smile. Atlas raised his fist about to shatter the window, jump down and swear his loyalty to the man, when Athena caught his arm, and shook her head. She pointed to her ear and whispered, “Listen.” Atlas stiffened, for he did not realize what he was about to do. The sand python was controlling him like strings on a puppet. In the warehouse came the descendant’s voice, as well as a few others. “I’m glad we have a deal, Mr Sanders.” The descendant said. “So do I, Mr Qin.” Sanders replied with a coarse voice. “Thirty million dollars in diamonds for the spoils from the Qin Shi Huang Tomb, including all the Terra Cottas and the stamp of the legendary sculptor, Zhuang. He branded his name onto the Terra Cottas he made, and I want it to complete my private collection. Here’re the diamonds, now I want my goods.”

“That would be correct, except...” Qin snapped his fingers. In marched an entire army of Terra Cottas, each with their specific weapons. The ground shook with each step they took. “I think you might want to hand over your suitcase, for I’d hate to pry off your fingers from it later on.” The Terra Cottas formed a barrier between Qin and Sanders, weapons raised. “This is a mista...” Sanders never finished his sentence. The Terra Cotta in front of him sliced him in half. Next to Sanders’ corpse, his gunmen opened fire. The warehouse was filled with explosions and gunshots, flashes of light illuminating the old brick walls of the warehouse. Cries from the gunmen were heard, and the splatter of blood on ground could be seen clearly. Atlas saw something small with smoke coming out, something which he had not seen before, coming towards them. He did not duck.

The explosion hit them right on. As the smoke subsided, Atlas found himself in the middle of the bodies stained red, surrounded by Terra Cottas delivering final bows to the gunmen. He looked up and saw Athena climbing up onto the construction platform just below a large gaping hole where the window had been. Qin was clearly dazed, but regained his composure after he picked up the bloodied suitcase. “Well, well, well, who do we have here? Isn’t this Miss Zhuang, who tried so hard to stop my business from prospering? And this is...” Qin motioned at Atlas, only to wave his hand immediately afterwards. “It doesn’t matter. You’ll die now anyway. Terra Cottas, on my command, kill them all.” Athena pulled out a gun and took aim at Qin. There was a quiver in her voice. Was it anger? “Take your hands off my family’s relics. They do not belong to you.” Qin laughed hysterically. “You really think that pathetic little gun is going to stop my mighty army? They were made to serve me, undead soldiers I can do anything to. Your family did not stop mine for centuries. You cannot change that fate now. Terra Cottas, attack!” The Terra Cottas did not move. They snarled at Atlas. “Traitor...You betrayed us all...How could you...” Atlas snarled back. “Stand down. The emperor is not what you think he is. We are in this together.”

“Stupid slaves! Do something!” Qin was unnerved at Athena pointing her gun at him, and his Terra Cottas not moving an inch. “You were made to serve me! There is no meaning in your lives except for protecting me!” Athena widened her eyes. “Shut up,” she said, and fired. Qin yelped as a Terra Cotta shattered to pieces after jumping in between Athena and Qin. “The next shot will blow your brains out, unless you leave all the artifacts behind.” Athena shouted. Qin, clearly panicking, spun around and dashed up the stairs, running for his helicopter. Athena went into hot pursuit.

Atlas dared not move a muscle. He was outnumbered greatly. “You betrayed the master... You should have been dead...” The Terra Cottas chanted. “No, I am alive.” Said Atlas, softening his voice. “The master we had did not respect us. You saw for yourselves, he called you worthless slaves. He did not respect the history and memory of the peasants who died so that we could be born. He is not our master.” A feeling of uneasiness fell over the Terra

Cottas. “Cannot betray...Sole purpose...Protect...” Some of them shook their heads. The sand python gripped Atlas’ throat, but the drop of Blood inside him kept on going. “We are not created for nothing but to support a tyrant! We embody the will and lives of all those who sacrificed under the reign of terror! We have our free will, given by the humanity inside each and every one of us!” The Terra Cottas shifted uneasily. Some crumpled into sand, swallowed by their own sand pythons, for they were unable to face and escape the duty branded into their bodies. Others slowly nodded their heads, and dropped their weapons. Atlas, relieved, took a deep breath. That was when a gunshot was heard on the rooftop. Instinctively, Atlas ran for the stairs, leaving the Terra Cottas below in deep thought.

Atlas busted through the door and reached the roof, under the pale moonlight. Athena was lying on the roof, both hand clasping her abdomen. Getting off the roof was Qin in his helicopter, one hand holding the handle by the side of the sliding door and another one holding his suitcase. “You’ll never get me!” hollered Qin. “I’ve got what I want, and you Terra Cottas can go kill yourselves for not doing what you were supposed to do!” Atlas looked around and saw a few broken metal rods from a nearby television antenna. “The only thing we are supposed to do,” said Atlas, picking up a metal rod, “was to protect the memory of all the people who made us. How they left their blessing to their descendants. Not to aid you in your crimes.” He took aim, and threw the metal rod like a javelin with all his might. The rod streaked through the night, and buried itself into the hand of Qin holding the suitcase. Qin let out a cry of pain, and slipped. The suitcase began to fall. Qin cried out, “No!” and reached forward with his other arm to grab the suitcase. Perhaps by chance, perhaps by fate, Qin misjudged his step. Down he fell, desperately trying to grab hold of his suitcase in midair, and disappeared into the jaws of buildings below, into the abyss. The pale moonlight gazed on motionless, yet another grave witness for a man following the footsteps of his ancestor. There is nothing new under the sun, and the same goes for the moon.

Atlas kneeled before Athena and took her hands, examining her wound. It was a gunshot, possibly by Qin. Athena’s breaths were short and jagged. “Did I, did I stop him? Did I protect my family’s legacy? Are the Terra Cottas safe from him now?” She asked. “Yes, you did.” Replied Atlas, devastated and hopeless now. The person who had awoken the drop of humanity inside him, the person who had given him hope and the courage for free will, the person who guided him back to the Land of the Living, when he had his eyes focused on the Land of the Dead, was dying. “I wish we had met under better circumstances,” said Athena, her voice almost inaudible now, “You would’ve made a great friend.” Her eyes closed, and her breathing strained. The sand python gripped Atlas, cracking his body. Atlas closed his eyes to accept his fate. From sand he was born, and to sand he would return.

No.

Atlas snapped open his eyes. The sand python was gone. The drop of Blood inside him grew warmer and warmer. He realized that it was the Blood that kept his soul on the right path. From a blessing he was born, and a blessing he shall return to. Atlas straightened his fingers, and drove his right hand inside his torso. Out of his torso he tore the drop of Blood, and allowed it to rest in his palm. His world was falling apart. With one hand he steadied Athena’s wound, and turned his palm to drop the Blood onto the wound. After two thousand years, the drop of Blood finally continued its journey, and reached the wound. Misty fumes evolved from the wound, and the wound began to heal, like liquid gold melting back to cover the crimson again. Athena’s breathing steadied, still slow but calm. Beside her, Atlas’ breathing relaxed, softening, until it dissolved into the night breeze. By the time the brilliant golden rays of the Sun kissed Athena’s closed eyelids, Atlas was already gone.

Blind Faith

West Island School, Chen, Serena - 15

42 years ago, in the land of the undiscovered, a soft wind returned hope to the forgotten. There, 8000 warriors called. All of them were frozen in time, each with their own individual features and expressions. But they all had one thing in common. They were all stiff, color-faded, and worn. A result from being buried underground for thousands of years. They were like careful works of art that never got to see the light. Like masterpieces that had been long lost, neglected, and blind.

Like me.

Light is a distant shadow. There is no spark, no glint, nothing. No matter how hard I try to search for it, everywhere I look is coated in layers of thick darkness.

“Scrub,” the voice commanded hoarsely. I sighed and did as I was told, knowing that whatever I said wouldn't make a difference. Beads of sweat rolled down my temple as I worked. My knees trembled as I slowly counted the dreaded seconds that passed, trying to ignore the burning ache that was slowly spreading up my arms. Praying for a distraction, I closed my eyes and let my thoughts drift...

“Evan,” my father's voice called from a distance. I followed his sound, trying to ignore the fact that he was adopting the nickname my mother had given me. It didn't work. “My name is Evelyn, dad” I yelled back, hoping he would hear me. That was the sixth time I had to remind him. I complained to myself silently as I made my way across the house. As always, I placed my hands in front of me to be sure I wouldn't run into anything. Mother used to help me around a lot, but gave up after I saved up for my white cane. Father was in his workshop. No surprise there. I knew I arrived when my palms brushed against the old wooden door that was weak and cursed with splinters. Slowly, I pushed it open, keeping in mind that too much pressure could snap it off its hinges. The sweet scent of pine and damp earth filled my nose. “Come here,” father instructed, sounding much clearer now. He had a deep and almost soothing voice, a wonderful sound. “Careful now,” he said, slipping something into my hands. The clay was slimy and soft, obviously not completely molded yet. It was a funny shape, not one father had given me before. Curiously, I slipped my fingers around it. There was something familiar about it, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what

it was. “A warrior,” father told me, “Terracotta warrior”.

“Oh,” I handed the clay back to him, wiping my hands on the half-worn cloth he handed me.

“A great part of history. The warriors were discovered in a unsuspected place, buried deep underground where few people dared to explore,” he explained.

“But how were they found if they couldn’t be seen?” I asked.

“To see is to believe, but to feel is the truth, Evan,” he said simply. I heard a smile in his voice as he spoke. The nickname didn’t bother me anymore. It was fine when father said it, I decided. “I don’t understand.” I heard him stroke his chin thoughtfully, his fingers brushing lightly over what sounded like sandpaper. “Do you feel this thick coating around the warrior?” He handed the clay back to me. I nodded. “That is armor. It is a soldier’s guard. It, like you, is unable to see light, reflecting it away from the warrior’s body. Yet no man can go into battle without it.” I smiled slightly. Armor. I tested the strange new English word in my head. It sounded strong and indestructible. A surge of pride ran through my veins. Warmth washed through me as I said it over and over again. Armor. I smiled. It was a good word.

The sound of shattering glass snapped me awake.

There were very few classes that my school allowed me to attend. My family couldn’t afford to send me to a special learning center. You’re not disabled, father had said harshly, as if the thought that someone would call me that disgusted him.

“Clean it up,” the voice commanded.

“With what?” I asked, baffled.

“Use what you have,” the janitor replied dully. All I was given was a damp washcloth. There was no point in arguing. I knelt down, brushing my hands against the floor to find the pieces of the shattered vase. I felt beads of glass cut into my palms. Something warm trickled down my fingers. “Help me,” I pleaded. “I can’t see.”

“I know that,” he said indifferently. There were no signs of sympathy in his voice. My heart pounded. I swallowed hard. “Take this as a lesson Evelyn,” he sounded almost bored, but there was a slight tone of amusement in his voice. “You can’t see. But you can walk, no? You can speak and you can hear. Why not focus on that instead. Or do you want to remain weak for the rest of your life?” My face burned, yet the darkness in front of me loomed on. “Don’t you dare cry, you have no right to show me disrespect, you insolent girl,” he spat. “You’re lucky that this school took you in the first place. If you can’t read or write, the least you can do is make yourself useful.” I clenched my fists, feeling glass digging in into my skin. The darkness loomed on. “Don’t expect people to pity you here. You may be blind, but we can all see straight through you. Clear as the glass vases you seem to find so difficult to clean.” A fire rose to my throat, a different kind of pain forming within me. It was a thick, sorrowful ache that spread from my stomach to my chest and the rest of my body. Screaming inside, I bit my tongue, knowing that a single slip in words could lead to unspeakable consequences. So I said nothing, knowing that he still saw me as the less superior, considering my disability as a weakness. But talking back now wasn’t going to change that. I could almost feel the janitor smirking beside me. Hopeless, I squeezed my eyes shut and forced back tears, letting the fire engulf me.

After a while, I heard him get up. Unmoving, I listened to his footsteps make their way across the room. I longed for the squeezed feeling to leave me, but it was a feeling I was used to by now. I stayed crouched on the floor even as the loud clinking sounds his shoes made against the wooden floorboards faded. And I waited for him to close the doors on me.

“There she is again. Careful Evelyn, don’t run into anything.” I sighed. I knew that

horribly familiar voice. “Leave me alone Tess,” I said, calmly as I could.

“I can’t believe they haven’t kicked you out yet,” she sneered. “You don’t belong in this school.” She wasn’t alone. I heard others snickering behind her. My fists clenched again. I knew I shouldn’t let her get to me, but she was right. I didn’t belong here. This was a school for normal kids, seeing kids. How did I ever think I could compete with that? I ducked my head and kept walking. My heart banged in my chest. My hands throbbed, numb with pain from the cuts I got. “You’re not one of us Evelyn,” I heard Tess call after me. “Don’t forget it.” How is it possible for someone to keep an enemy for such a long period of time? I’ve been enrolled here for months, and people were still laughing at me. Why hasn’t it stopped by now? Heat rushed to my face. The corridors raced past me as I urged myself to walk faster. In my head, I pictured the map of the school that father had read to me the night before my first day here. Tess’s voice echoed on behind me. Don’t run into anything. I pulled my cardigan hood over my head and closed my eyes. It’s not like I could tell the difference anyway.

For a small school that I’ve gone to for so long, one would wonder how it was possible to get lost. That was probability different in my case. Panicking, I waved my hands in front of me, desperately searching for something to hold on to. The walls felt like they were caving in around me. Suddenly, a door creaked open. I froze, hearing my heartbeat in my ears as voices appeared in the hallway.

“I don’t see why I need to stay with her all the time,” the first voice said. My head thumped, I knew that voice. “All you need to do is keep her out of trouble,” the second voice said roughly.

“She can’t even see, what’s the worse she can do?” the janitor said. I heard footsteps. Quickly, I started backing in the direction I came from. “You may be surprised,” the second voice sounded thoughtful. My breath caught. The headmaster. “Then why is she still here?” the janitor complained. There was a pause. Terror ran through me. I leaned my head onto the wall, my fingers clawing at the concrete, as if it was enough to hide me. How far away were they? Did they see me? They began walking again. I sighed in relief, but braced myself to run, refusing to think about what they would do if they caught me. Just before I turned round a corner, I heard the headmaster say, “She won’t be much longer.”

I ran. Thoughts whirled through my mind as the hallways flew past me. The school was a maze of corridors. What did the headmaster mean? My heart pounded, as if trying to escape me, to escape everything. Voices surrounded me. We see straight through you. You don’t belong here. Go away. Don’t be disrespectful. Stop. You’re not one of us. “Stop!” I yelled through tears. Something caught my shoe. The air rushed beneath me for a brief second. Then, I collapsed.

I hated it. I hated the way I was treated. I hated myself for not being normal. My head swirled. Pain spread through my chest. I wanted to rip away the blackness. I wanted to see their awful expressions, look him them in the eye and force them to take back every terrible thing they’ve said to me.

But I couldn’t.

And the darkness loomed on.

Because there was only one feeling stronger than the pain I felt. There was one desire bigger than the will for revenge. It was a feeling that came from deep inside, overwhelming and inescapable. It was something that ate me up whole, leaving no remains, and never spared a second thought.

Fear.

That evening, I sat outside father’s workshop. It’s been a while since I’ve been here. After

starting school, I couldn't bring myself to visit him much anymore, because I was alone, and I was ashamed. I wanted it all to go away. Hugging my knees, I prayed under my breath. Would father listen? He had tried so hard to find a proper school for me. He told me once that children should never shout at their elders. And I never have. I heard him and his tools through the door of his workshop, working away tirelessly. It was usually impossible to get his attention when he was focused like this. He would be disappointed in me. Mercilessly, the blazing sensation had crawled up from my chest to my throat. I shook my head, swallowing so hard my neck was sore from the effort. I thought I would scream, but it had the opposite effect. All that came out was a single tear, and with that, a whisper in plea. "Please make it stop." And just like that, the sound of working tools faded.

I kneeled, resting my hands on the wooden floor. Its cool, smooth surface eased my aching fingers, sending a thrill of warmth through my body. The cuts in my palms stung, but that was easily bearable. Father shut the door behind me. I wondered what his workshop looked like. The air was cooler than I remembered, but the smell of pine and wood remained unchanged. I smiled. It felt good to smile again. Quietly, I heard father sit down beside me. He took my hand. "Where'd you get those?" he asked, touching one of my cuts. Suddenly, all my doubts vanished. I thought that father was disappointed in me if I told him, that the shame I carried would also bring shame to him. But sitting here now, all those thoughts seemed silly. And I knew. Piled in front of me was my dignity, my strength, my home.

My escape.

We sat in silence as I waited for father to consider his response. His tone surprised me, his voice tight and uneasy. "...I suspected it," he said.

"What?" I stood up, bewildered. "And you didn't do anything?"

"Let me explain," he caught my hand. I tried to shake it free. My chest ached. "I didn't want to hurt you. If I had warned you, you would have believed that it was something out of your control!"

"But I was hurt," I shouted. "And you didn't help me."

"I'm sorry," he said. His voice rang with guilt and shame, but it also almost firm. I had no energy to yell anymore. "Why?" I whispered. Father sighed.

"I wasn't going to let you endure it for much longer," he admitted. "But there was something I needed you to understand." I stopped trying to escape his grasp. What was so important that he had to put me through this? He stood up too, wrapping his arm around my shoulder. "Evan," he said softly. "There will always be people who won't understand you, people who will discriminate and bully you because of the way that you are. When you were born, I expected it to happen, and I was prepared to fight it."

"Then why didn't you?"

"I promised myself that I would wait for you to come to me first."

"Why?"

"Because one day, I won't be here to defend you. And when that day comes, I need to know that you are strong enough to stand up for yourself. I want you to realize that it's okay to ask for help, from anyone that will listen. And it is not a weakness, it is courage."

"I don't understand."

"Come with me," he took my hand again, leading me. I heard squeaking from a door opening, a different door. Unexpectedly, a gust of wind swept my hair back. Under my feet, I felt rocks and soil where smooth floorboards used to be. I stumbled. Father caught me before releasing my hand. I heard him walk back into the workshop. What was he doing? Fearful of falling again, I sat down. Cautiously, I put my hands down first to make sure the rocks

were stable. When father returned, he handed me something. I recognized it immediately. “Armor,” I said. He chuckled. “When terracotta warriors were discovered, the land where they were buried was no different from the rest,” he spoke familiar words, but I frowned, still confused. He explained, “What you see on the surface should never be the first to be judged or trusted. Only when you dig deeper will you find priceless treasure. You should never feel guilty for the way someone else sees you. What matters is that you are good inside, and remain faithful in the people who truly care about you.” I nodded. He held me closer. “I wanted you to build your own armor, and that’s what you did. You are strong, my girl. And you will be alright.”

Maybe sight wasn’t what I was missing after all. Something rang in the back of my mind, words that my father had told me what seemed like far too long ago. To see is to believe, but to feel is the truth. Only now do I understand what he had meant.

In the land of the undiscovered, a soft wind returned hope to the forgotten.

Over my head, I could feel the cool evening breeze, contrasting with the warmth of the setting sun. I could hear the birds sing a day-to-day tune that I hadn’t truly recognized until now. Through the rough texture of the rocks underneath me, I could picture the dull, sandy color they may be. But light is still a distant shadow. And no matter how hard I try to search for it, everywhere I look is coated in layers of thick darkness.

I shut my eyelids, but the view never changes. I understand now. This is the truth, and I was ready to accept it.

I opened my eyes. And for the first time ever, I could see everything.



Fiction

Group 5

The Terracotta Artist

Korean International Springboard Programme, Mak, Arthur - 13

My name is Arthur Mak. I was the best sculpture maker in the village. I spent days creating sculptures of dead people so that their relatives could honour their tombs. Then one day, a person came to the village and ordered me to travel to Xian. When I arrived there, I saw the realistic models of soldiers, horses and chariots all lined up to guard the Emperor in the afterlife. I was told that I must make as many of these sculptures as possible. The work was hard as each one took over a month to make. My sculptures were amongst the best of the warriors and I was chosen to meet the Emperor and make a life sculpture of him. I was scared to meet the Emperor, many of my friends had told me that if he didn't like my sculpture he would have me killed. The Emperor was kind to me when I met him. He said nicely "Good luck and try your best!". I didn't know that he was such a nice ruler and I think he was a little misunderstood. When I had finished, the sculpture looked perfect and the Emperor loved it. I was rewarded with a box of treasure and allowed to go home. I used the treasure to open my own art studio to help other artists.

Wario and Mario go to Xi'An

Korean International Springboard Programme, Lin, Adrian - 10

Wario is a 9 years old boy who lives with his dad, Mario, in Shenzhen, China. It was December 2014 and they were about to head out to Xi'An for their Christmas trip. They took a train to Xi'An Station and the journey took about 30 hours. They checked in at the Westin hotel and took a rest for one full day.

The next morning, they went on a tour to visit the Terra Cotta army. They learned that the army was built to look after Qin Shi Huang after he dies. Suddenly, one of the warrior figures moved. He started to dance and moved from left to right. And all the other warriors started to dance too. Rock music came on and it was a big Christmas party. Mario, Wario, all the tourists and the Terra Cotta army enjoyed the party.



Fiction

Group 6

Terracotta Dream Visit

Korean International Springboard Programme, Leung, Nicholas - 16

I'm Nicholas the newspaper boy from Hong Kong and it is my dream to see the Terracotta Warriors. It wasn't easy saving up the money. I had to work really hard but I knew I had save some money. I packed my bag with two sets of clothes, some money and my passport.

The next thing I know I am on dragonair on my way. I told myself, "Xian here I come to fulfill my dream to see the Terracotta Warriors."

I was extremely excited and happy as soon as the plane landed on the airstrip. Finally I was in mainland China-Beijing.

It was a hot sunny day in July a proper summer day. I came out of the immigration and customs and it was nearly mid morning.

At the airport I made an enquiry how to reach the train station. I had to take a train to Xian. They told me to take a local bus which is the cheapest way to reach the train station.

I reached the train station at 12:02 pm. I went to the ticket window and got the ticket for my journey at 14:22 pm. I was told the train to Xian would reach there at 6am in the morning. The journey was long, it took 14 hours and 45 minutes. I had to go for a seat which is a hard sleeper costing me 45 us dollars. I could not afford a soft sleeper.

After a tough, tough night on the hard sleeper I finally reached Xian. I decided to join the local tour with the other international tourists. When I walked into the museum and saw the statues I could not believe my eyes. To my surprise the room was gigantic there were the Warriors standing in huge long lanes the sight was so beautiful that I cannot describe it in words. Each warrior was different. How I wished I could have seen them coloured in their original colours.

I left Xian with that happiest feeling and my dream to see the Terracotta Warriors was complete!