



Fiction

Group 1

Ellie's Adventure in Shanghai

Kennedy School, Lai, Charisse – 7

Ellie Macassy loves deer and dogs especially fawns and Chihuahuas. She has a pet Chihuahua called Charlie. In an autumn, Ellie traveled to Shanghai with her mom, dad, and of course, Charlie.

The weather had gotten cooler. Ellie was eating brunch at Mr. and Mrs. Bund. Everything was going fine until she realized Charlie was gone. Ellie remembered Charlie liked the Bund area. Quickly telling her parents, she ran fast to the Bund hoping her dog went back to enjoy the lovely breeze along the river.

Unfortunately, when Ellie got to the end of the Bund, Charlie was not there! Frantically, Ellie looked around the nearby shops. She wished Charlie had gone into a shop to find a bone or a toy. Ellie knocked on each door asking the shop owners if they had seen a brown, furry, small dog happily walking alone. She even asked tourists and passerby too. A shop owner told Ellie to search in Huangpu Park. Ellie agreed.

Ellie walked along the pavement leading to Huangpu Park. At the corner of her eye, she saw something silvery. “Could it be a coin?” She wondered. It wasn’t a coin; it was a bell. Ellie recognized that bell. “That is Charlie’s bell!” She cried. “It must have fallen off from Charlie!” There were lots of trees in Huangpu Park. She whistled her dog’s favorite tune. But there was no dog, nor the sign of Charlie.

Ellie looked around and saw a Yenom bank. She ran inside to look for her dog. It was absolutely a mess. The ladies were screaming and someone had turned on the emergency button. It was noisy, and the floor was covered in muddy footprints. They were dog’s footprints! Ellie followed them... until she saw a sign saying “This way to Mr. Fanoose’s Fabric Factory”. “Oh no!” Ellie moaned. “What if Charlie makes a mess there too? What am I going to do?”

As Ellie approached the gate, the muddy footprints led to an even BIGGER muddy puddle. “Oh great.” Ellie moaned silently. The old factory surrounded by ivy was very big, bigger than a mansion. Ellie snuck inside and looked around for Charlie. “There he is!” Ellie shouted quietly. Charlie was on the neatly made fabric leaving muddy paw prints on it.

Suddenly, Mr. Fanoose burst through the front door. “WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?” He roared. “Uh, um” mumbled the workers. “There’s a dog running all over our new fabric and leaving mud prints on it.” said one worker. Ellie ran out of her hiding place. “Stop!” She pleaded. “This is my dog. If you let me have my dog, I know how to make this situation better.” Ellie cried. “OK” said Mr. Fanoose. “Tell me HOW to make this situation BETTER!” He commended.

“These fabrics with the paw prints are actually quite pretty.” Ellie announced. “Hmm... you’re right!” Mr. Fanoose interrupted. “Alright!” Mr. Fanoose shouted over the loud speaker. “WE HAVE A NEW DESIGN! PAW PRINT FABRIC!”

Ellie said goodbye to Mr. Fanoose. She reached into her pocket hoping there might be some coins for her to take a rickshaw back to the restaurant. “Now you need a bath, Charlie.” said Ellie. SPLASH! Ellie and Charlie fell into the mud puddle. “Uh oh, now both of us need a bath!” laughed Ellie.

The Heroes of Old Shanghai City

Kingston International School, Doo, Damian – 7

Once upon a time there was a peaceful city called Old Shanghai City. Old Shanghai City was super hot and the city had almost caught a fire on each house! Even the temple almost caught on fire too. The king had a friend and he was very creative because he had many powers. He had: leaf power, fire power, water power, grass power and many different powers. The king had no guards but just one guard. “Protect the temple! Or else someone will steal gold from us,” the king told the guard. “Okey dokey king!” said the guard.

So the king went off to find his friend. One hour later he finally found his friend and the king told him that each house in the city had almost caught on fire! His friend was very surprised. So they went on a plane. Then they flew back to Old Shanghai City.

When they were there the entire city was burnt and on fire! So the king’s friend used his water power to put out the fire. But it didn’t work. So the king called all the firemen. But it didn’t work. The king’s friend figured out the fire was alive! He needed his brother, so king’s friend called. “Brother, can you help me put out the fire in Shanghai?” “Em... okay,” said his brother.

So his brother came but he didn’t feel like he wanted to fight the fire. He was just pretending to be very sick. So the king tried to figure the fire. He thought and he thought, then he had a very good idea!

“I have a plan. If both of you use all of your powers, we can fight the fire,” the king told his friend and his brother. So they worked together. And it worked! The fire was almost gone. They kept fighting the fire. “We are the heroes!” they said. But... the water power was too strong and it broke the houses! “Oopsy daisy!” They said together.

The fire was gone. “Hip hip hooray!” said the entire city. “For the king, his friend and his brother!” “Thank you. I have another idea,” said the king. “We can build a secret garden.” “Let’s call it the Royal Garden, okay?” the king’s friend said. “Sure. Let’s build it first my friend. Please tell all the people that we want to a garden,” said the king. “Okey dokey king!” said the friend.

The king’s friend went off to tell that the king had a very good idea. Then he told everyone to bring the material. “First give me ninety nine bricks. Second give me sixty five rocks. Third give me thirty nine pieces of wood. Forth give me a lot of soil. And finally we will build,” the friend told everyone. “First we need to build a circle with bricks.” “But how do we use bricks to make a circle?” said his brother. “Easy,” said the king. “Give me one block and put it horizontally. Then give me sixty five blocks and put it like this. Okay?”

The king and his friends only finished half of the garden before they died in 1989. Then the workers destroyed it because they wanted to build another one and call it with another name. They called it Yu Yuan. The workers built it. And inside the garden there was the jade rock that had seventy two holes!

Yu Yuan garden is very peaceful because it very quiet.

Old Shanghai

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Ding, William – 8

My name is SAN MAO. Yes! As you know, I am the boy that only has three ‘hairs’. I was born in Old Shanghai, My father is Zhang Leping, the famous cartoonist. Old Shanghai was the same as my childhood, poor and weak but full of vitality and hope.

I had no house to live, I lived outside the door of a “shikumen” in a narrow alley called “longtang”. Even now, it is rich with nostalgic charm. Every morning, I got up early to sell newspapers. I was the first boy who knew all the news about Old Shanghai. My customers were multifarious. He or she might be a capitalist, a worker, a starlet, or a mafia boss. Some of them might give me a tip.

But merely relied on selling newspapers is not enough, I must also do other work. The Racetrack or the Nanjing Road was the most lively place, there were many rich men or women there, and I polished shoes for them.

After I got my reward, I would go to the town’s god temple to eat some Old Shanghai’s snacks, such as fried baozi, steamed BBQ Pork Bun, or fried dough sticks. By the way, I could also enjoy a bowl of soybean milk, it was free!

Except physical food, I also had my spiritual food. There were many picture-story book stalls all over the streets. I often looked for my favorite books at the stalls.

From these books, I knew that Old Shanghai was a very special place in the Eastern part of China. It was a melting pot of semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. It mixed the western and eastern cultures together. Old Shanghai was referred to as “Paris of the East” and also as “paradise for adventurers.” Narrow alleys and exotic buildings, robes jackets and stylish business suits were all commonplace. National heroes and big traitors, the poorest and the richest, coexist in this city. Thus, good and evil mixed together on the seedy streets of this “Paris of the East.”

At the stalls, I could find << SAN MAO Huckleberry Finn>> or << Winter Of Three Hairs>>. That was the story of me! It was the darkest memories of poor people in Old Shanghai. For the rich, Old Shanghai was the Paramount, was the big bright cinema, was the Hualian shopping mall, were Miles with foreign, garden houses. But for the poor like me, Old Shanghai was the hell. In winter, I had no clothes, not enough food, and no house, I could only wandered around in the street...

Nevertheless, Old Shanghai is my hometown. A piece of land belongs to China. I love it! I believe that New Shanghai has become rich, democratic and powerful since liberation.

The Battle of Shanghai

Sha Tin Junior School, Chu, Cyrus - 7

Once upon a time, there was a place called the Old City of Shanghai, it was a little community. The city was clean, but old fashioned, there were humps on the top of roofs made from ceramic plates. In the middle there was a big temple, which was also known as the army headquarters. One day, a fleet of Japanese pirates suddenly decided to declare an attack on the city. The pirates wore red, white and blue clothes, looking furious and they sought to conquer the city for themselves. Their ships all had bone and skull cross flags hoisted up and a big sail with a wooden body. The citizens were shrieking with fear, trying to hide and get cover. Some people also tried to fight back, but it was no use. The old city fought hard to fend off the attack, but most homes were destroyed in battle. When all hope was nearly lost, one of the soldiers said “What we’re using is no use! We need a new tactic!”

Another soldier said, “Let’s use cannons and bombs!”

“Sure” everyone agreed. Soon after, the pirate ships were all destroyed! Forcing the pirate fleet to fall back. All of the Chinese soldiers cheered “Victory!”.

Meanwhile, at the army headquarters, the generals had to plan what to do to stop the Japanese pirates from attacking the old city ever again. One of them had a plan, he said “Let’s build a big wall out of rocks and bricks so the Japanese pirates cannot attack us using their cannons again”.

“Good thinking!” the general exclaimed. Immediately, they ordered the builders to begin building the big wall. It took about two months to complete, but eventually they finished and it was glorious. The wall was as tall as a palm trees, it was red and purple, surrounding the city in a large circle. There was also a little entrance at the side so that people could leave and re-enter.

Not long after, the pirates returned with an even stronger attack. They tried to battle their way through, but fortunately for the Chinese the wall held up strong. “This is useless” said the captain. “Our cannons cannot shoot through the wall” yelled one of the pirates. “Our ships are being completely destroyed and we’ve gotten no progress.” The pirates were forced to give up and retreated in defeat, never daring to coming back again. The Japanese pirates lost and the Old City of Shanghai won the war!

That night the city had a huge celebration at the town hall. Fireworks filled the dark night sky, the banquet hall was beautifully decorated, they had a big feast. There were noodles, jelly, seafood of all sorts and a tall large cake in the centre. Music also rang through the celebration and everyone drank loads.

From then on, the day the Old City of Shanghai won against the Japanese pirates became a public holiday, calling for celebrating across the city.

The Three Concessions

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Chau, Tsz Ling Alessandra – 7

Old Shanghai in the early 1900s was a vibrant and flourishing city with a huge trading port. The city itself was divided up into concessions ruled by the British, French and Americans all with their own mesmerizing culture, fashion and music, which brought Shanghai to life.

Unfortunately, I lived in the walled Chinese city of Shanghai but was fascinated by the sophisticated lifestyle in the concessions and longed to explore there...

One cold and frosty December night after pondering curiously about what was over the walled Chinese city, I fell into a deep sleep and found myself at Le Grande Monde in the French concession. As I looked around with my eyes wide open in amazement, there were theatres, cafes, restaurants, gaming rooms and cinemas everywhere. Le Grande Monde was alive with music, entertainment and laughter. It was bustling with people who warmly greeted each other with a peck on each cheek and said “Bonsoir” to each other. The French women were very thin and chic. They had an air of “Je ne sais quoi” about them and carried themselves elegantly. Women in the other concessions were so envious of them. As for the men, they were smartly dressed in tailored suits. I felt so out of place in my shabby old clothes, which were handed down to me from my sister.

With a jolt out of the blue, I was whisked away to the British concession and found myself in the British residents’ Shanghai Club. The men were happily knocking back whisky in front of a roaring hot fire and talking animatedly to each other in business language that was alien to me. They were dressed in lounge coats and dark trousers and were smoking out of pipes. They had an authoritarian air to them and looked very serious. The women, however, were seated in a corner sewing and reading peacefully a world away from the business banter of the men.

I found myself in the American concession at the Majestic cabaret, which was full of American sailors who were brash and loud. They were swigging beer from bottles and walking around unsteadily on their feet. Their ship had just docked earlier that day and they were letting off steam or drowning out their own miseries.

On stage, there were beautifully dressed professional dancers, who were oblivious to the rowdy crowd. Then, crash, bang, wallop, a huge fight started out. There were blows everywhere and one very drunk soldier even landed at the bottom of my feet startling me. His face was all twisted and bloodied. In no time, the ballroom of the Majestic was a seething mass of wildly flaying arms and feet as the sailors ripped into each other with heavy blows...

“Time for school! And stop frowning!” Mum yelled. After all these, I realised the adult world was too complicated and I was not ready to grow up yet. Perhaps a simple life was not a bad thing after all.



Fiction
Group 2

New Tales of Old Shanghai

Creative Primary School, De'eb, Chiara Bridget – 11

In a damp street of old Shanghai, a girl walked out of a dark building. She was wearing a ragged dress, which could have been beautiful long ago. She had come from an errand to buy more silk for the dresses she was busy making. Mei Ling had a very hard life as a seamstress under the evil hand of her Mistress Ms Huang. Tonight she was especially tired. She stumbled, and as she fell down she banged the building's wall. Some plaster came loose and when she looked at the wall more closely, she saw a little piece of black cloth sticking out. Mei Ling looked around but luckily the street was deserted. She carefully took the cloth out of the wall and when she opened it she saw a piece of golden jewellery. It was probably worth a fortune. She quickly hid it, as this was her ticket to freedom and hopefully she could use the money to find her grandmother down in the South.

Mei Ling knew she would have trouble selling it, so she waited patiently. And finally, her chance came when a French customer came to Ms Huang's workshop with her daughter who looked about her age and demanded a beautiful gown in the colour of cherry red to be sewn. Ms Huang appointed Mei Ling to measure the daughter, but when Mei Ling was acting a bit clumsy, the daughter hissed at her. Mei Ling apologised many times, but the girl didn't even smile at her or acknowledge her apology. Only when Mei Ling measured her belly and looked up at the girl, did she get a glance back. Mei Ling kept quiet.

Weeks later, when at last the dress was finished and Ms Huang was away, Mei Ling washed herself and put on that dress. It was slightly loose, but nobody would notice. She rushed towards another part of the city to sell the piece of jewellery, keeping in mind to make herself look and behave like a rich person, copying the manner of that girl whose dress she was wearing, so they would not question her. It worked!

Now she could leave this town, far away from her horrid Mistress. Her next step was to get to the wharf, to get on the river. She was enjoying her newfound freedom when she suddenly heard somebody shout her name. "Mei Ling! What are you doing here, in that dress? Does Ms Huang know you are here? You must be a thief!" Mei Ling was so afraid. She could already imagine Ms Huang's punishment when this person would take her back

to her Mistress. Just then she heard another voice. A girl spoke in French, “Silence! She is my friend. You have mistaken her for somebody else. How dare you accuse her?” Mei Ling turned around and was trying not to show her surprise at recognising the girl from the shop. It was the exact same girl whose cherry red dress she was wearing, on the arm of a handsome young lad. The girl extended her hand, and Mei Ling grabbed it, as if indeed they were two old friends and together they walked off to the ticket stand. They bought a ticket for the first ferry to depart just to get Mei Ling to safety first.

Once they were on the boat, the French girl introduced herself as Fleur. Mei Ling didn’t understand why Fleur had helped her, but Fleur didn’t seem to want to explain herself. Mei Ling took off the red dress to give it back to Fleur, underneath which she wore her ragged clothes. She was afraid that she would otherwise attract too much attention and she wanted to travel far far away. Fleur had to get off the boat to go home. Mei Ling waved goodbye to her from the boat, when she saw a group of men suddenly appear and take Fleur. Mei Ling saw how one man held her down and dragged her away. “They are kidnapping her!” Mei Ling thought and she was just in time to get off the boat and run after them. The men didn’t notice her as Fleur put up quite a good struggle and Mei Ling managed to follow them all the way to a little building. She saw them enter the building, but she didn’t dare to follow them further.

What should she do? She could just leave and find her grandmother or she could find help for Fleur. What would happen to Fleur if she didn’t help? And suddenly she remembered Fleur’s belly! She could not let another child experience the same life as her! So she went back to the pier where she got off with Fleur. The next ferry arrived and it couldn’t have been more of a lucky coincidence when she saw the same handsome lad come off. She ran toward him and explained everything she had seen. He took her to his other friends and together they went to the building where Fleur was kept. Obviously they knew how to fight and it wasn’t long before Fleur was free.

Fleur was really shaken and asked to be taken to her home. In front of an enormous mansion, Fleur said to the lad, “I think it is time I introduce you,” and to Mei Ling she said, “Please come in so my parents can thank you.”

Fleur’s parents were very shocked but grateful. As the story goes, the handsome lad was a Chinese gangster. However, in this time in Old Shanghai, it was very useful to have protection of the gangsters. And when they heard the other news, they welcomed him into the family. And Mei Ling? She went South and found her grandmother.

Brothers of the Night Pearl

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Fung, Ashleigh – 12

Shanghai, 1930s. The surrealistic and hedonistic ‘Manhattan of China’ is still a smoothly running engine, but only superficially. The colonial neoclassical buildings lining the Bund continue glittering like palaces under the starry sky. The hugs, kisses and laughters of drunken people from around the world ceaselessly fill the boardwalk along Huangpu River. Yet looking beyond this prosperity, even casual observers can detect a mood of panic lurking beneath. The Japanese imperial army has taken Manchuria for years. Their aggression would not stop there. The day they invade Shanghai is imminent. The Chinese government is striving to expose all the undercover agents hiding among us.

Tonight, in front of the City God Temple, Old Shanghai City, the Chinese are unusually elated. The police have arrested a group of Japanese Secret Service agents, and chained them to parade as a show of triumph. The crowds are yelling obscenities. Officers draw blood red marks on the captured Japanese undercovers’ backs. Some of them are actually Chinese. They are being burnt on the chest with words like ‘traitor’, and ‘guilty of treason’. While the public is furious, my heart pumps with excitement as I scan each of these chained criminals. This will be my last chance to find my long lost brother before my family moves to Hong Kong.

For years, my mother has been telling me that my brother, having studied military knowledge in Japan, joined the Japanese Secret Service, abandoned us and betrayed his country. But I distinctly remember that on one particular day, when I was a toddler, my brother’s cries of agony, his night pearl necklace that was hurled towards me, and the Japanese’ evil cackles. He was abducted and forced to be a spy, I believe. Because of this memory I have been painstakingly searching for his whereabouts. I earnestly hope to see him again to clear his name.

In my eagerness to get a closer look, I trip over something like a foot and fall among excited people. Scrambling back to my feet, I look up and see a lanky man in chains with jet-black hair – exactly like my brother in my memories. My eyes widen and my heart skips a beat. I attempt to get to him, but a gruff voice behind orders me back into the crowd. I lose sight of that man finally. “Never mind,” I convince myself. “I’ll go to the prison if that’s what it takes.”

Two days later I arrive at Tilanqiao Prison, ‘Alcatraz of the Orient’, a heavily guarded, formidable hell for rascals. In this fallen city where money rules, one can easily bribe the guard. He gives me a nonchalant look. Grateful, I immediately rush past the cells, searching for my brother. And... he’s there, at the very end of the gloomy corridor – I still recognize him, although he looks much skinnier, with cheekbones and ribs protruding from flesh like fossil of a baby dinosaur. He is staring at a ray of light sneaking through a tiny crack of the wall. I sit down hesitantly, and begin telling him everything about my family. At last, I let the bomb drop. “I think you’re my brother!” Hearing these words he jerks his head up, startled, and then smirks, his eyes dismissive. Maybe he cannot accept this shocking fact for the moment. So I continue telling him everything that might trigger his emotions toward his family and me.

I’ve been talking for an hour now, and my brother hasn’t even looked up at me. He keeps his eyes downcast, perhaps too ashamed to admit that he abandoned his family when we wanted him most. I decide to show him the most precious thing to me – my night pearl necklace, the one he threw to me before he was captured. Once I take it out from my pocket, his eyes flash, filling with greed. “Wow, my night pearl necklace. Thanks for taking care of it for me,” he utters. I am blank and yet confused – my brother didn’t ask me to take care of it for him. He gave it to me and asked me to remember him. “Now that I am here, why don’t you return it to me?” he continues, a tint of threat creeping into his voice. A wave of reluctance suddenly washes over me – and also washes my mind clear. I am afraid. Foreseeing my refusal, he rasps, “Give it to me, or you’ll die like you stupid brother!” These appalling words shoot through me like a lightning bolt. Before I can calm down, his gnarly hands reach out trying to grab the necklace. I quickly stuff my night pearl necklace back into my pocket. I glance at ‘my brother’ – his eyes are wild and feral, so intoxicated by the thought of getting the night pearl to buy him freedom, like a rabid dog. Horrified, I race out of the prison into the broad daylight, never to return...

Gazing out of the train window, I see hordes of desperate and frightened people hurling luggage into already overthrown vehicles, trying to flee the city before the Japanese comes. These people are just like my brother, trying all means to survive this doomsday world. The Bund washed off its dazzling glitters and transforms into a solemn fortress. My thoughts float back to my brother. Perhaps my brother was really killed. Perhaps he is still in captivity, and being forced to spy on us. Or perhaps that man in the prison really is my brother, but what he has suffered has driven him crazy. I even doubt my memory and start to wonder if my mother is telling the truth. But whatever the truth is, I will never see my brother. Lying ahead of me are numerous uncertainties, but one thing is for sure – I cannot waste the rest of my life searching for him anymore. He wouldn’t want me to either. After all, I’ve got my own life to struggle with.

A Legendary Shanghai Girl

Diocesan Preparatory School, Lee, Kwun Yee – 10

A short while ago in Shanghai, an old woman was taking her grandson, Aidan, to school. “Today is my first day of primary school!” he said excitedly to his grandma. She smiled and told him to sit on the curb while waiting for the famous Little Flower Primary School (Shanghai branch) to open its gates and welcome its students inside. Aidan absent-mindedly sat down on a huge bronze statue of a little girl holding a basket of beautiful flowers tied in bunches in front of the school gates.

“Don’t sit on the bronze statue!” the old woman whispered. “It is a statue of someone very important to this school. It is improper to do that!”

“Why?” Aidan asked. “What is the story of this little girl? Can you tell me?”

The old woman nodded her head and began her story. “The girl from the statue was a poor little orphan called Irene. She spent her whole childhood selling bunches of flowers she’d picked from different gardens and from the sides of the pavement. Money came from people who pitied her or careless children dropping their pocket money from their little hands in the rush to buy candy and toys from the stores. Every day, she went to the golden gates of the Paramount Hotel and said to each passerby, ‘Beautiful roses here! Get your violets here! Only 50 cents a bunch of flowers!’ But still, no one bought any of her flowers. One sunny day, Irene picked up flowers from the sides of the pavement as usual and walked towards the train station. She saw posh and rich people sitting inside red rickshaws, long queues of impatient people waiting to get their haircut, and schoolboys getting their black shoes scrubbed and polished by a group of skinny old men. She walked down a few streets and saw that all the stores had many customers buying their goods. ‘Sigh,’ she thought to herself. ‘Why am I the only person here not having customers? Why am I so useless here? Am I a failure?’ She felt extremely desperate and started to weep.

Irene walked miserably back to the Paramount Hotel and suddenly she heard some lively music coming from the Grand Hall.

Flowers are my life.

I made friends with them since five.

Roses are red.
I put some beside my bed.
Lilies are white.
I've loved them first sight.

.....

'Oh!' she relaxed and exclaimed happily after hearing a few notes of the song. She loved this song so much because it described her life. This song soothed her troubled mind and kept all her worries away. Every day, she secretly went to the exit of the Paramount Hotel and waited patiently for the song. She remembered the lyrics and rhythm of the song deeply in heart.

One day, while she was selling the flowers, she sang the song softly. Her beautiful voice apparently caught the passerby's attention. People stopped and gathered around her, marveling at 'the poor vagrant who sold flowers picked up in the gardens' (this was what people in Shanghai called her). Chloe Lee, a well-known Shanghai singer, passed by and heard Irene sing. She was amazed by Irene's beautiful voice and she knew this little girl could be polished to become a future star. 'Hey! Little girl, come and learn to sing from me.'

Irene was surprised and thought in her mind, 'I must seize this chance. This could be the start of my new life.'

As what Chloe expected, Irene had the singing potential and quickly mastered the necessary singing skills and techniques. Soon after, Irene performed on stage and got the media's attention. Everyone came to the Paramount Hotel and enjoyed Irene's singing. Irene and Chloe performed together at the hotel every night. People from all over the world invited them to sing at their parties and even while they were traveling on luxurious cruises. Irene traveled everywhere first class with Chloe by her side, entertaining people with their original compositions. Not only did she make her own life better, but she also made everyone happier.

As she had been born poor, she knew how important education was, so she carefully saved her money and donated money to the poor at the same time. She even founded many schools around the world offering free education to the poor and homeless children. She believed that everyone's life can be better if he/she receives a proper education. Sometimes, Irene visited the schools and taught the students how to sing too! And one of these schools, my boy, is this school that you are going to study in. To honour her, people have decided to put bronze statues in front of the gates of every school she founded. The statue is there to remind children to be brave and carry on, to never give up, and to overcome difficulties by themselves."

As the old woman finished her story, Aidan looked at her and asked, "Who is that girl you were talking about in your story?" She smiled and said, "Try to guess."

"Mother?"

"No."

"My friend Lily's grandmother?"

"No."

"How about the greatest and kindest grandmother of mine that I love the most?"

The old woman smiled and looked at the bright, cloudless blue sky above them.

~The end~

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

German Swiss International School, Jayaraman, Neytra – 11

Jing watched enviously as a flock of Frigate birds flew into the tranquil sky and over the wall separating her from Old Shanghai. Directly below them, the farmers sowed the earth. Sticky sweat ran down their foreheads as the bright orange fireball emitted burning rays. The farmers wore large straw hats to shield their eyes from the sun.

Inspired by the freedom of the birds, Jing cautiously unlocked the gate to her own home. She started to jog and a light breeze rippled through her hair. Her claustrophobia dispersed momentarily before a powerful hand grabbed her sleeve.

“Let me see the outside world!” Jing whined. She was confined to the house, her father told her. Jing hated this caged existence. Most children her age had the chance to explore exotic new places but she was only allowed to go as far as the weeds in her back-garden.

“Danger will come!” cried her father as usual. Jing rolled her eyes. The outskirts of Shanghai would be interesting to her if she could actually see past the fields, or maybe even past the boundary walls into the Old City. She cursed the paper-thin walls of their modest hut which was like a wrought-iron prison to her.

Darkness fell, covering the fields in a velvet blanket. Jing tiptoed to the window and stared longingly at the lights twinkling in the middle of the city. Another unexpected light, however, diverted her attention. A little flicker shone from a bag of straw. Inside was a tiny golden ball, small enough to fit in the palm of her hand. She carefully extracted it. The tiny rays shone on the ceiling, creating an image of people building a wall. A figure stole a piece of the wall and hid it in a temple. The ball glinted for a second, then faded. Jing needed to find the missing piece of the boundary wall. She excitedly placed the precious ball in its bag, ran through the creaking door and clip-clopped down the wooden porch stairs. The Old City was not far and Jing stepped through the waterlogged fields towards it.

Before long, Jing had reached the dark brick wall, which ominously loomed above her. A sharp breeze whipped around her head and she thought she could hear the voice of her father warning of danger. Jing peered about surreptitiously, but it was just an old fortune-teller slumped beside a hole in the wall, who repeatedly hissed the word as if in a trance.

Old Shanghai was an ancient warren of tunnels and narrow, twisting alleys. People bustled around the maze of markets and Jing watched children and adults emerging from their huts to partake in the evening's activity. People crowded around an enormous red and white temple with a towering peaked roof, draped in glittering lights. Nervously, she looked about her before producing the ball, which again flashed an image of the thief sneaking into the temple. As Jing made her way inside the City God Temple, she bumped shoulders with hundreds of late-night worshippers.

Jing's stomach sank. How she was going to find the brick? As if the ball had heard her thoughts, a vivid purple burst from the bag. Peeking inside, she could see a painting of a door that was identical to the one beside her. The crowd surged forward but Jing raced over to the door, ramming her whole body against the frame.

Jing tumbled inside and landed heavily in a pile of scrolls. The room was filled to the brim with rusted metals and gold-encrusted artefacts that had a lustrous surface. Jing's sight was blurry from the impact of the fall and the mesmerising glitter of the room's contents. She felt exhausted and far from her warm hut on the outskirts of the Old City. Nearby, she thought she could hear the monotone chanting of the fortune-teller, uttering "Danger". The room faded from eye sight as she began to nod off.

Jing came to as her head hit the stone floor. She rubbed her eyes and squinted suspiciously at the heavy cuboid that was now mysteriously placed in her hands. The magic ball brightly flashed several times, before dispersing into tiny specs of light. She realised then that she was holding the missing brick. She felt ecstatic.

A scrap of ancient parchment floated into Jing's quivering hands. However, her excitement dwindled and fear took over when she saw the blank paper. She rolled her eyes. Even the magic ball had disappointed her. She stared hard at the peculiar paper, willing it to impart a clue.

"The corners have been cut off", she noted, and folded the parchment into a rectangle like a brick. Words began to form: Danger Danger. She was terrified. She looked about her in a panic for any imminent sense of danger. Nothing moved. All she could hear was the howl of the wind outside, battering the walls. Then she realised what to do with the brick. The words were a clue. The paper glowed purple and spun into a vortex, which lifted Jing into the air and swallowed her whole.

Jing found herself once again in front of the boundary wall. The fortune-teller gestured to the hole with his bamboo cane and Jing lifted the brick, slamming it into place, concealing the gap between the old city and the countryside. The fortune-teller smiled mysteriously.

"You have served the Old City of Shanghai and protected it from the Japanese pirates who seek to loot our city of its ancient artefacts. In preserving the ancient temple, I will preserve your freedom." The sun's rays burst over the boundary wall and the Frigate birds danced above. Jing found herself transported by a purple spark emitted from the fortune-teller's cane. As she soared over the wall, she could see the farmers toiling over the paddy fields and her own hut on the horizon. Everything looked exactly the same, except around her home, there was no wall in sight.

The Virtuous Phoenix Gate

Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Chan, Hoi Tung Daphne – 11

The foreigners came from faraway, a place called Fa Guo, or France, as the teachers told us. They marched right into the core of our defenceless Shanghai while all our forces slacked, their navy velvet hats taller than the sky. People whispered that they came from a concession not far away from Shanghai, and that they'd come to get our homeland. Girls my age drooled over their golden breeches and fine blue eyes, but only I knew that they were posing a threat to us. One day, after having finished my chores, I ran to Father and Mother.

“Dad, Mum, the Frenchmen are going to be a threat. We have to keep them out.” I told my parents sincerely. Mother laughed.

“Mei, you're thinking out of the barrel again. They're just here to make peace.” Her sweet smile didn't sway me, and I kept this suspicion deep inside my heart.

Months passed and the Frenchmen aimed their long-barrelled rifles at us normal citizens. Red painted the wall of buildings and my family complained about the violence.

When a bullet killed my aunt Yu, we were outraged.

“We have to do something.” I said, looking out a bullet puncture in the wall. People were running for their lives. Gunshots echoed through the city and I felt the air dampen with blood. I repeated my words. “We need to protect our city from the Frenchmen.”

My parents shook my idea off like falling leaves. “Mei, we can't help the city. We don't have the strength and resources.” My father said, gesturing at the wreckage and the ruins of our house. “What are we going to do? Build a wall?”

“Build a wall.”

The words resounded in my mind, and I set off to work secretly. The last night of a dark December on, I shuffled my feet in Father's odorous leather boots off to meet with my band of friends. They shared the same opinion with me: we should build a wall and protect ourselves from the incoming soldiers. The wall would, if successful, scare away the remaining Frenchmen back to France.

Night by night, we set off to work, our hands growing callouses. Once Mother questioned me accusingly over why my hands were rougher as time passed, and why Father's

boots were muddy every morning. I never could answer her. Soldiers came to demolish our wall, their shiny metal-tipped boots aiming sharp blows at our rubble shield, and I bawled my eyes out while watching the force destroy the thing. Father and Mother patted my shoulders with confusion but that didn't stop my tears.

Our gang rebuilt the wall quickly, but there was one corner left that had to be fixed. None of my team were available that night so I set off alone. My parents and brother were tucked into their broken beds, and I slipped out into the darkness in my brother's work clothes. The rough homespun robe felt bulky on me, and I felt glass shards in his shoes, but I couldn't stop. Blood stained the earth under me and it yielded a spring of flowers. I called my partner-in-crime's name. "Feng! Feng!" Soon Feng appeared from behind the trunk of a tree, his face grubby and pale under the faint moonlight.

"Mei, stay away from the wall. The commanders are coming."

Oh, of course, the Frenchmen. The foreigner ghettos in the other part of town wasn't far away from where we decided to start our construction.

"I don't care," I retorted intensely. "As long as Shanghai can thrive." Feng gave me a sad look and slipped away. I continued beating the rubble so that they'd stay in place, and when the sun rose, I was finished. "The wall is done." I said, looking around for applause. The only thing I saw was the flash of a gold sword, and then I lost my consciousness.

When I awoke, I saw that I was tied to a log with tinder under it. A blazing torch was grasped tightly by a person with a tailcoat... "Oh, brother." I whispered fearfully. I was going to be cooked alive like a Peking duck!

"What's your name?" The commander asked me. I shut my mouth in defiance. He hit his rifle against the column in the room and snarled. "What's your name?"

I sniffed and tried to stop the tears of fright. "Mei." I stuttered. He roared in laughter, slicing a gold rapier over his palm and drawing blood.

"A girl wasted on politics. Aha, no woman in my homeland would ever do such thing. Women cannot protect a country." He reached for the torch and I stiffened, thinking of my family and Feng.

"You're such a virtuous girl." He laughed insanely. "No matter how my soldiers destroy your wall and your heart, you repair it and regrow it. Just like a Phoenix." The flame of the torch hit the wooden ground and it spread towards us. The tinder burst into fire, but I wasn't harmed. In fact, I witnessed my skin melting into my flesh, turning into scarlet feathers, and my limbs becoming talons of fire and power.

It was said that the commander was burnt to death and the fire spread to the houses and roads of Shanghai. The wall enveloped Old Shanghai and there was no way to get out until the Phoenix smashed through a portion of the wall, making a gate, and letting the people run.

Later, people named the gate the Virtuous Phoenix Gate, or Yi Fung Gate. Throughout the perils that Shanghai has been involved in, the wall has shifted from driftwood to hard steel, but the gate remains and the Virtuous Phoenix still watches over her city. No matter how Shanghai has become, metal or wood, modern or old-fashioned, the Virtuous Phoenix will surely guard her homeland from danger.

-The End-

The Time Lift

Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Cheung, Si Ya Elinor – 10

‘Like an Art Deco rocket ship arising from the impassioned waters of the Huangpu River, the Cathay Hotel of the 1930s was a powerful symbol of thrusting Shanghai society.’ I was flipping through a book about Fairmont Peace Hotel, which was called the Cathay Hotel in the 1930s. I was very fascinated by the old Shanghai, a style showing East meets West, modern and ancient. After weeks of persuades and reasoning, I finally got my parents to take me to Shanghai. On Lunar New Year’s Eve, we set off to Shanghai.

While my parents were checking in at the reception, I looked around the glamorous and mysterious Peace Hotel. I was very excited to see how the Ballroom restored as it was Shanghai’s most famous ballroom back in the old days. I went straight into the lift and pressed the eighth floor where the Ballroom was.

To my horror, the lift went up very fast. It was like going through a vacuum cleaner. I heard the air whooshing past my ears.

‘Oh no! I got stuck in the lift!’ I thought. I raised my hand to press the lift door open. To my utter astonishment, I saw that I had a different sleeve on. I looked down and found that I was wearing a nice costume in Qing Dynasty. How strange! Finally, the lift stopped moving and the door opened. I stepped out from the lift and I found myself stepping out from a traditional Chinese arch entrance. I looked back... the lift had vanished.

‘Am I dreaming? Where am I now?’ I thought I’d better get back to mum and dad.

The lane I was walking was so dark and dingy.

BANG!!!

A boy was running like a rocket. Behind him was a gang of youths chasing him. I wasn’t sure why but I grabbed him into the lane I was standing. The gang ran straight. He was avoided being caught.

‘Thank you so much for saving me!’ he exclaimed.

‘Who are the people that chased you just now? Why did they chase you?’ I asked him.

‘They are one of the many gangsters. They chase children and snatch their money.’ he said. Then, he looked at me closely. ‘Wait... don’t you live in Shanghai? Surely you know all about these already?’

I quickly changed the subject to avoid him getting suspicious of me, asking him what his name was. He said he was Ching. I told him I was called Si Ya.

‘Why is this lane so dark and dingy?’ I asked him. ‘Why are your questions so weird? Anyway, this lane is built in shhh...’ he lowered his voice, ‘Ming Dynasty... We can’t talk about it now. The city was built 500 years from now.’ I did a quick calculation in my mind and I suspected I must be in the 1600th century! My curiosity drove me eagerly to look around this ancient Shanghai.

‘Um...’ I quickly thought of a story. ‘I just sneaked out of home, and my parents don’t allow me to go outside. Besides, I rarely came this side of the city, so can you please take me to a famous landmark nearby?’ I requested. ‘Sure!’ he answered.

He led me to a temple. Looking up, I saw ‘Cheng Huang Miao’ in Chinese written on the signage. ‘This is the City of God Temple.’ I couldn’t believe it. The temple was built in the traditional Chinese style. When we stepped in, I saw quite a number of statues of gods and spirits who brought good luck to people. I breathed in a lungful of choking incense and realized as this was a place to pray, the floors and walls were much cleaner than the narrow and dirty streets outside.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

I heard loud noises coming from outside. ‘Where does the noise come from?’ I asked Ching.

Ching frowned at me. ‘Did you forget that today is the birth of City God too? Today is the ceremony! Those are the performers coming, do you see?’ I looked up on the stage. There were a lot of people wearing special costumes dancing. ‘These are theatrical performances.’ Ching said, pointing to the performers.

We stayed to watch the ceremony for a while. Then I remembered my parents, who must have finished checking in and wondering where I’d gone to.

‘I must go now.’ I said.

‘What’s that on your wrist? It looks so weird, but quite nice.’ Ching was pointing to my wrist. I took my bracelet off and gave it to him with a smile. ‘It’s pretty. Keep it well. I gotta go.’

A minute later, I was walking through the dark and dingy lane again and saw the traditional Chinese arch entrance. ‘How am I supposed to go back?’ I looked around for something like a lift, but there was no sign of such thing. I was stressed and worried, and then an idea struck me. The pillars next to the arch looked just like the buttons next to the lift! I touched that part, pushing down a little bit. **BINGO!** The arch entrance transformed into a lift with a whizzing sound. I smiled and stepped into it. It took me to the floor which the reception area was.

My parents were still checking in at the reception area. Time must have stopped while I was in ancient Shanghai. I went back to the lift again and press 8. This time the lift ran normally.

Finally, I reached the ballroom I was hoping to have a look. An exhibition was held inside called ‘Resurrected History of Shanghai’.

I was absolutely astounded, when I saw the bracelet that I gave Ching in a glass case. Beside the case, there was a passage - ‘The archeologists found that the silver crossed pendant looked so modern. They were now in a detailed investigation on this subject.’

‘How could the bracelet be kept for about 400 years?’, I thought. ‘Does that mean I am not dreaming?’

-End-

The Diary of Haruti Sugiyama, Pirate, on the Third Day of the Fifth Moon

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Jamison, Philippa – 10

Tonight, after 10 days at sea, we finally reached the Chinese city of Shanghai, which lies a half day's sailing up a wide river. We came in under cover of darkness. From the ship, we could see the massive walls of the town, casting a shadow over the many junks anchored in the wide channel.

Our first thought was how we could manage to enter the city through such impressive defences. Ten of our best men and I quietly rowed ashore in our small boat. The quayside was in total darkness, except for a few torches burning by the massive granite gate which was the entry from the riverside to the city. We cautiously approached the gate, we saw it was shut for the night, and a night guard was sitting on a barrel beside it eating a dish of dumplings. We were wondering how we would get past him. One of our crew, conveniently, can speak Chinese and he started a conversation with the guard. The guard was a fat, sleepy man and his head was shaved, so that there was a pigtail of black hair. Luckily, he looked very bored and was only too keen to accept our present of opium. After some minutes he was looking extremely dazed and drowsy. We were able to help ourselves to the man's heavy iron keys. The keys turned and unlocked the gate with a satisfying clunk. We were in!

Beyond the gate lay a warren of narrow lanes, barely wide enough for 2 men to pass. The city is a wealthy one, with well-built houses made of stone, roofed in green tiles. There was no light but for the occasional oil lamp in a window. We crept down the deserted lane, which was evidently a street of carpenters, for there were stalls selling lacquer chests and camphor boxes. We were making for the City God Temple at the heart of the city, for there we knew we would find silver and gold, and other plunder to sell in Japan. We passed other streets now, of shoe makers and butchers, until we turned a corner and saw the beautifully decorated Temple in front of us. It is a 5-storied pagoda, with handsome curved tiled roofs.

We crept slowly inside the temple, just in case someone was expecting us. Nobody was there. It was silent. There was gold and silver, shimmering in the dimly lit building and we gathered all the treasure we could find. As we were raiding the building, we were very

cautious, as the City God Temple was a very important place and who knows what would have happened if we were caught raiding it. When we had gathered all we could carry, we slipped quietly out of the building, back down the narrow street towards the river.

The sky showed the first sign of light, and we realised that the morning was not far off. The streets were waking up now. Tradesmen were opening up their stalls for the day. Men carried water in wooden pots hung on a pole, others wheeled barrows of things to sell noisily over the granite cobbles. People looked at us strangely, because our clothes are different from the Chinese people, but I think they could tell it was not wise to challenge us, and we passed without problems. We walked down a narrow alleyway which seemed to lead to the poorer part of the town. Deciding that there was nothing valuable to take, we wandered back to the gate. We wondered if the guard might try to stop us, but luckily he was still drowsy from the opium. He was lying on a bed, and seemed to be swearing and criticising his daughter who was cleaning the steps outside the guard house. We walked over and for the first time, saw the guard's daughter. She was extremely pretty, although her clothes were poor. Her hair was in a high plait and was pinned down so there was a loop in it. It was obvious that the other pirates found her attractive as well. She was not only beautiful, but very persuasive. I decided on impulse that we would take her with us. I grabbed her by the hand and we ran through the gate and onto the quayside. In a moment we were back on the water. On the quayside we could see a crowd of men gathering, looking angrily at our ship, but they did not dare to follow.

We pulled up our anchor, and the strong current of the river pushed our ship away from the quay, and towards the sea. Within a few minutes the grey walls of the old city disappeared from view, and we hoisted our sails for the open sea and Japan. The elders of our village will be pleased with the treasure we have taken tonight. The girl turned out to be a great asset. She married our captain, Ching Yi and became a famous pirate in her own right. Her name is Ching Shih. Sadly, Ching Yi died a few years ago, in 1807. Ching Shih has taken over the fleet and is an extremely successful leader. Perhaps even better than Ching Yi ever was.

Cruelty and Kindness - Tales from Old Shanghai

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Joseph-Hui, Lexi – 10

Many moons ago, in the bustling city of Shanghai, a 12-year old girl named Lin Lin Yang was stacking boxes in a small, dusty room. The room was in one of the city's famous tailoring shops, and stored some of Shanghai's most expensive silk.

Carefully, Lin folded the silk into boxes, each labelled by a card describing their vivid colour. Her back ached. Not only did she work there, she also slept on the stone cold floor with only one blanket. Lin had lived in this shop for five years, ever since her parents sold her to master tailor, Kuat, for 88 dollars.

"Get back to work!" yelled Mr Kuat. Suddenly, she snapped back into reality. She had to labour for Mr Kuat, probably the cruellest and most selfish man China had ever met. Lin squeezed her eyes shut and tried not to cry.

Ding! Ding!

A middle aged man with a cotton suit and a beautiful chestnut coloured briefcase strode into the room. He had creamy white skin and a moustache the same colour as his briefcase. His eyes were blue. She stared.

"He looks so elegant," Lin murmured. She sat quietly in the corner and watched the man as he wanted a magnificent silk dress for his beloved wife.

"You see," the man said, "My wife and I will be attending the royal ball."

By now Mr Kuat was purring with delight.

"Lin! Fetch a cup of golden blossom tea for our fine gentleman. And use our best porcelain."

Lin came out of the room, gently balancing a cup on a delicate plate. She looked up at the man, noticing his twinkling eyes. Surely, he thought, a girl this age would not be working.

"Is this little girl your daughter?" he asked Mr. Kuat. He was shocked and saddened to see that she had dark purple shadows under her eyes and she was so thin you could see her ribs sticking out.

"Here," he said to Lin, "Drink this tea."

"No!" barked Mr Kuat.

"Why not?" asked the man.

Mr Kuat snarled. He was acting polite and sweet, but his true colours were showing.

"She's not my daughter, she's merely a servant!" he growled. He said the word daughter as if someone would say the word manure.

"I see," said the Englishman. He went straight on to discuss his ideas for the dress, building his vision for a lavender gown.

Mr Kuat nodded at every suggestion, sending Lin to and from the store room to fetch materials. Soon, the dress was designed and the business deal was settled.

Mr Kuat disappeared into his office to prepare the bill.

The Englishman walked up to Lin, who was silently dusting the shelves.

“My name is Charles,” he said. “Please take this business card and this small gift. If you ever come to England, know that you will have a home with me.”

He gave Lin a small bar wrapped in gold foil and a card with delicately scripted words.

Later that night, Lin unwrapped the bar and bit into the milky, crunchy, sweet substance. She took a nibble every night and promised herself she would find the Englishman one day again. Except, she had no idea how.

One morning, when Mr Kuat failed to return from a night out gambling, Lin knew what she had to do. She took a little bit of money and slipped away into the early dawn. It was dark, but the streets were still illuminated by red lanterns above her. She ran through musty alleyways and streets where the traffic gathered into a storm as the day started.

At every street she saw crowded shops. Her stomach would growl every time she walked by restaurants with big steamed buns, the smell spilling out into the alley.

As she roamed the streets, droplets started to fall from the sky. Not long after, Lin’s clothes were nearly soaking. The best thing to do, Lin thought, is to find shelter for tonight and continue tomorrow. She closed her eyes and almost immediately fell into the world of dreams.

Lin woke to an old woman’s voice, “Ni Hao? Hello!”

She blinked. It was morning!

“Come inside my house!” the woman beckoned. Lin couldn’t resist. The woman’s gentle voice drew her in, like a fresh patch of carrots to a bunny. Obediently, she followed her. Her long dark hair swished behind her as she opened a rusty wooden door. Lin gasped in amazement. At first she thought her vision was damaged because of fatigue, but no matter how many times she pinched herself, she saw the same.

All shades green: emerald, bright green, leaf green and dark green covered her house. Glimmering stones perched on the shelf.

“Please sit down!” the woman exclaimed. “My name is Kylie. I own this jade shop. Who are you?”

Lin explained all about her emotional past. Kylie saw her sad, anxious eyes. Why should a little girl be going through all this?

Through many shivering winters and hot humid summers, Lin had a warm, safe shelter. Kylie raised her like a daughter as she had no children of her own.

One day, in the company of all her green treasures, and holding Lin’s steady hand, Kylie took her last breaths. She had had a great life, and now it was time to move on.

She left everything she owned to Lin, including a boat passage to England. Kylie knew it was best for Lin to go and find her lost friend.

The day came, and Lin waved goodbye to the crazy streets of Shanghai. She stepped onto the rusty, tattered ramp ready to face her future in a brand new country.

As Lin looked into the distance, she took something out of her pocket. It was the thin, delicate business card Charles gave her and she held it up to the moonlight.

Behind the Garden of Happiness

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Suen, Gwyneth – 9

The engine roared and our plane took off. I was buzzing with excitement. It was my school's Culture Trip to Shanghai.

Mr. Hancock handed out booklets about Shanghai. I read with fascination- there were lots of skyscrapers! It seemed like another Hong Kong.

Then, I read about the Old City, which began as a walled ancient town, now a tourist spot. I was marveling at the beauty of the Yu Garden when I heard a cracked voice rattled somewhere near my ear.

“Come hear us!”

“Come help us!”

Followed by a spine-chilling scream of a child that ripped through the air.

I sat corpse-like, frozen.

I managed to gather my senses. Looking around, everyone seemed normal. Jess, who sat next to me, was singing as usual.

I was suddenly more afraid than I had ever been in my life.

On the coach, Mr. Hancock explained that we'd stop at Shanghai Gucheng. We disembarked at Remin Road. Jess held my hand as we entered the Old City. It was bustling with tourists, packed with restaurants and stalls, filling the air with an exciting mix of smells and sounds from around the world.

Navigating through the narrow alleyways, a pair of small Chinese lions caught my attention. They stared at me with mud-brown eyes- dangerous but sad. I felt a sudden shiver. Expressionlessly, the lady screamed, “Twenty yuan each!”

Only then did I realize Jess was not there with me. The class had vanished into the colourful, twisting alleyways.

Something urged me on. All my instincts screamed at me to get away, but my legs seemed to move of their own accord into the Yu Garden.

It was a beautiful wilderness of trees, rockeries, flowers, and ponds. From the distance, I saw two moss-covered Imperial Guardian stone lions, with cloudy, saucer-like eyes filled with grief. Intrigued, I walked closer. As they came into focus, a gust of ferocious wind blew hard at me. The leaves and flowers fluttered. The rocks rolled towards the lions. My mind was also a whirlwind- a pulsing, surging tornado of fear and disbelief.

Suddenly, the lions leapt to life.

“Nihao! We're Shishi and Xiaoxiao. We've been guarding the Yu Garden for years!” The pair said with bitter pride.

My heart clenched behind my ribs. I must be deathly pale.

“Come with us!” Shishi exclaimed with a wave of her paws.

Shishi and Xiaoxiao led me through numerous walkways until we stopped at a pavilion. Xiaoxiao touched a heavy oak door with his paws and miraculously, it opened. Alert, I was also filled with curiosity.

It was dark. The room was filled with antique furniture. As my eyes adjusted to the gloom, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I whirled around but found myself face to face with a white shadowy figure, with a pale face and hollow eyes. They filled my chest not with fear, but sadness.

The figure said, "I'm Xiaoqing. I've lived here in Gucheng all my life." Pausing, she tried to catch her breath. Tears streamed down her eyes.

"Everyone here seems so melancholic. What's wrong?" I asked. My eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Too many questions popped into my mind.

"A long time ago," Xiaoqing explained in a shivering voice, "here was a peaceful town. But the war broke out, and my husband left in the army. I struggled to provide for our daughter, Shen Yan." Her voice sank to a murmur.

I gave Xiaoqing a look of concern, encouraging her to carry on.

"Soon after," Xiaoqing continued with shuddering sobs, "the Government decided that our weary town seemed an unlikely place for business. They called for redevelopment and turned the Old City area into a tourist attraction. Our house was pulled down to build multi-storey buildings, restaurants and apartments."

"Shen Yan and I lost our shelter. We ran out of food. Soon winter came and we caught a fatal disease. We failed to survive. Shen Yan was only four when she died." Her voice trailed off and a heart-wrenching silence shook the air.

"That's so unfair! Why was the Government so merciless?" I cried, unable to stop myself. I felt a wild grief building inside me, mixed with anger.

Xiaoqing sighed, "Every society has to progress. As population grows, people need more space. Old houses become unsafe and costly to maintain. In the end, the town needs to modernize, but houses become more expensive and only those rich enough can afford to stay."

"Still, the Government shouldn't leave the poor without shelter... and old buildings could be a legacy of Chinese culture and history!"

"Maybe there's no right and wrong in life, my dear..." Xiaoqing replied. She gazed at me and continued, "Have you ever wondered why you're able to see us?"

Xiaoqing explained, "You're a child who's willing to connect. You can feel all these because you CARE. You'd do something to make the world a better place, by understanding and sharing the stories of the poor, and the voice unheard."

Xiaoxiao asked, "Can you please help us? We need you to spread the message: is the world really becoming a better place, when people are suffering in the name of progress and development? Not only in Shanghai, but in Hong Kong, and around the world! We should all open up. We should all care. We should all think!"

Suddenly, the wind came back, howling loudly. The pebbles rolled. With one last piercing moan, the wind stopped. The air froze into silence. The lions rested like statues, as if they had never come alive.

"Where have you been?" I heard Mr. Hancock screaming, partly angry and partly relieved, "Always stay in groups please!" I tried to apologize, but my expression faltered as I was trembling. I felt as if I had just walked in a blizzard of bewilderment. But I am grateful to be who I am.

Don't worry, Xiaoqing, I will share your story. Behind the Garden of Happiness, there are always pain and sacrifices.

A Matter of Time

Kennedy School, Bharwani, Dia – 10

Me: a lonely child without many friends, except for Lian, but she too bailed on me. I had no idea where she went before recess. While looking for her at school, I spotted a **NO ENTRY** sign. As curious as I am, I barged in.

Inside stood a bizarre machine that was bulky and bright. It was mysterious and nothing like I had ever seen. As I got closer, I found a note: “For Meili”. ‘It’s for me!’ I thought, as I leapt inside...

There were switches and an curvy slot in the center. I couldn’t understand what the slot was for. It finally dawned on me, the slot was a keyhole, in which my half of a sun-shaped amulet would fit in. Lian gifted me half an amulet and she kept the other half. As soon as I inserted my amulet, the machine came alive! I fell back and was locked in by a metal belt. I heard the engine *w* to life! My seat spun uncontrollably and the dashboard lit up. I suddenly felt dizzy and slipped into unconsciousness.

I didn’t know how long I was out for, but when I woke up the machine was silent. I could now see my amulet ejected from the keyhole. I grabbed it, wondering what had happened...

As I stepped out, I found myself in a field. I saw a troop of soldiers in the distance aiming guns in my direction! I froze and didn’t know what to do. Suddenly someone jumped on me and pulled me down to the floor. I looked up... It was Lian!

“Stay down, don’t let them see you!” She gasped.

“What is that?” I asked when I heard whizzing sounds.

“Those are bullets, be careful! What are you doing in the middle of the field? Are you crazy?” Lian said in a state of panic.

How did I get here and what is Lian doing here? I thought to myself.

“Why did you leave school so early?” I asked her.

“I got here the same way you did. I built the time machine that transported you. I used the amulets as a key. Half the amulet takes you to the past and joining the amulets takes you to the present. I travelled without both amulets and got stuck here in 1949, and boy, am I glad to see you! I need your help. With your half of the amulet, we can go back home” Lian concluded.

I listened to her story in disbelief.

“Do you have your half of the amulet with you?” Lian asked

“Yes, what about you?” I replied.

Lian said she was transported to Jing’an Temple, where she dropped her half of the amulet in all the chaos.

“We have to go to the temple to find the other half” Lian said anxiously.

“Hang on, where are we?” I asked.

“We’re in Shanghai in midst of the Chinese Revolution, it’s the 2nd of October 1949, and we need to go home!” Lian exclaimed.

“ WHAAAAAT?!!” I screamed

We set out to Jing’An Temple. On our way, I saw soldiers dining in a quaint cafe. They were everywhere. All seemed unreal to me, like an old Chinese movie. We passed beggars on the street. I saw fear in their eyes. There was tension all around as people were afraid for their lives. As we passed a newspaper vendor, I read the headlines that screamed out “**THE BIRTH OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA!**” The date read *October 02, 1949*. Lian was right, my worst fears came true!

We finally arrived. The temple was magnificent and stood tall with a majestic gold exterior. The wooden doors were enormous and devotees crowded at the entrance, flocking around an awesome sight: a towering jade statue of Buddha. It was the largest statue I had ever seen. We saw locals praying anxiously. I noticed long corridors crowned with arches, adorned in intricate carvings. The echoing of the copper bell would ring through.

We searched high and low for the amulet, in vain. We were getting desperate and Lian broke down. Just then, someone heard us. It was best not to tell her our version of the story as she would think we were delusional.

“I’ve dropped my mother’s precious amulet. She will be heartbroken if she knew I lost it” I explained.

Luckily, the lady believed me and offered to help. Her name was Ming. We spent the next few hours searching every inch of the temple. Lian and I were now losing hope...

Ming was a caregiver who provided wholesome meals to the monks. She was graceful and saintly. She considered her devotional work as a calling from heaven. Ming asked for help in lighting candles and serving food. I was willing to help for a while to ease my stress. Lian was now extremely distraught. After I served meals of rice and soup, I proceeded to the candles. As I came to the last candle, I saw a glow but it was not a flame. I went closer and looked inside. I gasped with excitement! It was the amulet shining brighter than ever! Lian was ecstatic! We thanked Ming for her kindness and ran to the machine.

We joined the amulets, inserted them into the machine, buckled up and were set to go home! The engine came alive and our seats spun uncontrollably, and as before, we lost consciousness...

I woke up to the deafening sound of a bell. Where on earth was I now? Are the soldiers coming? I looked around with beads of sweat pouring down my forehead... and realised I was back in class!

“PHEW, I’m home!” I said to myself, as my heart stopped racing. I looked over to Lian who smiled at me, but I couldn’t help wonder, had we really travelled back in time to Old Shanghai, or was it just a dream?

Reunited in Old Shanghai

Korean International School, Tong, Chi Lok Leia – 9

It was just an ordinary day in Shanghai in the 1920's. During this time Shanghai seemed to be run by the “Green Gang”, a secret society. The leader of the Green Gang was a man called Qiang Shang, a notorious gangster, who was well-known by the local police.

Qiang Shang was a very busy man but he loved going to the movies. At the moment, his favourite movie star was Jing Tien. She was a young actress and the daughter of Jing Fung, an official in the Shanghai government. Her latest movie was called, “Tales of Lost Love”, and it was about a soldier who fell in love with the daughter of the Emperor. Qiang Shang watched that movie at least 20 times.

Meanwhile, Jing Tien was busy filming her new movie and was collected everyday by a rickshaw driver who would pick her up in the morning, take her to her studio for rehearsals, and drop her home in the evening. The rickshaw driver was called Jiao Ring and he had been pulling rickshaws since he was 14 years old. He had always worked very hard and now, at the age of 42, had bought his own rickshaw and managed to pay for his 2 children to go to school.

One morning, Jing Tien received a letter, she opened it to find out it was from Qiang Shang. She had never met him before but there were often rumours about him in the newspaper and whisperings from her father. Imagine her surprise when she found out that it was actually a love letter with a marriage proposal. She did not know what to do so, she did the next best thing and told her parents. Her father was even more shocked than Jing Tien.

The very next day, Jing Fung went to see Qiang Shang to ask him about the letter. He demanded to know why Qiang Shang wanted to marry his daughter when he had never met her before. Unexpectedly, Qiang Shang began to cry and explained that he had always wanted to be an actor but his father, who had started the Green Gang, had pushed him into the family business. After his father died, he felt that he had no choice but to carry on with whatever he did before. He told Jing Fung that he wanted to leave the Green Gang and set up his own movie studio. He wanted it to be the “Hollywood of the East”, and he wanted Jing Tien to be in all his movies as he had fallen in love with her while he watched her movies on screen. Jing Fung was speechless. He told Qiang Shang that he would need time to think about everything and talk to his daughter.

After he left, he went straight to the studio where his daughter was making her latest movie. He got into a rickshaw that was parked close by and gave the driver directions

As the driver turned around, Jing Fung was shocked for a second time that day. The driver looked just like Qiang Shang, but it was Jiao Ring. The hair was certainly different, as were the clothes but he had the same eyes and nose! Jing Fung asked Jiao Ring if he knew Qiang Shang but the rickshaw puller said that he had never heard of the Green Gang boss. When asked for more details about his family, the driver told him he did not remember his mother as she had died after he was born and that he grew up in an orphanage.

Jing Fung couldn't believe what he was hearing, was this rickshaw driver really the long lost brother of one of the richest man in Shanghai, was this possible? The rickshaw driver took Jing Fung to the movie studio and told him he knew this place well because he drove the famous actress, Jing Tien, here every day, "That's my daughter!" he said.

There were just so many coincidences on that day.

Jing Fung spent an hour telling his daughter the whole story and she was as shocked and surprised as he had been. Jing Tien wanted to reunite Jiao Ring and his brother, Qiang Shang, because she liked him and had heard his story about how hard he had worked in life so that his children could go to school and have the opportunities he never had. Jing Fung naturally agreed with everything except allowing Qiang Shang to marry his daughter. Jing Tien laughed and said that she could think of another way for the gangster's dream to come true.

A few days later, Jing Tien and her father got a lift from Jiao Ring and asked to be taken to Qiang Shang's house so that they could put their plans into action. When the father and daughter arrived, they asked Qiang Shang to come downstairs as they wanted him to come to the studio for an audition. They said that one of the actors was sick and they had told the director of the movie that they knew somebody who was perfect for the role. Qiang Shang was already very excited to see Jing Tien and believed her when she told him it was a very last minute decision.

Qiang Shang followed the pair to where the rickshaw was parked and when he saw Jiao Ring, he stopped and stared at him. Jiao Ring stared back, when they were together they looked even more alike. Jing Fung spoke first, "This is our driver, he is a good man and does not know his real family."

The brothers hugged and spent an hour in the rickshaw telling each other about their lives. "I feel like I have known you my whole life," said Qiang Shang.

Jing Fung and his daughter were happy for the brothers, she said to Qiang Shang, "there is still one thing left to do, we must get married today, I'm afraid it's only in the movie though!" Everyone laughed and they drove to the studio to say, "I do".

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Kok, Karina – 11

My twin brother Chang sat silently on the luscious green grass, reading a book. I ran over to him, sitting down on a stone stool. “Chang, what’s the story of the girl who ventured over the wall?”

“You’ve asked so many times about Yang, don’t you just hate hearing that story?” Chang lamented, pushing his glasses further up his nose. “You are constantly bothering me about it. You should memorise it and read it to yourself every day,” Chang snickered.

I narrowed my eyes at him and pounced on him tickling his sides. “Okay, okay, I’ll tell you,” Chang gasped between breaths. I sat down and waited patiently for him to begin.

“In 1554 during the Ming dynasty, the city wall was constructed, mainly to keep threats away from the main city, Shanghai. Locals were not permitted to leave – they would receive death penalties, but high class nobles or traders could go safely. The story started a long, long time ago...

Yang’s brother, Ying frowned. Yang was pestering him about the wall. “Yang, why do you keep asking? Are you thinking about sneaking out? Let me tell you – never attempt that – those soldiers and guards are merciless. Once you are discovered, you could be publicly hanged.”

“Whatever,” Yang waved him off, “I would never think about something so risky.”

“You better not,” Ying warned Yang for one last time before slinking away to do his chores. Really, she was thinking about running away – the thrill of these “adventures” in the middle of the night made her more and more excited.

“Ying, Yang, it’s dusk, come back in,” their mother hollered into the backyard. Yang raced back into the house, up the stairs and into her room. She sat on her bed, watching the sun slowly fade into the horizon as nighttime fell upon them.

As the chatter in the house slowly fell silent, she extinguished the candle in her room, pretending to be asleep. This is a risk, but it certainly should be worth trying, Yang thought to herself in the eerily silent dark.

Sticking her head out of the window, Yang checked for anyone roaming the streets at night. There were a few patrol guards here and there, but they couldn’t possibly see her. Her house was a few blocks down to the wall, she would have to slip through the alleys to reach it. Yang squeezed through the window, and nimbly climbed down the slippery, grey tiles, scaling down and landing on the rock-hard pavement. As quickly as she had come down, Yang hid in a dark corner of the street, away from the sight of the guards.

She ran, panting, down the stairs of a dark alleyway towards the towering north gate. She was going to head past the tower and reach the north east part of the wall, where there were little to no guards on patrol. Just as she was about to grab a loose brick, a tug on her boyish shirt held her back.

Yang whirled around, face to face with a handsome strange boy about her age, smiling mischievously. The boy shook her gently.

“I’m Heng, and you are?” the boy asked her.

“Aren’t you going to tell on me, for trying to escape?” Yang trembled, getting more scared by the second.

Heng stared at her, surprised. “Of course not, I came here to have an adventure too!” he laughed quietly at Yang. He quietly sneaked the grappling hook out of his backpack, and Yang gasped in surprise as he swung the grapple up into the moonlight sky and hit the top of the wall with a silent “clang”.

He lifted himself on the thick rope, gesturing for Yang to wait as he scurried up the wall like a professional wall climber. When he was nearing the top, he hoisted his leg over the wall. Yang was still halfway up when the guards approached, walking below the both of them. Yang shrouded her face with her raven black hair, and Heng crouched low behind the thick wall. The guards were talking in a low whisper, and soon they disappeared and the two came out of hiding.

“Well that was close, the guards were that near to discovering us.” Heng breathed out.

“Yeah, we would be killed the second they see us,” Yang whispered into the darkness. The duo started down the wall, light footsteps receding in the dark as they walked silently, hand in hand into the big unknown city.

The sun was rising, the boy and the girl turned around after lots of exploring and adventure in the vast city. The horizon burst full of colors as the sun slowly climbed out, shooting beams of magical light through the clouds, lighting up the sky as the small city awakened. However, the magnificent sight did not last long, and the sunrise signaled the ending of their adventure.

“Liang will kill me if she finds me missing from my bed when she comes to wake me up!” Yang exclaimed in shock as a wave of realization washed over her.

“I’ll get you back in time. Let me tell you, I do this every Sunday nighttime,” Heng laughed softly and tugged her by the arm, and they ran back to their houses, twisting and turning around the familiar streets and alleyways of Old Shanghai.

“And then? And then what happened?” I interrupted impatiently, and Chang scowled, obviously annoyed at me. He made a “quiet” gesture, as he continued the story.

“Yang and Heng got home successfully and continued to have many more rendezvous. They didn’t tell anyone about the secret until the wall was dismantled in 1912. Someone thought they fell in love and had a family. That’s all I know.”

I nodded, dreaming of the romantic meetings of when they explored the unknown together. At that moment, a photo floated down from the sky, perhaps blown by the light breeze. I picked it up, and I gulped out of surprise – a photo of a young lady in a Chinese dress from the ancient times – just what I had pictured Yang to be like. I flipped it to the back – in beautiful calligraphy, written on the back of the photo was: for my granddaughter, whom I would like to be named...

The Promise

Sai Kung Central Lee Siu Yam Memorial School, Gabutina, Kimiko – 10

The knock on her bedroom door woke up Madison with a jolt. She checked the time — half past eleven. She needed the sleep — the next day was the first day of her final exams. Education came before almost anything, her father always reminded her. *‘It’s the one thing you can take with you anywhere you go.’*

She had been in the middle of a dream, the one she had been having the past few nights. It always began with her standing on a bridge, staring at the most unusual set of rocks beside a traditional pavilion. If only she knew where that place was.

Madison rubbed her eyes sleepily as she marched toward the door, cracking it open. “Dad?” she grumbled, peering at her father, whose hair was a tangled mess. “What is it?”

“It’s Nāinai, she’s in hospital. She had another stroke. Mum and I are going there, you should come with us.”

Madison opened the door wider. “Is Nāinai going to be okay?” Her father looked down at his feet. “I don’t know, Maddie. Aunt Lorraine said it’s bad.”

Madison grabbed her father’s hand and squeezed it, not knowing what else to say to comfort him.

The drive to the hospital was filled with silence. Her dad was fidgeting behind the wheel while her mother quietly prayed. Madison’s grandmother had been immediately sent to the Intensive Care Unit, which only heightened her father’s distress. “You should go inside, Maddie,” her mother urged. “Dad and I are going to talk to the doctor.”

Madison nodded and trudged into the sterile room. She gasped at the sight of her grandmother. She almost didn’t recognise the woman who used to bribe her with cookies in exchange for kisses. She swallowed a sob as she stared at her while trying to drown the sound of the heart monitor’s constant beeping. Nāinai seemed so tiny and frail, with wires hooked into her body. Madison wondered how long it had been since she had paid gran a visit.

“Nāinai,” she whispered. “It’s me, Maddie. I’m here. We’re all here.”

She pulled the lone chair near the bed and sat. “I’m sorry I wasn’t around that often. It’s just that school has kept me busy and I always have a truckload of homework. Also my piano recital is coming up. And, oh, I made it to the drama club too. We’re going to do *Romeo and Juliet*. I’m townsfolk number two. I have, like, two whole lines. Isn’t that neat? Get well, okay? So you could watch me upstage the leads.”

If gran were awake she'd be laughing. *'Oh, Maddie, you crack me up,'* she'd probably say. She should have visited more often, told her more stories, asked her to teach her Mahjong, or listened to her talk about the days when she and Yéyé lived in China. How they sailed to the United States with only the clothes on their backs. Ever since Yéyé died two years ago, Nāinai had never been the same. No more spring in her step, no twinkle in her eyes.

Tears began trickling down Madison's cheeks, moistening the pillowcase. She was dabbing it with the sleeve of her coat when something under it caught her eye. She tugged at its edge and pried it free.

It was a black-and-white photograph of her grandparents when they were young. Squinting, she studied the grainy image, and saw the way they beamed at each other while holding hands. They were on a bridge over a pond, near a bed of giant rocks. It looked familiar. She clapped her hand over her chest as her heart thumped faster. "No way," she muttered.

"What's wrong, Maddie?" Her father's voice made her yelp. "Dad, look!" She held up the photo. Her father drew a finger to his lips, gesturing to keep her voice down. He bobbed his head. "Oh, that. Ma always keeps it with her. It was taken the day Yéyé asked her to marry him."

"This is the garden in my dreams. See the rock with a lot of holes? Pour water on top and it will pass through each hole. Or burn an incense stick below it and the smoke will flow through the holes too. Cool to watch."

"How did you know that?" her father asked.

"I told you, I kept dreaming about it. Sometimes I'm on the bridge, sometimes I'm swimming in the pond, sometimes I'm the one burning a joss stick under it."

Her father smiled. "You remembered. There's a reason you know all those things about that rock — because Nāinai used to tell you stories about the Exquisite Jade Rock of Yuyuan Garden when you were little."

"Huh?"

"The Exquisite Jade Rock— it's one of the most famous rocks in all of South China. It's in Yu Garden in Shanghai. It's Nāinai and Yéyé's favourite place."

"I remember now. She told me that rock had sunk in the bottom of the river when it was being transferred. Then people had to break down a part of Shanghai's old city wall when they transported it into the Yu Garden."

Her father touched the pale, wrinkly hand of his mother. "The rock was simply magnificent, one of China's true gems. Pan Yunduan built the garden for his parents, where they could live peacefully together. Yéyé promised Nāinai he'd bring her back there. 'Next year,' he'd always tell her. But then he got sick and..." His voice trailed off.

Yéyé ran out of 'next years.' And now Nāinai seemed like she was about to.

A year later.

Madison stepped through one of the half-circle moon doors in the crowded garden.

"Over here Maddie!" her mother yelled.

"Coming!" she hollered.

She could see it now — that hole-riddled rock in the middle of two giant stones, like guards watching over the exquisite creation atop the artificial mountain in the middle of the man-made pond.

"Nāinai, Yéyé, we're here," she whispered.

A Tale of an Orphan in Old Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Cheung, Bowen – 11

My name is Lee Ming. My father makes fabric at home, and my mother sells them in the market. One day, foreign troops came to our village and took over. They started selling machine-made fabric which was more beautiful than ours. Those fabrics were not just beautiful, but they were also cheaper than ours. Soon enough, people in our village stopped buying our hand-made fabric, and started to buy the machine-made fabric sold by the foreigners. Since our business was stolen by the foreigners, we decided to develop in Shanghai. My father joined the Shanghai Green Gang, and my mother now works in a rich foreigner's house. A year later, my father was killed when fighting with another Green Gang member for territory. My mother then contracted lung disease because she started to smoke opium, and she passed too. That is how I became an abandoned orphan in Shanghai.

After my parents died, I had to live on the street. My life was absolutely horrible. I had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to wear in the winter, and I get kicked by the rich when I beg at their feet. I thought to myself, why not go and join the Green Gang like my father did? That way, I can survive in Shanghai and revenge my father's murder. Yes! That's the best thing to do. The next day, I went to the Green Gang's headquarters. The air at the Green Gang's headquarters filled with the smell of opium. The hallways were dark and gloomy, and there are guards everywhere in the building. At last, I finally got to the Green Gang's boss, Du Yue Sheng's room. The door of this room was decorated with the picture of a Green Gang member holding an axe. I knocked on the door. "Dong Dong Dong" When I finished knocking, I heard someone inside say "come in!" in a fierce yet mysterious voice. As I went into the room, fearful, I saw a tall, slim man sitting on a chair. He was Du Yue Sheng. "Why are you here?" His voice boomed in the room. I told him what happened to me and why I wanted to join his Green Gang. At last, he agreed for me to join. He then told me the territory I have and what is my business for surviving. After he finished, I said thank you to him and quickly ran out of his room. Whoa, that was a scary person. My business was the

same as my father's, to trade things to the foreigners at the dock of Shanghai. I am very lucky not to get the business of trading opium with the foreigners. Not long after I joined the Green Gang, I learned how to do lots of bad business. It was absolutely horrible. Unfortunately, if you want to survive in the Green Gang, you need to be bad, or should we say evil.

After a few years, my workers and I already had one third of Shanghai as our territory. I also helped my father take revenge on the person who killed him. In all those battles with other Green Gang members for territory, the battle with a member called Huang Wei was the scariest. This person had one fifth of Shanghai's territories, so it was really useful to get his territories.

It was a dark, stormy night. The wind blow ferociously in the sky, and a lightning storm was striking Shanghai. I had about 700 people on my side for that battle, and that guy had like 600. When the fight started, you could see a swarm of people fighting with each other. Some holding axes, some holding knives. You can even see some holding guns. The battle lasted for hours. At dawn, you could see dead bodies all over the place. It was a disgusting and scary sight. Blood also splashed all over the place. I almost lost my arm in that battle! Well, it's a good thing we won. When you win a battle for territory, it means more power. After this battle, I still can't imagine how a teenager like me would have the power of controlling one third of Shanghai. What I can't imagine even more is that how did I manage to get to this place I am now?

At that time for me, it was just battles after battles, fights after fights for territory. I managed to stay alive for this whole time. It was a hard time for me in the Green Gang, but it was better than lying on the street and getting kicked by foreigners. I guess a lot of other people who joined this Green Gang have the same reason as me for joining. For a better chance to survive in Shanghai.

After being in the Green Gang for so many years, I finally learned something. That is if you are rich or if you have some kind of power over Shanghai at that time, you must have had contacts with some bad businesses. If you wanted to survive old Shanghai at that time, you need to be bad. Shanghai wasn't a place where everyone had equal rights, it was a place where you needed to really fight for your place.

Historical Pages of Shanghai

Shanghai Singapore International School, Wong, Edith – 11

“Erin! Time for dinner!”

“Yes, mum.” Erin Campbell groaned as she closed the book *Ancient Shanghai*. Slowly, she dragged herself to the bathroom to wash her hands.

“What were you reading again? New book?” Erin’s father asked as soon as Erin sat down at the dinner table.

“Yes, it is.” Erin murmured as she started to stuff food into her mouth, trying to finish the dinner as fast as possible and continued to read the book.

After dinner, Erin went back in her room. Her twin sister, Eleanor Campbell, followed her and said, “Don’t you notice something weird about your new book?” Eleanor delicately touched the book *Ancient Shanghai* with her index finger.

“Nope.” Erin replied, stacking up her other books. “What’s wrong with it?”

“It looks so old. Do you think the book is magical or something?” Eleanor asked again, but with a whisper this time.

“You might be right. Let’s check it out!” Erin said excitedly.

“Okay, I don’t think I was serious about it.” Eleanor said, but Erin was already flipping the pages furiously, hoping to find something magical in the book. Suddenly, the pages started to glow. “Move back, Eleanor. I want to...!” Erin yelled. Then she somehow got sucked into the book. Eleanor immediately followed her.

“Where is this?” Erin asked herself.

“AAAAAAHHHHH!”

Eleanor fell on top of Erin.

“Eleanor, I told you not to follow me.” Erin said grumpily.

“Well, what am I going to tell mom at dessert time? *Hi, mom! Erin fell into a book. By the way, what’s for dessert?* Give me a break!” Eleanor replied, highly offended.

“Let’s look at where we are before we start quarreling again,” Erin instructed, picking up the book from the floor.

The place was familiar to Erin. It was a whole bunch of white brick walls, but it looks like...

There was a road signage that read “Avenue Joffre” outside the window. A quiet, leafy street outside and inside of the room was cold brick walls, the guards, and... the uniform! “A portrait above the fireplace showed the name Charles de Montigny!” Eleanor realized. “We’re in 1849! He is the French Consul to Shanghai. He is the one who established The French Concession in Shanghai.” Erin concluded quickly.

“I suppose so.” Eleanor grunted.

“*Bonjour, sire!*” An unfamiliar voice said. Eleanor and Erin hid behind a chest full of France’s treasures, but Erin accidentally dropped *Ancient Shanghai*.

“*C’ est?*” Another voice replied. Erin could see face of the French Consul, talking to a French soldier. “We’re in the book!” Eleanor whispered.

“Wait, where’s the book?”

Eleanor turned around as one soldier picked the book up. The two men continued to have the conversation in French while Erin and Eleanor quietly tried to check out this French concession house while trying to find the book. But they stopped at the first room. Three soldiers were guarding the room, and one of them was holding it.

“What should we do?” Erin whisper-shouted. “The book is the only way of reaching back home!”

“I don’t know, okay?” Eleanor answered in another whisper.

An idea popped up into Eleanor’s head. She first scooted up closer to the soldiers and hid behind the wall. Then she whispered like an owl with a low voice. “*Hoooooooooot -a - hooooo - toot.*” Eleanor sang. The soldiers quickly scurried away and dropped the book *Ancient Shanghai*. Erin retrieved it as quickly as she can.

“How did you do that?” Erin asked with astonishment as soon as she got the book back. Eleanor winked at her.

“The French army use that sound as a battle alarm. That’s often used when they were in China because they often have battles in here.” Eleanor explained patiently. “Now, let’s get going.”

Erin laid the book open on the floor. Again, the book magically sucked them in.

“Where are we now?” Erin gently rubbed her eyes. Suddenly, she heard a scream.

Erin expected the scream to be Eleanor’s (since she was falling), but surprisingly, Eleanor asked Erin, “Did you scream?”

Erin shook her head. “Nope, I thought it was you.” She answered cautiously as she looked around.

Unexpectedly, cannons and gun sounds were filling up the air everywhere.

The scene was recognizable. Terrified Chinese women were clutching their babies tightly, screaming. Chinese men were trying to fight off a bunch of Japanese soldiers with pale faces but determined spirits that they would defeat the Japanese. Little children scurried down the alleyways trying to flee from the Japanese.

Erin immediately realized this scene was an actual picture in her book *Ancient Shanghai*. “It’s the Battle of Shanghai! We are in the period of Sino-Japanese War!” Erin shouted, but her voice was swallowed by shooting sounds.

Eleanor ran towards Erin and ducked cannonballs that were coming in every direction. Both of them hid behind a wall.

“Let’s get out of this crazy place!” Eleanor yelled as she ducked another cannonball.

“Please don’t tell me you lost it again! In the middle of World War II!”

“I didn’t lose it! It’s over there!” Erin shouted.

The book, in fact, was stuck in the dirt.

“Good job!” Eleanor yelled sarcastically. “Now we have to risk our lives just to get a stupid little book titled *Ancient Shanghai* in the middle of a war between the Japanese and China! Thanks a lot, Erin!”

Erin grabbed a rock and threw it towards the Japanese army’s direction. Ducking a few more fiery cannonballs, Erin made her getaway to grab the book missing being struck down by the tip of her hair. Erin scattered towards the rock where Eleanor was hiding. Now, it was Erin’s turn to be admired.

“Wow!” Eleanor’s jaws dropped. Without waiting for another minute in this war, Erin opened her book and the book sucked them in for the final time as she prayed to be out of this old city. “Please bring us back home... Please bring us back home...”

The book brought them back home with the girls landing with a thump on their floor of their warm, cosy bedroom. Their eyes glazed in astonishment and relief, but the book shut and flew into the bookshelf.

Nothing like home, Erin thought to herself as she drifted off to sleep, the sounds of canons and children scattering in old town...

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Tam, Zheng Xin Katy – 11

“**W**hy would they disapprove?” questioned Seth in his impossibly thick American accent. Even at the young age of 17, his accent was as prominent as his father’s. Lee was the richest kid in Shanghai, and had everything from girls to brains.

“Seth, I’m...different. I don’t come from a rich family. I’m just another beggar, as desperate as an aging belle seeking attention.” Noy replied as he took out straw basket and parked himself on the curb, “I’m a nobody: your parents want you to be hanging out with important figures. Go talk with Lee or Priscilla, I’m not worth it. I may be funny, but your reputation is more important.” Noy finished and slumped against a pillar, engraved with political remarks by the protesters that roamed the street occasionally.

“Noy, you’re different than the rest. You’re doing this for your family, and you have done nothing but suffer throughout this war. I admire you Noy, you have held on through this war while still remaining optimistic.” Seth commented as Noy turned away and held out his basket, slouching as the basket remained empty. Seth simply sighed and headed back home, immediately greeted by his servants and overly dressed parents.

“Seth, where have you been?” Seth’s father, Michael, asked as Seth simply shrugged and placed his hands on the gold infused handrail, then turned when his mother, Olivia, asked him something outrageous.

“Have you been seeing that tramp again? That smelly one who somehow knows information?” she asked again as Seth’s eyes filled with fury. Yet he did nothing but clench his fists and slam the door that barricaded him from his parents. What did his parents have against Noy? Noy was just another refugee in their eyes, but to Seth he was the funniest, most intelligent person he had ever met. Seth’s fists met the walls when he thought of the war and the discrimination that came with it. However, it was the war that brought him to Noy. Seth connected his fists with the walls again then slumped down.

“You want to meet Olivia Minter? You? My word you’re silly. Back off, you strange man!” the voice of Seth’s dad echoed throughout the mansion and flowed through the ears of Seth, who braced himself for what was to happen and he brought down his backpack.

He then panicked down the stairs to see Noy, holding the birthday card he and Noy made together for his mother. Seth, infuriated by his dad's words, pushed him away and just hugged Noy, who hugged back. It was Seth who broke away from the hug, to scold his dad.

“How dare you speak to Noy like that? I can't believe you! Can't you tell that not all beggars silly and cruel. If anything, you have been nothing but silly in believing this kind of behaviour, Michael.” Seth shrieked, to his parent's shock and horror. And with that, he slammed the door to the once glamorous mansion and let the metal gates in front of his house clang shut, dragging Noy and his backpack towards Noy's usual spot in Shanghai as the locals on the street held their noses at the pair in disgust.

“Have you tried going away from ‘The Bund’? Seth asked, breaking the tension that enveloped the two. Noy simply shook his head.

“Japanese officials roam the area, I don't go there anymore because of them.” Noy replied as he reluctantly followed Seth down the road that led to the infamous Bund. He helped me set up my sign and sat down next to me, clutching a basket to his chest as well.

“Seth? What are you doing? You're the poshest kid in Shanghai and you're begging on the streets! Get up now! What is this hidden objective of yours?” Noy yelled in shock as Seth simply shook his head.

“Noy, you are the reason. Since the day I met you I knew we were going to be friends, and ever since then our friendship has been through so much,” Seth admitted, and hid his face as Noy faced him, “I love you Noy, and I can't help it. I don't care about your clothes, I care about seeing you smile and seeing you be free.” Seth continued as happy tears flowed down slowly as he simply turned to Noy, waiting for some kind of response. But before anything could happen, they were rudely interrupted by a Japanese official, who did not look happy.

“Noy Fujishima?” he asked in a gruff voice. Noy raised his hand in fear and stood there, petrified by the towering figure in the black jacket.

“Noy Fujishima, you are under arrest for being part of the Japanese resistance and you are heading to the police station with this friend of yours.” The official said as Noy was separated from the ground and was dragged off to the station and thrown into jail.

“This is that resistance leader you were talking about, Riku-san” The guard said as he pointed to Noy as Seth looked on in confusion when the inspector said three words.

“Beat him up.”

Seth completely lost it and threw himself in front of Noy, and he took all the punches and kicks for Noy, who stood there, crying as he watched Seth lose it when a woman in a fur coat appeared at the jail cell's entrance.

Olivia Minter.

The soldiers backed away and ran as she comforted her son, yet the only thing Seth heard was the bombs that began dropping in the background and the screams of civilians and the laughing of officers.

As Seth dropped down to his knees, he muttered over and over, “Unfair, this world is unfair” Then collapsed as the bombs rained down and the sound of explosions rang round his ears.

Goodbye, Shanghai.

Great Grandmother's French Encounter

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Leung, Charlotte – 10

Ten-year old Lei Yu felt very thankful. It was 1940. She knew there was a war and many parts of Shanghai were under the Japanese concession's control. She also knew they were not kind rulers. The Chinese population were suffering. Fortunately, the Japanese had left the foreign concessions alone. As she walked along Ave Pe'tain in the French Concession part of Shanghai, there was no sign of war. Tall plane trees lined the road and behind the trees, protected by hedges and fences, were grand mansions and expensive apartment buildings. This was one of the most beautiful parts of Shanghai. Lei Yu was glad her family was rich enough to live in this area.

As she skipped along, Lei Yu had only one thing on her mind – she was going to the big park. It was surrounded by a high stone wall but Lei Yu could get a glimpse of the park through the large iron gates. She did not like the sign on the gate. Written in large Chinese characters were the words 'NO CHINESE OR DOGS ALLOWED'. Lei Yu was not sure what that meant or why the sign was there. She just knew she could not go inside. But, oh, everyone looked so happy in there. The tree leaves had turned golden and red, and they were fluttering ever so gracefully to the ground. She could even see squirrels scampering among the branches. How she wished she could run in that large park and hide among the trees!

"Hello." A voice startled her. Lei Yu looked up and saw a boy standing inside the gate, looking at her. He seemed to be about her age, maybe a couple of years older. He had the most yellow hair and the most beautiful brown eyes she had ever seen. He wore a plain blue shirt and stood there, his hands in the pockets of his grey and white trousers, with a big smile on his face. He looked friendly and very rich, but Lei Yu did not know what to do. She turned round and ran away. She could hear him calling after her, but she just ran without looking back.

The next day, Lei Yu went to the park again. She peered through the gate and the boy was standing just inside! He seemed to be waiting for her. "How are you? My name is Ames. Who are you? Why don't you come in?" he said in Mandarin!

Lei Yu was really surprised but Ames' accent was so funny that she giggled. Ames blushed. He looked down at his shoes and said, still in Mandarin, "I know I don't speak that well, but at least I hope you can understand what I'm saying."

Lei Yu was a little embarrassed. She had been rude. She looked at Ames and nodded, "I can understand what you're saying. My name is Lei Yu. I'm sorry."

It turned out that Ames was French. He and his family were staying in the big mansion just opposite to the park. He was able to speak Mandarin because his nanny and the family driver were Chinese and because he had a Mandarin tutor. When Ames found out Lei Yu's desire to visit the park, he took her to his home when his parents were away. From the big glass window on the second storey, Lei Yu was able to see into the park – the flower beds, the ponds, the bicycle tracks, and of course, the beautiful trees. She could even see children running around and adults resting on the benches under the trees.

After that day, the two youngsters would meet at the gate of the park and they would spend hours together. They would read and recite, they would run and hide in Ames' garden and they would take walks along the avenue or follow the stone walls of the park. Lei Yu helped Ames to improve his Mandarin, and he taught her French.

Then one day, Ames had bad news for Lei Yu. A new government was in France and his father had been ordered to return to France. Lei Yu did not really understand. Her eyes were filled with tears, wanting to cry, but she did not want to upset Ames who was already very sad. The afternoon was spent in silence. When their last meeting came to an end, tears rolled down Lei Yu's cheeks. Ames took out a piece of paper and a pencil and asked Lei Yu to write down her address. He promised that he would return to see her. With trembling hands, Lei Yu did so, but she had a terrible feeling that she would never see Ames again.

Life in the French Concession did not stay unchanged for long. Lei Yu heard the adults talking about a place called Pearl Harbour, about the United States entering the war. Then, Japanese soldiers marched into the concession areas. The foreign nationals had to wear armbands. The Japanese soldiers were not kind to them. Some were even sent to prison. Lei Yu was aware of all the terrible things that were happening. As she saw Frenchmen being beaten on the street, she comforted herself that even if she never saw Ames again, she was grateful that he was away back at home and safe from these people.

The years that followed were not easy ones for Lei Yu and her family. Peace did not come when the Japanese were defeated. The Chinese Civil War followed. Many people left China when it was clear the Communists would win. Among them were Lei Yu's family. After that, Lei Yu never returned to Shanghai.

Two years ago, Mother took me to Shanghai. We visited the area that was the French Concession. We walked along tree-lined streets. We admired the old but grand mansions. Many had been turned into restaurants and clubs. Then Mother told me the story of Lei Yu-my great grandmother and Ames. Finally, she stopped in front of a red-brick apartment block. "This is it. This is where your great grandmother lived." We were so intent on looking at the building that we didn't notice a gentleman with blonde hair and brown eyes, he had a yellow shirt and green shorts. Then he spoke, he held out a piece of yellowing but well-kept paper, he showed it to my mother and asked in a funny accent in Mandarin, "Is this the address on this paper?"

Beyond the Wall

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Sung, Alannah – 10

Xiao Ching finished sweeping the dusty old road outside her family's store. She looked over at her two adorable young children, and stared out at the French Concession in the horizon, reminiscing about the wonderful experience that had changed her life. She wondered what her childhood friend Chantal would be doing now in faraway Paris...

Shanghai was once a small and peaceful market town, but it gradually grew larger. After the British came and opened the city as a treaty port, other foreign countries started to establish their own settlements there too, such as the Americans and the French. Merchants started trading goods in Shanghai, and the city became a vibrant and bustling place, but soon, the people decided to build a wall to separate the International Settlements from the rest of Shanghai.

The Wangs gave birth to a beautiful little girl called Xiao Ching. Although she didn't grow up in a rich and luxurious home, she still enjoyed her simple life. Xiao Ching was forbidden to enter the Settlements because her parents had told her that the people who lived there were strange-looking and dangerous, but whenever she went to the street leading to the Settlements to fetch water from the well or to sweep away the trash in front of her family's store, she would see lots of people from different countries walking up and down. They all wore elaborate hats and fancy clothes, which made Xiao Ching all the more curious about what life was like beyond the wall.

One afternoon, Xiao Ching was sent to get water from the well. She was just about to set down her bucket when she saw a girl who was different from her in every way. She had curly brown hair and was wearing a very pretty dress.

"Bonjour!" said the girl. She was walking a cute little poodle.

"Ni hao!" Xiao Ching replied, "What is your name?" she asked.

"My name is Chantal and I am from the French Concession."

The two girls started chatting as if they had known each other for years. Chantal then whispered, "I will tell you a secret. I am not allowed to leave the French Concession because my mother told me the Chinese are a peculiar nation, and it would not be safe for me to go

outside, but oh! How I wish to explore the outside world, so I sneaked out while my mother was taking her nap.”

“You know what?” Xiao Ching said, “My dream is also to explore the world beyond the Shanghai Wall. How about we help each other!”, Xiao Ching exclaimed.

She leaned over to whisper something in Chantal’s ear. After hearing Xiao Ching’s ingenious plan, Chantal gave a mysterious smile. They then said goodbye and went their separate ways.

Early the next morning, Xiao Ching rushed downstairs and told her mother that she was going to play with the kids next door, but instead, she went to hide herself inside a large sack of goods that she knew her father was going to deliver to the French Concession later that day, and so, Chantal met Xiao Ching at just the place where they had planned, and the fun began.

They spent the afternoon first playing in Chantal’s home while her mother was visiting her aunt, then exploring the streets of the French Concession. While they were standing outside the window display of a puppet shop and giggling away, a man’s powerful voice suddenly thundered from behind them, “What are you two mademoiselles doing here by yourselves... and oh, aren’t you Monsieur and Madame Rougier’s daughter? Now, I better take you back to them as you are far too young to be wandering the streets with your young Chinese friend here.” Chantal then recognised the man to be General Dupont, a very highly-ranked soldier and good friend of her father’s. Chantal knew she was in big trouble.

While they were walking to Chantal’s home, the two girls discovered that General Dupont was actually a very kind-hearted and funny man. They couldn’t help but pour out the truth to him. General Dupont was equally impressed by the girls’ courage to tell the truth, and he believed that they were genuinely sorry for what they had done. Therefore, he agreed to plead with Chantal’s father not to punish them. Although Chantal’s parents were very angry with her at first, they decided to give her a second chance. Monsieur and Madame Rougier also thought that Xiao Ching was a lovely girl. They decided to let the two girls remain friends and even let Chantal visit Xiao Ching’s home if her parents agreed, and to never trap her in the French Concession again.

Meanwhile, Xiao Ching also realised that she needed to confess to her parents about lying to them and sneaking into the French Concession, so she also told her parents everything and asked for their forgiveness. Xiao Ching’s parents were touched by her honesty. Not only did they not punish her, but they welcomed Chantal to visit their home.

Both girls’ parents realised that they had judged the others wrongly and were ashamed. The two families decided to meet and they became good friends in spite of their differences, and so the special friendship between the Wangs and the Rougiers has continued till this very day – a friendship not confined by the wall, and certainly not by the geographical distance that separates them even now.

The New Tale of Old City of Shanghai

Ying Wa Primary School, Chan, Yin Wang – 11

“**A**nd I just have to add the flux capacitor to the control panel and the time traveler 2000 is completed!” said Lambart. Lambart was a twelve-year-old genius. He loved to invent things, and his newest invention, the Time Traveler 2000 stood proudly in his messy laboratory. The Time Traveler 2000 was a time machine that could travel to any time and place on Earth. Lambart was learning about the old City of Shanghai, and he was very eager to see how life was like in the old city of Shanghai. He typed “The Old City of Shanghai” on the control panel and set the year dial to random. He then pressed a red button on the control panel. All of a sudden, the machine started to vibrate, humming with an eerie sound. Then the sound stopped. Both Lambart and the machine had disappeared.

The Time Traveler 2000 appeared in a dark alleyway. Lambart checked the year dial. It was the year 1853. Lambart didn’t know what happened in 1853, so he used the time machine’s built-in database to search about what happened. He typed, “The Old City of Shanghai in 1853”. The screen said, “It was the time of the Taiping rebellion. In 1853, The Old City fell into the hands of the Small Swords Society.” Lambart looked around to find out that he was face to face with an old man. The old man said, “What are you doing here, boy? Don’t you know that the Society members will be here any moment? Run!”

As they were about to flee, they found their ways were blocked by two large and burly men. The bigger of the two men said, “Mister Lau, Master - “Before he could even finish his sentence, Mister Lau had already punched him so hard that the man slumped to the ground, unconscious. The other man wheeled around, trying to attack the old man, but Mister Lau was too quick for him. Before long, both men were knocked out cold. Mister Lau said, “What are you waiting for, boy? Now we’ve attacked two Society members, they will be hot after our tails. Follow me!”

They both ran like rockets to Mister Lau’s house. After they went to Mister Lau’s house, the old man bolted the door shut. He said, “It won’t be long before the Society members

find us. Here's the plan: I'll give you my armor and a fast horse. You must get out of this city quickly, or they will be after your blood. I'll keep them busy while you escape. Understand?" Lambart nodded his head. The old man said, "Good. Here's my helmet and armor." The old man handed Lambart a set of bronze armor. "It's as tough as a diamond and twice as precious. This shotgun is also yours. Keep yourself safe, okay?" Lambart nodded. Mister Lau then led him out to the stables and took him in front of a handsome chestnut colored horse." This is Swiftwind," the old man said, patting the horse's head," the fastest horse in the whole city. You must get back to where you came from safely, before the society members get you. Understood?" Lambart nodded. He climbed onto Swiftwind's back and started to go back to the dark alleyway where the time machine was hidden from prying eyes.

Suddenly, he could see a dust cloud, so big that only a crowd of powerful horses could create a cloud of sand of that scale. He could hear the noise of a pack of horses galloping across the land. Once the dust cloud cleared he could see a team of ten people riding on horses. Once they dismounted, two people pointed a gun at both Mister Lau and Lambart.

The leader of the pack slid from his horse's back to the ground. He was a middle-aged man with a hideous scar running across his face. He said, "Well, well, well. Look at what we have got here! An old man who constantly disobey my orders! Now look at him, mopey and weak-"

"Excuse me, sir," said Lambart calmly. Anger and hatred were bubbling inside his stomach: how dare this foul man call one of the bravest people he had ever known weak?

The leader of the pack glared at the boy. Apparently, he was not happy to be interrupted while he was speaking. He said, "How dare you interrupt the leader of the Small Swords Society while he is talking? Do you want me to throw you into the moat?"

Lambart said, "Well, no. I just want to say that I am going away."

The leader of the Society raised his eyebrows. He said, "What makes you think that I will release you?"

Mister Lau said, "I do." Without waiting for the leader to defend himself, he punched the man in his face hard. The leader of the Society fell to the ground, unconscious. Lambart saw this as his chance to leave. With one last look at Mister Lau, who was still fighting the society, he urged Swiftwind to the alleyway where the time machine was hidden. He pressed the red button, and after a while, he was already back home.

Lambart started to think that the Time Traveler 2000 wasn't such a great invention. What if he accidentally screwed up? Would the whole world be affected? After a while, he decided on dismantling the machine. From that day on, he didn't make any time machines anymore.



Fiction

Group 3

The Red Ribbon

British International School Shanghai Puxi, Tan, Munique – 14

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

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

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

-Chen Li Na, June 9th 1931”

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

entry, hungry for more.

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

-Chen Li Na, September 21st 1931”

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

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

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

-Chen Li Na, July 30th 1937”

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

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

-Chen Li Na, August 7th 1937”

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

As I reached my bed, I dropped in exhaustion as the pages fluttered to the floor. I gazed at them before making the decision to reach over my bedside and grapple for my phone. The

line was ringing before I'd even thought it through.

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

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

"Good, thanks... You?"

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

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

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

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

-Chen Li Na, November 20th 1945"

Last Dance

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

“May I have this dance, Chen Manli?” he asks.
He is a Chinese soldier and a regular customer of mine. I look him up and down. He wears a dark green uniform as usual. He glances down at his pocket and pulls out a red wallet.
“You get 90 seconds.”

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

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

I pull away as fast as I can.

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

“You will regret this, kono baka!”

He storms away.

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

I stare down the barrel of a pistol.

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

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

The man pulls the trigger.

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

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

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

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

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

The door slams shut.

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

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

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

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

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

With a swoop of his staff, I am back.

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

The headlines reads, ‘Japanese Pulling Out.’

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

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

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

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

“Then dance you shall!”

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

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

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

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

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

The Candles

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

I was never supposed to see it.

Sunday 14th April 2000 - Miami, Florida

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

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

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

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

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

“Sir? Sir? You're fa-” I hear a voice, fading away.

“Mama, they're here! The Japanese they're here!”

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

“Mama.”

“Go now!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Hen Ren, don’t stand up, but roll over here, there are two men, and... and... one with a gun at your direction!” Lai La murmurs, shaking and scared, as she lay flat under the hay.

I quickly wake up and slowly, without sound, next to her, putting my hands on her head so she wouldn't risk being shot in the head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I relive it, over and over again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Embers of the Past

Chinese International School, Lam, Ralph – 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The door opened with a quiet creak and the pitter-pattering of feet stepped inside. Under the blanket of a posh bed slept a figure that was actually the portly man from the article and the vision. Beside the bed was a oil lamp. A small hand reached for the handle. The lamp began to shake in their hands, showing the raw emotion they contained. The man's eyes fluttered opened. He noticed them holding the lamp to his face. He spat out the word "You!"

but it meant nothing. Overwhelmed by emotion. They threw the burning oil lamp at the portly man, the glass shattering on his face, pelting it with a mixture of oil and fire. Causing untold agony.

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

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

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

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

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

Shanghai Summer 1921

Fanling Rhenish Church Secondary School, Sung, King Ho John – 14

As the orphans grew through the summer of 1921, studying, practicing, and living with Master Zhou, running through the streets and mapping out their hideaways, they decided it would be a good idea to establish three safehouses in each of the French Concession, the Chinese City, and the International Settlement. A safehouse would simply be a stairwell or a false floor where they hid a cache of weapons. These could be used in case someone tried to kidnap Peace again.

And with each passing day into the late summer, Peace grew ever more beautiful, more alluring, while her prostitute mother fell deeper into debt. Master Zhou—who adored the three children—warned Peace, Sanmao and Ah Yi never to wander down certain streets, especially near the Bund, and showed the children how to position themselves in a diamond shape for protection when passing through busy markets. He also made them promise never to leave the International Settlement (but they did, with frequency). Master Zhou could see that the children were over-confident in their kung fu skills and fledgling black magic abilities.

Once per week, the children would skip along rooftops in the French Concession to pay a visit to Peace’s mother for tea. This was very provocative, if not outright dangerous. Although her mother was always relieved to see Peace so happy and healthy with her ‘brothers’ (as Peace called the two boys), she would repeatedly beg Peace never to visit the brothel and always stay on guard: ‘Here. Rub this coal on your cheeks, and hold your head down...walk slowly...’ her mother would coo as if she were instructing the latest style in makeup.

Before the current uprising, Peace’s mother had always intended to send Peace away to live in the countryside near Ningbo, but with increasing lawlessness throughout the countryside, she gave up any plan of allowing Peace to leave the city. Warlords and armed gangs roamed on the outside, while refugees, beggars, and ordinary families begged to be allowed to enter the city. Yet, Shanghai itself was in a state of unrest and far from being ‘safe’...

The kidnapping finally took place on September 2nd, 1921. It was an ordinary day for the three children. The weather was clear, and Peace had let her guard down. She and Sanmao were at the corner buying steamed buns. Walking back to the gated yard of the Home for

Poor Children, it seemed as though Peace was hopping when she tripped on an invisible wire. Instantaneously, a man turned from his place against a brick wall, produced a burlap sack, and bungled Peace into a waiting car. Sanmao witnessed the abduction from his vantage point and took note of the car's number plate.

Peace was now in the hands of the legendary Madam Wong, who greeted the car at the gates of her mansion. Madam Wong had heard of Peace's beauty: 'Welcome to my home. Don't be depressed, Little One, we will bring you everything you need. Let's get started with a proper breakfast and then we'll talk business.'

Madam Wong was charming (and she spoke the most beautiful Shanghainese), but Peace was already planning her escape. Her knowledge of the city was so thorough that with just one glance out of the window, Peace knew exactly where she was within the International Settlement, and she even knew where the nearest safehouse happened to be: incredibly, it was in a garden shed behind the club next door. Peace tried not to stare in the direction of the cache as an exquisite congee was brought to the table.

'Thank you, Madam. I'm hungry.'

Madam Wong wore heavy makeup to cover the scar on the right side of her face. She had big, beautiful eyes, a big nose, and a crooked mouth. When Peace smiled, Madam Wong's crooked mouth would break into a crooked smile, and display a set of false teeth.

At that moment, two tall strangers burst into the room. They did not bother to introduce themselves: 'All we want is silver. You can start by asking your mother for 600 taels.'

Peace saw a look of annoyance cross Madam Wong's face. 'Not now, boys. Can't you see that two ladies are sharing breakfast?'

Peace smiled thankfully and tried to prolong the meal. She calmly spooned the congee without actually eating. She was sure that Sanmao and Ah Yin would arrive at any moment, and took a quick glance out of the front windows. The fine lead panes had been left open to catch the late summer breeze (Madam Wong and her foolish gang didn't seem to be taking this kidnapping very seriously).

'Perhaps Little Peace will become my adopted daughter for while; we have prepared the most beautiful rooms for her visit.'

Peace nodded slowly and forced a tight smile. Naturally, Peace would never consider leaving Master Zhou's studio. She would never leave her brothers and her teacher, not even if she were given the opportunity to move into a luxurious mansion.

Suddenly and as expected, Peace heard a pebble bounce off the windowpane. She caught a glimpse of Ah Yin's hair. He was already up on the roof.

'Excuse me, Madam, do you mind if I wash my hands?'

Peace rose from her chair and took 3 steps back. Just then, the boys burst into the room through the window. They were brandishing two swords and a changjon. SanMao threw the changjon to Peace, which she caught it deftly with one hand.

'Are you ready!?' cried Ah Yin.

'Yes, here we go!' shouted Sanmao.

The boys backed the two strange men out of the room with smooth sword work, then locked them in the stairwell. One of the men bolted out the front door of the mansion to get more men and weapons. In the meantime, Madam Wong was still sitting at the breakfast table, sipping her congee and Peace was standing at the back wall, changjon at the ready.

Ah Yin was annoyed: 'This was obviously your plan to kidnap Peace. You never think about the safety of others. Give us one reason now why we shouldn't kill you.'

'Children, children. I am like a mother to Peace, I want to take good care of her...and we

never asked for any money. This is all a big misunderstanding,’ replied Madam Wong.

Peace was touched by Madam Wong’s words, but couldn’t erase the memory of two large men demanding 600 taels, just seven minutes ago. And these men were surely coming back.

‘Madam Wong, now I think it’s time for *you* to call *your* mother. We want 200 taels – now – or we will chop off your fingers. Listen to us. There is no one in this house to help you.’ stated Peace, who used her training to force a determined look, even though she secretly wanted to run.

Madam Wong started to look upset, but she didn’t seem at all regretful. She started to weep false tears and said that she only wanted companionship, not silver. The boys were surprised for a moment, but Sanmao made the demand once again: ‘You are a con woman, famous all over town for terrifying good people. The time for tears has passed. Get 200 taels from the safe. This is officially a **RAID**. Do it **NOW!**’

Madam Wong walked slowly to a jade carving in the corner of the room, opened a door in its base, and took out a leather purse. She turned to face the trio that had thwarted her plan: ‘Children, don’t become thieves. Please don’t be like me. Just leave now and walk away from this life, become honest citizens.’ Madam Wong said, claspng the red leather purse with her long, painted nails.

‘Don’t listen to her. She’s stalling. Grab it!’ shouted Sanmao, taking the bag.

The children debated whether or not to harm Madam Wong and finally decided that they would simply break her jade bangle. They agreed to do this instead of harming her body.

Madam Wong was made to hold her hand out flat on the table while Ah Yin smashed the flat of his blade onto the crystal green–white jade. It cracked and split into two. When the jade broke, Madam Wong turned ash grey and crumpled into a pile of tears. The children then rushed through the back window and ran down the alley at speed.

When they reached Master Zhou’s studio, they finally dared to peek inside the red purse. It contained 80 gold taels! Truly a fortune. In handing it over, Madam Wong must have been convinced that she would get it back.

The following day, the children were training with Master Zhou when the news came out that Madam Wong had passed away. Peace felt an instant wave of shame and regret, and told the boys that breaking her jade wasn’t necessary.

Ah Yin simply stared at the ceiling and then asked Peace if she’d like to get kidnapped again. After all, with Madam Wong gone, Shanghai would be a safer place.

Later that afternoon, Peace’s mother sent a message to Master Zhou’s studio: she was been released from all debt upon Madam Wong’s passing, as it had been Madam Wong who had credited the brothel.

And so, soon after the summer of 1921, Peace’s mother was able to open a small business in Master Zhou’s building, mainly serving noodles and steamed bread. There would be no more need for Peace to walk to the corner in the early morning hours. Eventually, Peace’s mother gave out so much free, delicious steamed bread to the orphans from The Home For Poor Children that the steamed bread stand on the corner had to pick up and move to a different part of the city.

The summer of 1921 was not the first, nor was it the last time that Peace got kidnapped in Shanghai. However, it was the most memorable kidnapping and formed one of the most treasured memories of her youth.

Courtesan

Heep Yunn School, Chong, Kylie – 14

I'm not just in it for the money.

It's the heady, intoxicating rush of power, the knowledge that I hold someone's heart in the palm of my hands, bending men to my will with a pout and flutter of the eyelash.

The money's certainly a factor, though. People pay you surprisingly well for breaking their heart.

Making people fall in love with you is addictive. It's almost like a game- the initial eye contact from across the room, the coy smile and feigned blush, the courtship, the clink of copper, the broken heart. I make it a point to ruin all other girls for my clients, and besotted earnestness is proof that I've done my job. Some of them even become outright delusional, convinced I'm in love with them and expecting me to spend time with them for free.

I flash an insincere smile at the man opposite me as he wrings his hands, clearly holding back tears.

“Sorry, love, but I don't do freebies.”

It's not my fault he went bankrupt and can't afford me anymore. Without a backward glance, I walk into the foyer and swing the front door open.

Being desired really is flattering, but I'm a courtesan, for goodness' sake. Loving and leaving is quite literally my job. Why would I tie myself to one man? I only made that mistake once, and look where that got me.

Life here passes in a swirl of glitter and dances, and the courtesan house exists in another world, providing men with a break from reality. I'd been hearing about the war for a while, but as long as there were men to bewitch and money to earn, I couldn't have cared less about who controlled the city.

The Japanese occupation meant an influx of foreign clients, but Japanese officers were prone to violent outbursts and got away with almost any crime, especially committed against a courtesan. Still, I wasn't worried- I could look after myself.

One night, I was lounging against the bar, checking out prospective clients, when a commotion broke out. Violet, another courtesan, wrenched herself from the embrace of a Japanese officer and spat at his feet before stalking away. We courtesans had always been given to dramatic gestures, and I shook my head in wry amusement- Violet probably wasn't even angry.

As muffled giggles broke out, the shock on the officer's face gave way to humiliation, then uncontrolled rage at Violet's public rejection. Abruptly, he took a handgun out from his waistcoat and, before anyone could do more than cry out in surprise, shot her in the back.

The gunshot reverberated in the silence as we all processed what just happened, and then the room lapsed into mayhem, we courtesans sprinting upstairs to hide in our rooms.

That night, I remembered the men I'd rejected, all those lovers I'd spurned after they went broke trying to keep me by their side. I imagined them breaking down the door, revenge alight in their eyes, and my skin crawled. I had to get out of there, had to protect myself using the only way I knew how.

That was how I ended up the wife of Huang Yuelin, the highest-ranking police inspector in Shanghai. This was purely a business relationship– I accepted his protection as payment for my services, and marriage was the easiest way to deter would-be assailants from extracting retribution.

I was spending more time with Yuelin than I'd ever spent with any client, but during our conversations I remained alert, never forgetting that I was on the job. That was how I lured people in– I became whoever clients wanted me to be, a manifestation of men's fantasies. Knowing what made a person tick was a point of pride.

I could usually deduce what kind of woman my clients wanted, but Yuelin proved an enigma. As I studied him, reading by the fireplace, he glanced up and smiled at me.

There was nothing for it. I asked him straight out.

“Are you satisfied with my services?”

He barked out a surprised laugh at my bluntness, then sobered.

“I'm very satisfied, but– I don't know. Something about this feels off...”

I was instantly on edge at the insinuation of my performance being less than perfect– no man had ever been able to resist my charms.

“I'm sorry. I'll try to be whoever you want me to be in the future.”

He sighed. “Shaohei, that's the problem. I want you, not some projection of whoever you think I want you to be. I'd like it if you tried to– be yourself.”

I turned away from him to hide my expression, thoughts whirling. There was a reason I never showed my true self to clients. My confidence came from the knowledge that clients were attracted to the personas I put on, the woman of their dreams. They courted me because they wanted the glamorous, unattainable girl, not boring old Shaohei, and that lent me a certain degree of emotional detachment. I was careful to be professional, to keep my emotions out of working relationships.

I'd always just been an actress playing different roles, and I was terrified that if I let my mental barriers down, I'd found myself falling for Yuelin. Still, he gazed at me with such earnest hope, and something made me close my eyes and take the plunge.

“Okay.”

Yuelin's job as top detective put him on the hit list of many in the Shanghai underworld, but I'd never thought about what that meant for me. I was well-known as the wife of Huang Yuelin, and, oblivious to the true nature of our relationship, a gang tried to coerce Yuelin by

holding me hostage. They sent ransom demands, but to the gang's bewilderment, no response came. I wasn't surprised by Yuelin's silence. After all, I was nothing but his courtesan.

I was replaceable.

Resigning myself to languishing in this damp, dark room, I closed my eyes out of exhaustion and despair.

When I woke up, I was lying in my bed, Yuelin leaning anxiously over me. His face split into a grin of relief as soon as he saw my eyelids flutter open, dashing outside to summon help.

As Yuelin fussed over me, I noticed shadows under his eyes and realised that he'd lost sleep looking for me. He'd been worried about me. Yuelin cared for me, in a way that nobody had cared before. He saw past the makeup-caked facade I wore day in and day out, and loved who I was inside.

As the days wore on, I found myself enjoying Yuelin's company, laughing freely in his presence and sharing errant thoughts that crossed my mind. My heart swelled whenever I saw him smile, and I was the happiest I had ever been.

One day, I realised that I hadn't collected payment from Yuelin in months.

I'd committed the cardinal sin of a courtesan. I'd fallen in love with a client, but I couldn't even bring myself to care. I understood then the power of infatuation, the giddy high that came from loving and being loved. I'd never thought that I deserved to be someone who experienced the beauty of falling in love, much less have someone love me back.

I should have remembered that what goes around, comes around.

It was all over the newspapers: Top police officer caught in a sordid affair with actress Lu Lan-Chun. Maybe age was catching up with me, the papers speculated with savage glee, or maybe Yuelin had just gotten tired of marriage. I sat in my bedroom, staring blankly at the headlines, all suggesting that I had driven Yuelin to seek comfort outside marriage through my own shortcomings. An indescribable sensation welled up within me, and I cocked my head, trying to identify the unfamiliar feeling.

Of course. How ironic.

The courtesan was heartbroken.

Whoever said 'tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' obviously never experienced what I was going through. I felt like I was being ripped apart from the inside out, my heart shrivelling but beating harder than ever, a cruel reminder that I would have to live on without his love. My lungs constricted, and a raw cry ripped itself from my throat. I understood now why people died from a broken heart, knew all too painfully the agony and despair of my spurned clients.

I had to leave Yuelin. Stalking down the stairs in an attempt at quiet dignity, I cut off his explanations.

"You owe me the payment for the last three months of my time, I'll send you the invoice. Thank you for your business. Never contact me again."

"Shaohei-"

I didn't look at Yuelin as I walked to the door, because I knew that the sight of his face-earnest, open, pleading- would break me. The front door swung shut behind me with a soft 'snick', signifying the end of another client.

Just another client.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai - Freedom

Heep Yunn School, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris – 12

1921

Fanchone grew up in the largest city in France – Paris. Like all Parisians, Fanchone had always been extremely conscious of freedom.

He was an only child. His father was away from Paris and only came home during Christmas. All these years, alone with only his irritable aunt for company.

Fanchone's life changed in 1928. It was the last Christmas and the last time Fanchone ever saw his father. His father never came back; his death message came instead, delivered by a Chinese man. Orphaned at age seven.

His mother had died when he was born, so his father was all he had in the world. And now the only one in the world he could rely on was gone, and though he tried to get his father to talk to him, the dead, as always, refused to speak.

The Chinese man told Fanchone that his father's business partner in China would take him in and he had to go to Shanghai. Fanchone knew nothing about Shanghai except what his father had told him. Shanghai. A cosmopolitan city, known as a paradise for adventures and Paris in the East.

Fanchone left on the day after. When the cruise approached Shanghai, Fanchone stared at the faraway port. He saw people fighting, yelling prices, bargaining... and along the coastline, coolies and barrels of opium.

The Chinese man led Fanchone to a rickshaw. The rickshaw hurtled towards Nanjing Road. In seconds, they arrived at the International Settlement – a place run by the Municipal Council, a powerful assembly of “taipans” and “nabobs”, who set up their own police force and defense corps, and ruled all of Shanghai.

Hurrying on for another mile or two, they arrived at a huge villa in the French Bund. The villa stood imposingly amongst its neighbours and embodied an elegant mix of European and traditional Chinese designs. Fanchone stepped into the villa and saw a Chinese man in a long robe talking to another man heatedly. Fanchone stood imprisoned in the hallway, listening wearily to the man's criticisms about the disastrous opium business the man had been running.

“So he's the fearsome Du Yuesheng that my father has been working with?” Fanchone questioned himself.

Du saw Fanchone and moved forward. Fanchone trembled. Du patted his head, “Come, child, this is your home from now on.”

For some reason, Du loved Fanchone and treated him better than his own blood. Although Fanchone loved Du as a father, he detested Du's ways in running the opium trade, courtesan houses and racketeering businesses in Shanghai.

At eighteen, Fanchone was good-looking for his age. He had inherited the best of his dead parents' features – his mother's light brown hair and leaflike ears, his father's rounded chin and hazel eyes. He came with Du to Du's favorite courtesan house every day.

Fanchone sat at the table, watching the beauties file in. Each one reflected gracefulness, charm and beauty. Fanchone noticed that the colors of their *qipaos* complimented the Mei Langfan teahouse. Thick carpets, colorful tapestries, fainting couches, flower stands with peonies as big as babies' heads. The food on the table looked Western but tasted Chinese.

Sipping wine, Fanchone watched a song girl take to the stage. Another courtesan seated herself before the zither. As she swept her hand across the silken strings, the room fell silent.

Softly at first, the first cabaret let a few notes flow from her throat. Slowly, her voice rose, then fell again, like the waves of the ocean. Every person sat mesmerized, struck dumb by the magic in her voice.

The girl came to the climax of the song. The waves roared, reaching its peak. On the wings of music, she seemed to fly through the starry night sky, her eyes seemed faraway and distant, her face shone with jubilation. As she ended, the girl's last lines sent a shiver down Fanchone's spine.

For so long we have met under the bamboo tree,

And in spirit you will always be free.

You are free

The moment you wish to be.

The audience took a moment before they gathered themselves enough to applaud. The girl simply walked away and began to help serve. Fanchone watched her quietly. As she placed a cup of tea in front of him, Fanchone saw her sneak a glimpse at him. He learned that her name was Muoli, and in turn he gave her his name.

Closely, Muoli did seem like the most beautiful of beauties. Her hair had a tinge of red, streaked with dark brown, and cascaded down her back. Her *qipao*, a beautiful soft, sky blue complimented her pale skin. Her eyes were dark brown and in them Fanchone saw sincerity, but also the starvation for what so many song girls lacked – freedom.

The courtesan and the gangster began a relationship. Their love was companionship, happiness, and discovery of freedom in their hearts.

Du noticed changes in Fanchone and guessed he had a girlfriend, but he would never have guessed it was a courtesan he had fallen in love with.

Years passed, and one night, Mouli performed in Mei Lanfong and Fanchone watched her. When the song ended, Muoli turned away to help serve.

Muoli placed a bowl of rice in front of a well-dressed gentleman. He thanked her and began to speak to another man in rapid English. Obviously, they thought Muoli would not understand. But Muoli did, thanks to the Fanchone, who had been teaching her English.

"Is it all ready?" whispered the first gentleman. Muoli's ears perked up. She shouldn't be eavesdropping, but the man's whisper made her feel uneasy.

"It is. We're patrolling Du Yuesheng's house. Anyone who appears nearby will be shot on sight."

"Good. Then by tomorrow we will be ready to capture Du Yuesheng and hand him over to the Communists so we can peacefully retreat to Taiwan."

Though Muoli disliked Du as he had been forbidding them together, she respected Du as

a revolutionist, unlike the other racketeers. She knew, if Du died, thousands of revolutionaries would be in danger. She smiled at them innocently and hurried off to find Fanchone. In a whisper, she told him what she had heard.

“We must go, then,” whispered Fanchone. “But remember, he might not believe you.”

Muoli nodded and they waited for the party to end. Then they followed the agent to Du’s house.

Sweat was breaking out across Muoli’s palms. She tried to slow her hammering heart. Taking a deep breath, she and Fanchone stepped out from behind a corner.

Bang.

Muoli first heard it, then instinctively flung herself over Fanchone’s body to protect him. She felt the searing pain in her stomach.

“Muoli!”

She shook her head. “Du.”

To her relief, Fanchone seemed to know the situation was dire. He heaved her to her feet and pulled her to the front door. The Communists guarding the house saw Fanchone and merely nodded in acknowledgement.

Together, they stumbled into the villa and burst into Du’s bedroom.

Du jolted awake. “What happened to you?”

“You’re in danger,” answered Muoli, her breathing ragged. She told Du of the conversation.

Du’s brow furrowed. “Why are you doing this?” he asked Muoli.

“I know you don’t like me staying with Fanchone. But we truly love each other. And I know he loves you too.” Muoli gasped. “So you must take Fanchone and leave Shanghai tonight. I once was like you. I believed only in money and power. But I had never had happiness because I never had freedom. Listen to your heart. Don’t you feel tired surrounded by bodyguards every day?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Fanchone saw in astonishment a tear glistening in the corner of Du’s eye. “Muoli is right,” Du told Fanchone. “I thought I had everything in Shanghai, but to keep everyone safe...” he angrily wiped away a tear. “I’ve been enmeshing racketeers and revolutionaries all these years. We must leave now,” he said, remembering the situation.

“There here will be no freedom under Communist ruling, no doubt. There is only one place where true freedom reigns – Hong Kong.” Fanchone answered.

“Leave now. Please,” said Muoli.

“No, Muoli,” Fanchone hissed angrily. “I’m not leaving without you!”

“You must.” Muoli’s breathing was raspy now. “Go to Hong Kong. Have a taste of freedom. Please, Fanchone. Promise me.”

“I promise.” Fanchone’s words were the last thing Fanchone ever heard. She closed her eyes, knowing that she would rest in peace under the starry skies.

Muoli’s chest stopped moving, and the waves of her voice died and never roared again. Fanchone threw himself over her body and wept.

Du and Fanchone packed nothing but bags of clothes and fled to Hong Kong with Du’s family, leaving all their properties, wealth and business behind.

As they stepped off the boat, Du thought he heard a woman’s voice, singing down from the heavens.

You are free

The moment you wish to be.

No. 76 Jessfield Road

Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College, Abu Khaleel, Maryam Kamal Castro - 13

They dragged him through the street, his captors, under the protection of the silence and darkness of the street, most of the squabbling families in the stone houses already fast asleep.

As he blinked slowly, trying to cover his eyes with his hands from the bright light that suddenly appeared in his cell blinded him after so many days in the dark, an uproar of sound almost deafened him.

His feet were bloodied and bruised after being dragged for quite a while, for he had no energy to even try to walk after that excruciatingly painful beating they had given him. Given the fact that he had a fair idea of where he was being brought to, there was surely more to come.

If someone told me three years ago that I would one day be a prisoner of the Japanese puppet government, I would have laughed in their faces. He chuckled darkly, but was stopped as a surge of thick, hot blood came up his throat and filled his mouth, forcing him to spit the blood out of his mouth, staining his already soiled shirt even further.

Two figures rushed in, frantically looking around the cell while holding a lamp, the source of the blinding light, as they finally noticed him, a filthy figure hunched in the corner.

“Too bad we have to keep him alive, eh?” The more filthy-looking of the two who were dragging him snickered, as they roughly pulled him upright.

He gritted his teeth, trying not to scream out as they set him down on his feet, the torn skin of the soles of his feet screaming in pain.

They approached him slowly, both of them squinting and trying to identify him. Realization suddenly dawned on them.

“We just have to keep him alive until we get there, ain’t it?” As the two guffawed over that unfunny joke, he found himself wishing that they could have just killed him earlier when they found him.

“Dad, is that you?”

After only 3 days at #76, he was starting to feel as if he were near death already. He was going to give them nothing- he knew that, and they knew that as well.

Still- they were cruel, sadistic people, and torturing was what they excelled at and considered as one of their most enjoyable leisure activities. Day, after day, after day, of continuous torturing, each day with a new and even more painful method. He wondered if they would ever run out of creative torturing methods.

Mostly he just passed out before the pain became unbearable, thankfully.

During the 5th or the 6th day, not able to tell the time anymore after being in the dark for so long, he was roughly shaken awake by the guards outside his cell. When he couldn't find the energy to rise, they poured a bucket of ice water on him. So, they couldn't afford giving him water to drink regularly, but could waste a bucket of it just to wake him up?

He struggled to stand up, stars popping before his eyes as he swayed on his feet. The guards shackled him, and sighed when they saw that they had to help him walk.

"What's... What's this for?" he asked groggily.

"Boss wants to see you. Come on now. He doesn't like having to *wait*." One of the two replied, in a tone that suggested that the so-called boss had never had to wait for anything before, least of all prisoners, at least in #76.

They marched him up the rickety and rusty stairs, which made him feel like the stairs were going to collapse under him, and stopped in front of the only nice-looking door in the entire building, which obviously meant that the person of who it belonged to was very important to the place.

The guard that spoke earlier tentatively reached out and knocked on the door, his face showing that he'd rather have been anywhere else than knocking on the door at that moment.

The door slowly opened to reveal a man in his late thirties. He was sitting in front of a desk, which looked quite out of place in a torture building.

As soon as the prisoner recognized who the 'boss' of this torture house was, his eyes went wide with shock and he started to feel a bit faint.

He signaled for them to go into the room, and was all smiles as he said:

"Oh, look what we have here! Quite a nice catch, this person is, I admit. Now, let's get down to business. My men tell me that you've been refusing to answer to their questions. Why is that? You know it will be easier if you just do."

The prisoner said nothing, his face giving away nothing.

"Hm. So he still won't talk. I suppose we should try plan B, then. Oh wait, this *is* plan B! Sorry, I meant plan C." The boss was a peculiar person, not at all what the prisoner expected him to be, based on the rumors, and he was making jokes that were lost on all those who worked for him.

"So, we did some background checking on you, and found out that... You have two children, don't you? Mei An and Mei Ling? I suppose we could just hunt them down and kill them if you don't give us the information, but wouldn't it just be easier to tell us *now*, so we don't have to deal with the mess of killing two innocent, young children?"

Under all the blood and bruises, the prisoner's face went white. He was certain that he had hidden his children away in a safe location months before they even caught up to him- but still, what the boss said worried him. But no- he swore to himself that he would not give in no matter what, and that these were just empty threats.

He just stared stoically back at the boss. The boss sighed.

"Well, this was pointless. Take him back to his cell, and don't give him any water to drink or any food to eat for 3 days. Don't send anyone to watch him either. Wonder if he'll talk *then*." He passed out immediately after they shoved him into his cell.

"*Dad? Is that you?*" *The shorter of the two, a girl, stepped towards him cautiously.*

“Mei An? And Zhong Hua as well?” He struggled to stand up, and they rushed to hug him.

“How did you two find me? I thought I told you to stay with your aunt until this all ended and I could finally come back to you.”

*“Well... It’s a long story, and we’re sorry for not listening to you, but word had it on the streets that you had been taken to #76, and you **know** we couldn’t bear knowing and just leave you here! Especially at the mercy of **him**.” His son, Zhong Hua, the taller figure, shuddered.*

“Still, you shouldn’t have come! How did you even get in here and not get caught? They’ll kill you if you get caught! Wait... How did you know who the boss was? I didn’t even know before coming here! What are you not telling me?” The prisoner said suspiciously, now even more confused.

“Err... We have to get you out of here now! They’ll be here in a second!” Zhong Hua said, visibly changing the subject and avoiding the question.

His two children each took one of his arms and carried him out, trying not to put pressure on his feet or scrape it against the floor, which had never healed from when he first came in to #76. For some unexplainable reason, he only felt a dull throb from his various injuries, like his physical body was far away from him.

“Hey! Stop right there or I’ll shoot!” A man holding a gun said. But he was faceless- the prisoner couldn’t tell the details of his face at all, no matter how hard he squinted.

“There’s no chance of that!” his son shouted back. They started to continue running, when the man fired the gun and shot the prisoner in the shoulder.

He screamed, because that was, well, your natural reaction to getting shot, but not because he could actually feel the pain. He wasn’t sure whether it was because of adrenaline, or because of the constant torture over the past week, or something else.

As his children looked at him in shock, he pushed them to keep running and they did. They ran until they finally reached the entrance, and finally exited the building and got far enough that they wouldn’t be found easily.

He couldn’t believe that it had only been about two weeks that he was in the building. He felt like it was forever. His children were rejoicing and hugging him, and yet he could feel them slipping away, and when he looked at them, he could actually see them fading away.

“A Hua! A Hua! What’s happening? What’s happening?” He tried to shout, but his tongue felt heavy in his mouth, and his eyes forcefully shut.

His dead body was found 3 days later, when the order was given to finally check on him. It turned out that the injuries he sustained from the constant torture finally took a toll on him- his body was already weak from injuries from before he arrived at #76. His children were safe and sound with their aunt in a safe house, and wouldn’t know that he died until 2 years later, which was the time he gave them for when he would return, and they finally looked for him then, when they could, after the liberation of Shanghai.

Last days in Wujiang Lu

Island School, Jain, Ravi – 12

A stack of empty bags of flour lay on one side of our small stall, fluttering in the gentle breeze, secured in place by metal weights. A small plastic fan for cooling hot food, decorated with oil stains, lay on the collapsible table with cracked enamel coating. A red tarpaulin, once protecting food from the rays of sun, now waltzes with the warm summer wind, only a short string holding it from flying out into the clear skyline of Shanghai.

Living in *Wujiang Lu* hasn't been easy. Here in the inner belly of Old Shanghai, my father and I work day and night serving *xiao long bao*, barely squeezing out a living. Many of us dream of the glamorous life that lies across the *Huangpu* River along the *Waitan*, but I suppose I'm different. I like it here.

A wok lies abandoned in a corner along with porcelain plates with intricate patterns, now hardly visible after the wear and tear of everyday abuse. All of a sudden, my father's tired and husky voice calls for me from the back of the stall, where I find him sitting on a red plastic chair, fiddling with a broken bamboo basket.

"Son," my father says, coughing a little while adjusting his small, metal-rimmed glasses further up his nose. "Can you carry these metal pots outside?"

"Sure!" I eagerly reply, taking the large shining pots outside, leaving behind a tingling melody of metal bumping into tables and chairs, dampened by the pounding footsteps of pedestrians on a hurry. At one side of the stall sit two old men on red collapsible chairs, shouting and laughing with each other. They start a game of Chinese chess, using pieces that look as if they were carved from soap and a wrinkled piece of graph paper as a substitute for their long-lost board.

"Hey, I also heard there are some good public high schools nearby," father says from the back of the food stall. "You should study to get accepted."

"But father," I quickly reply, "I want to help you cook and maintain our stall."

"Don't worry about me, son. After you complete middle school, you need to study hard and get a good job, so you can lead a good life."

"But how about your stall?"

“Son, even though I love to cook, the stall’s not getting enough business. This whole food street might not survive for much longer. Something with the World Expo, I hear...”

“That can’t be true! We’ve lived here for so many years; they can’t just destroy *Wujiang Lu* like that!”

“I didn’t say that! Even now, the future remains uncertain. Don’t worry son. If you don’t mind, I’m going for a quick walk in the park to clear my mind.” Yet even as father said this, I felt he was not telling the whole truth and holding back the worst parts just for himself.

The next day, I woke up to the pungent odor of stinky tofu as the streets filled up with noisy tourists and workers. Suddenly, uncle *Li*’s penetrating voice pierced through the cacophony of the busy street. He wore simple clothes and a short white apron with the words “The Best Chou *Doufu* in Shanghai!” proudly emblazoned with rich Chinese characters. His wooden four-wheeled cart, creaked every few steps under the staggering weight of the stinky tofu, as he pushed his way through the molasses of people.

“Get your *chou doufu* here! Only five *yuan* for a plate!” he screamed passionately as he drove his cart through the cobblestone street. The food in the cart jumped up and down like children enjoying a trampoline. As predictably as the afternoon tides, huge flocks of people started to pile around uncle *Li*, asking for heaps of cheap stinky tofu.

Coughing a little, I see father stand up from the chair and itch his eyes, trying to rub away his sliver of envy for the successful neighbor. Adjusting his small metal glasses and regaining focus, I see father quickly take a kettle of water and a huge translucent pork skin blocks, his arms trembling under the weight.

“Father, I think you need some help!” I hastily cry out in alarm.

“Don’t worry son,” father replies “I’ve got this.” And just like that, father started to cook.

Like the hands of a potter, father slowly churns the flour, dripping water in circles, and sprinkling small flakes of salt, the tasteful rain of the gourmet world. Nimble hands gently jab the dough, squeezing it and turning it like a typhoon. Father slowly spins the filling, a concoction of pork and vegetables, with long, thick chopsticks, worn away by continual use. With a small, ivory spoon, father slowly scoops the filling from its cozy bowl, and places it delicately on the outstretched dough. Like a lotus that closes its petals to the dark curtain of night, father gently seals the dough and creates a perfectly round *xiao long bao*. Yet, the delicate tranquility only lasts a moment, suddenly shattered by the high-pitched voice coming from the now empty stinky tofu cart.

“For the very last time, I don’t want to help you! I just want to hang around with my friends!”

“*Wei Zhang*,” sadly pleads uncle *Li*, “be a good son and please help me with our tofu business! I’m getting older, and I really need your help. I know that you want to hang out with friends, but I really...”

“Is this what you called me for? Do you really think I care about your useless food stall? Well I don’t! Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to hang out my new friends, who know a thing or two about the good life. Unlike you, I want to live near the *Waitan*, not in this ugly street.” As the people on the street curiously watched the drama, a sleek black car recklessly drives into the over-crowded street, knocking over the small table where the two old men played chess.

“Hey dude! Come on inside the car.”

It has been a long time since I paid attention to what uncle *Li*’s son looked like. He appeared short and fat, with small, beady eyes that always squinted, as if unsatisfied with everything. The black shirt he wore was tightly stretched, barely able to cope with his great

belly. As he clambered into the black car, the car honked loudly and raced out of the small street, leaving a small trail of rubber behind.

“What a roadhog!” father exclaimed, before disappearing into his small stall, glancing at uncle *Li* as he wept silently. As we retire into the comfort of the food stall, I noticed night had already enveloped the sky, with its twinkling blanket of stars competing for attention against the flashing neon signs.

The very next day, as I wake up, I see father handling a small bundle of cloth in his hands. As I walk outside, bathed by the warm morning light, father stands up, before he thrusts a clean white apron into my open arms. Surprised, I look up at him, as he slowly slides up his glasses and looks at the glistening skyscrapers near the *Waitan*.

“I know I haven’t gotten much,” Father says with great difficulty “but I need your help, son. *Wujiang Lu* may be no more someday, but I’ll still have you, even if we have to move away again and again.”

“Don’t worry father. I’ll stay with you no matter what.” I say happily, my emotions overcoming me as I hug father gently while the rosy morning horizon spreads its color over the skyline of Shanghai, gently shining on *Wujiang Lu*, and the rest of Old Shanghai.

Eight Hundred and One Heroes

Shanghai American School, Jiang, Elena - 11

I stare out of the window of my bedroom, unable to fall asleep. The flashes streak orange across the dark Suzhou Creek. On the other side of the creek, dense columns of black smoke billow out of the battlefield, and deep growls of artillery echo in the distance. The Four Banks' Warehouse stands alone in the ruins like a fortress. The faint shadows of soldiers appear through empty windows, with glows of fire raging inside.

Is Kai one of these soldiers, I wonder?

Kai and I strolled along a tree-lined avenue in the Shanghai International Settlement. Soon Suzhou Creek came into view. The sixty-yard Lese Bridge arched over the flowing water. Rickshaws were rolling back and forth, while people were hustling and bustling around us.

It was a fine summer day, the last day of our middle school. Rays of sunshine bounced off the creek, making it sparkle like diamonds. Our faces reflected on the rippling waves of the water. Kai's dark hair contrasted with my blonde hair. My sky-blue eyes blended in with the color of the water, while his brown ones were blurred by a pair of thick glasses.

"I can sing the Chinese folk song you taught me!" I exclaimed to Kai.

"Poling, poling, up to Granny's Bridge.

Granny calls me a sweetie.

A bite of rice cake, a bite of candy."

We sang in unison.

"Come on, I'll take you to meet my granny," said Kai.

Soon we were in a narrow alleyway in the Old City of Shanghai. Strings of black wire hung between the dormers, and drying clothes lined along the grey brick walls. The wind carried a damp smell of cigarette and food.

We entered a semi-circled Shikumen, jogged up a flight of stairs, and stopped in front of a pavilion.

Kai turned to look at me as he scooted his glasses up his nose. With an anxious tone, he said, "I'm sorry that this place is a bit crammed. My granny likes to stay in the Old City, since it is where our ancestors lived."

I shook my head, "It's fine. I just want to see your granny."

Kai let out a sigh of relief and opened the door. Before I could even blink, an overwhelming smell of sweet rice rushed upon me.

"What is that?" I gasped.

"Oh, it's my granny's home-made fried rice cake! Do you want to try one?"

Unable to resist, I nodded my head excitedly.

We walked to a small kitchen, where an old lady was working. She was plump, her white hair in a bun. She turned around and saw us. Her face lit up into a wide smile revealing a mouthful of mismatched teeth.

“Hello, my dear grandson! Oh, and here is your best friend from school?” She asked in a raspy yet jolly voice.

Kai nodded and replied, “Yes, he’s Charles. He wants to try a rice cake!”

Kai’s granny picked up a bar of rice cake from a wok, as steams of hot aroma rose up her face. She gently blew on it, and then handed it to me. The outer layer of the rice cake was fried and yellow while the inside one was fluffy and white. My teeth sunk into the crisp layer, and then touched the sticky rice. Savoring the taste, I couldn’t help but devour it in seconds.

“Wow, you practically inhaled that!” Kai joked, and we both burst out laughing.

Little did we know that the euphoric days would soon come to an end.

The Japanese invaded Shanghai in the summer of 1937.

Creak. The door opens. My dad is home now. As the British General, he is busy accepting refugees and protecting the International Settlement.

I run downstairs to him, and ask, “Are the Chinese Army still fighting in the warehouse? Is Kai in the warehouse?”

“I have yet to find Kai. But 800 soldiers are still fighting there. They are already surrounded by the Japanese, but they want to show the world that the Chinese Army have not surrendered.” He says with admiration.

“Could you accept them to come on our side? The only place to retreat to is the International Settlement.” I plead.

He looks at me for a while, considering my request. He finally replies, “Yes. It is my honor to let the Chinese in.”

At dawn, I race to the Old City.

“I am going to the warehouse to find Kai.” I say to Kai’s granny.

“Good! I have been worried sick. Can you also bring some fried rice cakes to the soldiers? They must be starving.”

“That is a great idea!” Soon, the small kitchen is bustling with the preparation of the rice cakes. Once Kai’s granny bakes 800 cakes, I pack them on a large trolley and roll it towards the warehouse.

As I approach close to the Lese Bridge, I see British sentries guarding the International Settlement side. I sneak up towards the bunker. As the sentries look over to the battle side, I slip past them and onto the bridge. When the barrage dies down, I rush across to the warehouse.

I creep along the dark hall and find a roomful of soldiers. Some are boarding up empty windows, others are bolstering blockers, and more are lying wounded on the floor.

While I am scanning to find Kai, a middle-aged military officer comes up to me. In dirty but trimmed Chinese Army uniform, he stands as straight as a warehouse pillar.

“You are British General Telfer-Smollett’s son, if I am not mistaken. I am Commander Xie. What are you doing here?” he asks, straight-faced.

“I thought you’d be hungry. I brought rice cakes to you.” I reply cheerfully and open the trolley. Immediately the scent of sweet rice fills the warehouse.

The soldiers' weary eyes travel to the rice cakes, and their eyes light with hope. I pass them the fried rice cakes. Not until every soldier has gobbled the cakes down does a young soldier around my age carefully wrap his rice cake up and put it into his pocket.

The young soldier totes a rifle as tall as him. Under his flopped helmet, layers of bloodstained bandages wrap his head and cover his eyes. He looks exhausted, but resolute.

He is Kai.

"Kai..." I gasp, lost for words.

He turns at the sound of his name, "Charles..." he realizes.

We engulf each other in a hug.

"You're such a hero, Kai." I say.

"You are one too. You are the 801st hero." Kai replies.

"I have good news! My dad welcomes the Chinese Army into the International Settlement!"

A faint smile appears on Kai's face, "We will fight for the good of our country, even if it means sacrificing our lives. We will not go across, unless we get an order from our general to do so." Kai says decisively.

Moved, I remember his words and head back to the International Settlement.

Once I get to my house, I recount to my dad the Chinese Army's response.

"I will contact their general and try to change his mind." my dad says.

That night, I listen nervously as my dad talks with the Chinese general over the phone.

After he puts it down, he tells me the news, "They've agreed to retreat into the International Settlement and then move to the next battlefield. We will be expecting them tonight."

"Yes!" I yell in victory and run towards the bridge to await the soldiers' arrival.

After midnight, amid the barrage, the first soldiers begin to dash across the bridge. On the other side, I start to count.

"One."

"Two."

It seems like a forever of running.

"355 and 356." Commander Xie comes across carrying Kai by his limbs.

Early next morning, I go to the Old City. I want to tell Kai's granny that I've found Kai and get more fried rice cakes for the soldiers. On the border, the barbed wires blockade me. On either side, the British soldiers and Japanese soldiers are at loggerheads, bayonets pointing to bayonets.

I go visit the soldiers.

"The Japanese occupied the Old City. I cannot meet your granny and bring fried rice cakes." I say to Kai sadly.

Rage crosses over Kai's face. He takes the whole bar of the fried rice cake out of his pocket. "I will keep this rice cake with me for the next battle. We will fight back to the Old City."

To soothe him, I start to sing,

"Poling, poling, up to Granny's Bridge.

Granny calls me a sweetie.

A bite of rice cake, a bite of candy."

Kai chimes in, and then the soldiers join.

The nostalgic tune blends into the shimmering Suzhou Creek. It runs relentlessly past the International Settlement with the unyielding heroes, past the Four Banks' Warehouse with the empty windows, past the Old City with Kai's kind granny.

Cultural Revolution

St. Joseph's College, Wong, Sean - 14

“Yulan. I’ll be waiting for you,” came a fatherly voice, worn and old with the passage of time. Yulan felt a tear run down her face as the father she hadn’t seen for 17 years clasped her hand and continued, “I know you don’t want to come, but here’s the ticket for the last ship to leave Shanghai.” Yulan swore she saw a tear in the old man’s eyes, but she didn’t get the chance as he faded away, his footsteps growing softer as he went. That bitterness quickly turned to resentment—resentment for father’s selfishness; resentment for father’s cowardice; resentment for resentment’s sake.

“Stand up, all victims of oppression,
For the tyrants fear your might...”

Yulan jolted awake to the deafening song blaring in her ears. Outside the window, Red Guards threw antique furniture down from marble mansions onto the puddle-ridden, hard, stone paved Shanghai street. It was a symbol of the bourgeoisie and the decadent past, and it would be smashed.

“Don’t cling so hard to your possessions,
For you have nothing if you have no rights...”

Yulan started moving more furniture to barricade her doors. It was folly to hold the door against the tidal wave of Red Guards, but that was all she knew to do. She could hear each word of the song as the chanting Guardsmen stormed across the street. There was the low thump of wooden doors falling; the crisp clang of pottery being hurled across rooms; the cheers as road signs were torn down and new revolutionary names were scribbled on.

“Let racist ignorance be ended,
For respect makes the empires fall...”

They’d broken through the front door. It didn’t take long for fists to bang on Yulan’s fortified door. But Yulan wasn’t opening up, so down fell the axes and batons. Yulan mustered all the strength she could, but it was to no avail as the door collapsed.

“Freedom is merely privilege extended,
Unless enjoyed by one and all!”

Gone were the flowery Qipaos and the smart western suits. They were traded in for uniforms carrying a monotone brand of green and a bright red armband. Revolutionary, every Red Guard said; dull, Yulan would reply. With unmatched spite, the angry mob dragged her

out the room, down the stairs with every single bump being registered with painful clarity, until she was finally thrown onto the back of the brand new Liberation brand truck.

Yulan felt a searing pain as the guards forcefully made her kneel. She felt her arms being yanked backwards. All the while, bigger raindrops fell in lieu of whacks. There was a strange wetness on her forehead. It was only when she tasted the salty tinge of blood that she found the massive open wound. The truck started moving as the beating stopped. Yulan jerked upwards to see what was happening only for the leader of the mob to shove her head right back down. The leader seized something from Yulan's pocket—her lipstick! Several hands immediately held Yulan in place despite her struggling.

“Comrades!” the leader screeched over the rumbling engine, “The old world is ending, yet there are deluded fools who cling to it!” There was a howl of agreement and joy. “We of the Mao Zedong Thought Revolution Group are the judge, jury and executioner of the proletariat! No mercy for the wicked!”

With that, the exquisite lipstick was snapped in half and stamped beneath the soles of the guardsman while what remained was smothered across Yulan's face, the original glamor and softness molding into a slimy mud that stubbornly stuck despite the rhythmic pattering of the raindrops. Yulan realized her crime now—the crime of not leaving Shanghai while she had a chance. A chance she had missed 17 years ago...

Father's gloved hand gripped Yulan's own as they sped through the factory. Yulan watched as her father bit his lip, steeled his composure and tidied his suit as he headed towards the thumping noise from the door that only grew in strength and intensity as a seconds ticked by.

Yulan took the chance to scan the factory. Father never liked her walking around this area, it was filthy of grease and wax, inhabited by the scum of the earth. But Yulan didn't care much for her father's words. Yes, she knew being a worker was tough, but she was fascinated by the steaming pots of wax, pigment and perfume being mixed for the thousands of lipsticks that were to adorn the lips of ladies across the breadth of the nation. Yulan adored the red gleam of these seemingly divine sticks that made even the most down woman's face glow in ethereal tones in a matter of seconds.

The thumping on the door grew louder and quicker—the patience of whoever was outside was quite obviously wearing thin. Father swung open the door as a stern officer barged in, complete with the blue sky and the white sun on his cap.

“Oh...Commissar Chiu! How nice to meet you again!”

The commissar, not flattered looked at Yulan and nodded as he spoke, “Mr. Jiang, would you mind talking in a more...secluded place?”

Yulan watched them talk by the rumbling machinery. Father started seemingly steady and confident at first, yet he returned visibly sweating and pale.

“Thank you Mr. Jiang. I hope you understand.”

“Yes...yes. Of course. For party and state!”

Father turned towards Yulan. Yulan knew from the swelling drops of sweat on father's forehead that something was terribly wrong. Father took out a handkerchief to wipe away his sweat, “Yulan, the Reds. They're coming. We'll have to leave for Hong Kong tonight.”

“Tonight? Why?”

Nervous yet adamant, father continued, “Yulan, you're young and won't be able to see the big picture, but father can. And the big picture tells us that we cannot stay. Those landlords and entrepreneurs the Reds are always rambling about? That's us, Yulan.”

But father, don't you see those revolutionaries? They're not here to destroy—they're here to save us and save this country! They're saving us from ourselves!"

"Sweetie, don't be mistaken, when the reds—or "revolutionaries"—as you'd say scream for equality, it means taking from us..."

Yulan realized the futility of continuing the argument, as she threw the very lipsticks that she used to treasure on the floor. It was the product of vile capitalism—the very same feudalistic capitalism that had been plaguing China for centuries.

"Yulan! I know you don't want to leave. But listen to me, take this."

Father placed a ticket for a ship to Hong Kong in her palm, as he continued, "The ship leaves at midnight. Think carefully about the choices you make."

Yulan felt a single tear trickle down her face—how far was too far for the revolution?

"Yulan. I'll be waiting for you."

The truck rumbled on, the creak of the wheels synchronized with the chanting of the guardsmen. It went on and on, oblivious to what Yulan was experiencing. A plaque showing a crudely painted "YULAN" was hung on her neck as a badge of shame—the shame of a pretend-westerner, of a capitalist. But that was not her crime. Yulan had been too naïve, too young, too seized by the illogical fervor of revolution.

Customs House over at the Bund tolled the bells of Westminster Quarters. It was midnight and the revolutionaries lined Waibaidu Bridge. Yulan was there, waiting. She had never thought that she would live to see China liberated from the specter of capitalism, yet here she was. Finally, all would enjoy equality; finally, the corruption that had seized China would be beaten back; finally, Shanghai would be free from its decadent past.

In the distance, she heard screams of adorations accompanied by the quick, agile march. The revolution had come! A recently commandeered tank—formerly a counter-revolutionary tool of oppression came rumbling forth, filled to the brim with soldiers. An alien yet irresistible urge grew within Yulan. She wanted to throw herself into the revolution; she had to drag out every single capitalist in the city; she longed to ransack Shanghai for all that it was worth.

Yulan couldn't help but to start humming a tune—a tune of the revolution. She listened as the hum grew into a murmur, and that murmur transform into a chorus. "Stand up, all victims of oppression,

For the tyrants fear your might..."

The truck finally reached the Bund. Once again she heard Customs House toll its bells, but what she heard wasn't Westminster Quarters. Instead, out came "The East is Red". The guardsmen began singing.

"The east is red, the sun rises

From China comes Mao Zedong."

She had expected them to sing of the victims of oppression, of tyrants ages past. Yet that was all gone. The east was red, and nothing was standing in its path.

When East Meets West

St. Mary's Canossian College, Tam, Celine – 14

It was a bright autumn afternoon in 1910. Mackerel clouds were drifting under the gleaming disk of sun, and the rays of sunlight shone on the Shanghainese terrace, at which sat two sophisticated Chinese ladies in their seventies. Looking first at each other, the older lady, with her hair in a Victorian updo, sipped from her cup of Earl Grey tea, while the younger lady, with a curled fringe, tasted her cup of oolong tea. With the same expression of enlightenment, they smiled at each other as their memories flew back sixty years ago.

As the precious daughters of Master Liu, Dingxiang and Dinglan, who were born a year apart, had been the apples of his eyes. Ever since the death of his wife shortly after giving birth to Dinglan, people wondered how unusual it was for a wealthy man like Master Liu to insist on remaining single, especially when he was one of the wealthiest men in the Old City of Shanghai. This legendary Old City has been in its current location since the ancient times. After the Opium War in 1842, a number of foreign concessions had been set up outside the Old City. Despite this foreign influence, the Old City was still under Chinese control within the 10m high, 5km long walls. The wall served as a border between the East and the West, as a result, the Old City of Shanghai was also known as ‘The Chinese City’.

Despite the loss of their mother, Dingxiang and Dinglan, who were born with a silver spoon in their mouths, had a wonderful childhood, one that would make people envious. However nothing lasts forever, the turmoil in life revealed itself when the sisters reached the age of marriageability. Dinglan could never forget the day when the matchmaker, Aunt Lien, walked into the Liu’s mansion.

“As the best matchmaker in the Old City, I can definitely find the perfect match for the daughters of the prestigious Liu family.” Aunt Lien looked passionate and enthusiastic when she first met Master Liu. Her bright smile fell when her glance moved from Dingxiang towards Dinglan. Subconsciously, Dinglan believed Aunt Lien was looking at her feet, and she found it uncomfortable. As early as the 10th century, foot-binding was considered as attractive. It has long been thought to be able to increase the marriageability of women. A small foot in China, no difference from a tiny waist in Victorian England, represented the height of female refinement.

“Can I gather more information from the two precious Ms. Liu’s?” Aunt Lien asked for permission from Master Liu and tried hard to cover her disappointment from her facial expression upon seeing Dinglan’s feet. Dinglan was born premature, and since then, she had been weak throughout her childhood, therefore Master Liu did not have her go through the process of foot-binding. As per Dingxiang, she had a pair of feet with only three inches’ in length, of which Aunt Lien instantly directed her attention. She turned to Mr. Liu assertively, “With this pair of perfect lotus feet, I can guarantee Dingxian a highly compatible husband.” Yet, Dinglan had been ignored from the scene. Not only did the world judge a woman by her feet, so did Dinglan look down on herself due to this social norm. No one at that moment could have understood the humiliation that she was experiencing.

In less than a year, Dingxiang married the eldest son of a ministry president, and they had the most glamorous wedding of their time; whilst Dinglan had been rejected for several families and eventually left the Old City of Shanghai with a heavy heart, and instead chose to live at a foreign concession just outside of the city walls.

Another five years passed by, and Dinglan had never stepped foot inside of the city walls, only until when she was informed that Mr. Liu had been seriously ill and was on the brink of death. Wearing her best domed skirts, made fuller by deep ruffles, Dinglan, with her preferred name Daisy, took her first steps into the city. With the influence of Western culture, Daisy was surprised how faded her sense of humiliation had been of that unforgettable incident. To some extent, Daisy even found it disgusting when she came across a woman with lotus feet passing by in her sedan.

Driven by the sense of responsibility, Daisy decided to move back to take care of her deathly-ill father. As she arrived at the mansion, she met her nieces, the daughters of Dingxiang, for the first time.

“Chunmei and Daidi, greet your Aunt Dinglan.” Dingxiang, who wore a silky dress with sophisticated details, elegantly ordered her four-and three-year-old daughters. The twin girls bowed immediately. Daisy had no intention to correct Dingxiang or the girls; moreover, she had thought that Dingxiang had been leading a joyous life for the past five years. On the other hand, Dingxiang was impressed with Daisy’s Westernized outfit.

“How have you been?” The two sisters asked each other simultaneously. When they looked at each other as memories were brought to mind, tears welled up in their eyes.

“Having a rough time” was an understatement to describe what Dingxiang had been gone through in the past few years. As the eldest son of the patriarchal family, Dingxiang’s husband blamed Dingxiang for being sonless after giving birth to two daughters and took this as an excuse to marry a mistress two years ago. The status of Dingxiang in the family was at stake. The situation got even worse when the mistress gave birth to a son a year ago. These all had been too overwhelming, in which Dingxiang did not know where to start. Daisy noticed the sorrow in the eyes of Dingxiang and instantly realized her sister was not living as well as she thought.

“Why don’t you leave?” Daisy questioned Dingxiang sympathetically after hearing her story, “You are the daughter of Liu’s, and you can live an extraordinary life without him.” Dingxiang was puzzled with what her sister was suggesting. It was a disgrace or even a humiliation to the family for a traditional Chinese woman to get divorced. Daisy understood her worries and said, “No one can diminish your sense of worthiness without your permission. And we, Liu’s daughters, deserve to determine our own sense of ourselves, instead of being influenced by others. This is your own journey of life, and you should declare your right to the pursuit of happiness. The world is your oyster, and it is up to you to find the pearls. Come with me, and let us explore the world outside these walls.”

These trips to the foreign concession were journeys of rediscovery of the sense of self for Dingxiang. Within a month, she had talked to an Italian Catholic pastor, shook hands with a British sailor, and met a French businessman. Her world has been changed. Not only did she reformulate her narrowed view of women's life and understand her unresolved trauma from her marriage, she also regained her confidence in facing her damaged marriage.

One day, when the two sisters were just about to leave for another visit to the foreign concessions, a servant rushed in and told the sisters that Master Liu's health was deteriorating rapidly. Dingxiang and Daisy felt so helpless in front of the deathbed of their father. "Dinglan, remember." Master Liu turned to Daisy, just as she began to turn her head away to weep. "Falling leaves return to their roots. I understand that you have gone through deep humiliation, but in the end, this is still your origin. All cultures have their flaws, but there are also beauties in it. Just like how you are willing to come back to care for me, despite how much you detest this place! Is it not an act of filial piety? Look around, and discover the beauty of your roots." Daisy felt relieved when her father finally recognized her struggles she encountered all these years. She slowly turned back to look at her father, tears silently streaming down her face, as Master Liu took his last breath. Dingxiang stepped forward and embraced Daisy, while the younger sister emitted a quiet sob, which slowly turned into a wail.

Things have surely changed since what had happened years ago. With Daisy's encouragement, Dingxiang mustered her courage to ask for a divorce. The only thing she hoped for her daughters was to be brought up with confidence. Meanwhile, Daisy had decided not to get married, instead she devoted her years to push for gender equality in China, her homeland. She became one of the activists who called for the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, which advocated education for women and were dedicated to put an end to foot-binding. And the rest is history.

Back on the terrace, the setting sun shone onto two cups of cooled tea as the two sisters, hand in hand, left the balcony. Dingxiang's cup of Earl Grey, and Daisy's cup of oolong.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

St. Paul's Convent School, Leung, Wing Yan Janice – 14

“Rub a little faster, would you?” The tall man in the shiny black suit snarled, his face twisted with annoyance.

“Yes, sir,” I mumbled. I tried moving my arms a little faster, but immediately regretted it as I winced at the sharp pain from my side left by the beating yesterday.

The man clicked his tongue, “Forget it.” He withdrew his half-polished shoe from the brick and left without paying a penny.

“Mister, you haven’t paid me yet! Please!” I cried out and ran after him.

The Leader’s voice echoed in my ears, “You will not get a grain of rice if you come back with less than 10 pennies tomorrow, you hear me you little rascal?”

“I’m going to go back empty-handed again,” I thought to myself. I felt a lump in my throat. Hopeless and freezing, I sank onto the ground and buried my face in my hands.

A stream of warmth on my shoulder brought me back to reality. I lifted my head a little, and a pair of stitched flowery shoes entered my vision. I moved my gaze upwards until it met a pair of round eyes.

“Why are you so sad?” a crisp, singing voice asked.

“It’s just... I can’t earn enough today,” I answered, quickly wiping away my tears with the back of my hand.

She ruffled through her pockets and placed a few dimes in my palm. “That’s all I have, it’s not much, but I hope it’ll help!” she said in a sincere tone.

My jaw was frozen in place and I couldn’t respond.

“Well, it’ll get better tomorrow!” She said cheerily with a pat and my shoulder, then turned around and left.

She trotted a few steps before coming to a halt and turning back around. She walked back over to me and removed her red mittens.

“It’s cold today,” she handed me the pair of mittens and ran off again.

That’s how Peony and I met.

One afternoon, I saw the same pair of stitched flowery shoes again, this time along with a

pair of brown leather boots. The man wearing the boots started talking as I polished his shoe, “Is this him?” He asked the girl. “Yes, master. This is the boy I was talking about the other day,” the singing voice answered.

The man held my chin with gloved fingers and tilted my face left and right. “Yes, he does have a great face for my business. I like his high cheekbones, which show character,” he said as he let go of my face. “Son, where are your parents?” He asked.

“Me? I... I don’t have any,” I answered.

“Then who do you belong to? I want to speak with him, bring me to him,” ‘master’ ordered.

I looked at the girl, and she gave me a nod. I got up and led them to the lair.

The ‘master’ bought me from the Leader. I learned that he was called Master Po, and he ran one of the biggest Chinese Opera houses in Shanghai. He offered a bag of gold coins for me, and I was sold immediately. Ever since that day, I was trained in Master Po’s theatre, with a newly given name, ‘Dawn’. I remember hearing on the radio that Master’s show was sold out completely in Shanghai, and I realised my life had been completely turned around.

The reason I was chosen was to pair up with Peony. Master Po had been searching for new talents. He would always say, “In ten years’ time, you two would be the best-selling couple in my show.” Peony and I trained restlessly every day, and were inseparable. Our lives slowly melded into one.

One summer afternoon, a few years after I joined the show, we sat side by side, shoulders flush against each other, munching on icy watermelon slices to cool us down. “Peony,” I muttered to no one in particular. “Hmm?” She hummed lazily in response. “Peony,” I repeated again. “It’s an unusual name. Aren’t girls all called Ling or Mei or something like that?” I asked. Peony giggled, “Haven’t you figured it out by now? Peony’s not my real name,” I raised my brows in incredulity. “We all get a new name after we join the show, a more... enthralling name, I guess,” she explained. I nodded, “So what’s your real name?” I asked her. She flashed me a warm smile, “Moon, but nobody’s called me that in ages,” she replied, “What’s yours?” she asked. I tilted my head in confusion. I never really had a name, my parents never named me before giving me up. “I don’t really have one besides Dawn,” I told her truthfully. She laughed, a clear, cheerful sound, “Then I guess we’d have to name you.” She stared at a sparrow flying above us. “Sky,” she blurted out after a while. “Let’s name you Sky,” she said. I beamed at her, “I like it. You can call me that from now on.” “And you can call me Moon,” she grinned and rested her head on my shoulder. I felt my cheeks grow red from something that wasn’t the heat.

Peony and I bonded a lot. She was the closest thing I’ve ever had to a family. Just as Master Po said, we became the best-selling act in the show. All was well, until the third year anniversary of our first performance.

“You were great out there today, Moon,” I said as we walked out of the changing room. We just finished a show. “Not so bad yourself, Sky,” she replied with a cheeky grin.

Just as we were about leave the empty theatre, Master Po approached us with an unfamiliar-looking man. The man was dressed in formal attire, which seemed like military uniform. Judging from his posture and stance, he was a man of high status. “Peony, Dawn, meet General Takashi,” Mr Po announced. Peony and I bowed slightly. Ironically, I could hardly remember the General’s face. After all, no one dared to look directly at a Japanese, especially a general.

“Hello,” the General said with a thick accent. He was speaking to the both of us, but all of his attention was on Peony alone, “I watched your show just now, and I have to say that I was

deeply impressed,” a proud smile tugged at my lips, “by your beauty, Miss Peony,” my smile faltered instantly as the General finished. The General continued with his small talk, but my mind was elsewhere. He invited Peony to dine with him. Peony stared at me, and I stared right back. Peony and I had a tradition of going to the noodle stall next to the theatre after every show, we’ve been doing that since our very first performance. She wouldn’t ditch me, not on this special day. Peony tore her gaze away from me and faced the General, “Of course, General Takashi! It would be my honour!” He extended his arm to her, and she walked away with him, arms linked, without looking back. That night, Peony returned at late night, and rambled on and on about how great the meal was with General Takashi. My heart was pricked by a thousand needles, but I all I did was smile.

I would never forget that night. “Sky,” she started. I looked at her, “Yes?” She deliberately averted her gaze from mine. Something wasn’t right, I thought to myself. “General Takashi asked me to go to Japan with him.” I froze in place. No, no, no, was the only thing in my mind. “And your answer?” I asked, failing to conceal the shakiness in my voice. “I said yes,” Peony said in nothing more than a whisper.

I let out a breathy chuckle. “Sky? Say something,” she shot me a look of concern.

“So you’re willing to give up on... everything we had? And for what? Money? Power? Is that all you want?”

“What? I thought you’d support me!” She looked offended, “We’d still be friends too! You could-”

“Friends, is that what we are?” I cut her off.

“So what if it’s something more? Can you blame me for wanting a better life? Look around you Sky, look at what our country’s become! Are you really fine with constantly being looked down upon? True love, friendship... can you survive on these?” she exclaimed. I opened my mouth to say something, but my mind went blank, Peony left the room with a huff.

Peony left for Japan. I left all her letters unread.

Today’s the eighth-year anniversary of our first show. I am sitting in the train leaving Shanghai, I looked out the window mindlessly.

The radio broke the silence, *“Major news report- Japan has suffered a tragic atomic bombing in Hiroshima, causing huge number of casualties. Known deaths include the general Takashi Akio and his Chinese wife Peony Chang...”*

My eyes widened as the mug fell from my hands and shattered on the ground.

The Prophecy of the Yin Yang Jades

St. Paul's Convent School, Luk, Ho Yan Katie – 14

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang describes how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. In the 20th century, there was a well-known myth in Old Shanghai, the traditional urban core of China, about Jade stones, one of the most valuable treasures. Families or couples who are separated will reunite one day, no matter where they are, by the gravity-like Yin and Yang forces possessed in the two complementary pieces of Jade stones they each carry with them, when the powers within the Jades exude.

“Oh not again!” I mumbled under my breath as I sheepishly hauled myself up after slipping, wincing in pain when my finger was sliced inadvertently by a red booklet. “I don’t think I’ve seen this anywhere in the house before, what could it be?” I shrugged and shuffled into my room with the booklet held tightly to my chest, the stinging pain long forgotten.

Kneeling on my bedsheets I flipped open the first page of the booklet. I smiled. Well, who could resist the idea of a little adventure amidst their repetitive life of adulthood?

‘Liang Luoyang’s Diary’? Hold on...does this belong to mama?” I wondered. Unending questions flooded my mind. I picked up a miniature map of Old Shanghai with red markings on random spots of its defensive walls. A thought suddenly occurred to me and I gasped.

“Daughter...” my mother whispered. “Yes, mama!” I mumbled. “Find papa and gege for me, okay? This is my last wish...” she breathed out inaudibly. “And... and how shall I do that, mama?” I whispered. “Remember the myth of the Yin and Yang Jade stones I’ve told you since you were young?” I nodded. “The only way to find him is through the power of the Jade stones, only then can papa and I may be reunited...” Mama coughed out. “So where is your piece of Jade stone, mama?” I urged, but there was no reply. That was the day mama officially left me, all alone.

As days passed, I was too busy striving to survive in this dangerous world alone, soon forgetting about my mother’s last wish. Who do the merchants think they could fool into believing these stupid myths anyways? Not me, as a fully grown adult. It occurred to me now I’ve found mama’s diary as the directions to find papa, I could at least be a filial daughter and show her that I’ve actually paid some effort in fulfilling her wish.

Stepping out into the fresh summer breeze, I walked down the streets of Old Shanghai, occasionally glancing to check the map. Then the Dajing Ge Pavillon museum, my first destination, caught my sight. It was one of the only two sections that remained after the City walls of Old Shanghai were dismantled. I silently praised myself for remembering what I was taught in school when I spotted barely decipherable words beneath the red marking on the map.” “The first time I met him”? Why does this sound like some old cheesy lines from romance novels?” I spluttered. “Could this relate to papa?!” I flipped the page.

“23rd June, 1917

*What a beautiful sight to behold,
a scenery of gold,
ravishing and entrancing;
bewitching and captivating;
Why don't we dance,
In this song of endless romance?”*

“Seems like someone had a crush then...” I smiled unconsciously, examining the half-faded picture of the man’s silhouette. Who doesn’t love romance? “What directions can I get from a poem though...” I sighed as I proceeded to the Bund, the location of a mark on the map that can be clearly seen. The turquoise-blue seawater in front of me prompted me to flip the page.

“5th October, 1932

The Japanese officially took over Old Shanghai. My world turned upside down. I still remember the screams and shouts of soldier in the cold malevolent air, the gunshots and explosions which startled the kids, especially LingXin, the remains of our bombed house from the underground emergency shelter... We have no idea what the future holds. Even if we all survive this war, we had no home, no capital, absolutely nothing. Laogong suggested he'd bring Li Shun with him to find refuge in Hong Kong, but that means separation, and I might never see my laogong and son again. What a despair.”

I remember my mum telling me about this famous beach that she always goes to when something is bothering her. On the day papa and my gege LiShun departed, she must have come here too. I involuntarily frowned as I picked up a family portrait. The vibrant smiles of my family pulled my heartstrings, triggering a wave of emotions as I caressed the photograph dearly. I am the only one left now. I missed papa and gege dearly. I grimaced, rubbing the stone on my necklace which was a usual habit when I feel down or nervous. A loose piece of paper danced in the wind and landed gracefully in the sand.

“21st December, 1933

The whispers of the wind can seem as sinister as the murky midnight sky. Four silhouettes became two on a shingle beach. The sea dashes the sand and retreats, the spiritless sky and the featureless waterscape reflecting my soul's emptiness. It stings my heart with its saline touch. The seagulls' trident cries are brash in the faltering light, reminding me of the screams on the battlefield. Dear Lord, why must you send them away from me?”

A pang of shame washed over me for not taking mama’s last wish seriously. My tears were camouflaged by the beginning of a hard rain as I awakened from my trance, shoving the diary under my cardigan and sprinting off to search for the nearest shelter.

“There’s no hope in finding papa or my gege anyways. I knew this myth was just some merchant’s selling techniques.” I crossed my arms and let out a huff, waiting for the incessant rain to end. “Moreover, I don’t even know where mama hid her piece of Jade – almost everyone owns Jades in Shanghai! ”

“Do you mind me sharing my umbrella with you? The rain is unlikely to stop in a short period of time.” A stranger offered, disrupting my blabber. “Oh! Thanks, how nice of you!” I smiled. At that very moment when our eyes met, it was as if I was electrified. A sense of extreme familiarity overwhelmed me. The man had hazel eyes like me, which was odd in Shanghai. I awkwardly wiped my clammy hands on my dress, then habitually rubbed the stone hanging on my neck again. I was desperate to identify any part of him I found familiar. It was also then I felt a sense of melancholy, matching the solemnness of the sky as it slowly caged me in, creating mixed emotions in me. I couldn’t help but turn to the stranger, halting us both into a stop. The man seized me by my wrist. “You felt that didn’t you” he stuttered, looking straight into my eyes. “Are you here to... find a piece of Jade?” I choked out. “Yu... Ling Xin?” the man whispered. “Wait...Is this...Li Shun? Gege, is that really you?”

“... And that was how I decided to try and find the pieces of Yin and Yang Jades to fulfil mama’s last wish, yet I couldn’t even find one.” I said, as I trailed my fingertips on the sand. “I didn’t know about the myth of the Yin and Yang Jades, but I know exactly where they are. Take a look at this.” My brother smiled, pulling out a piece of jade tied up by a string around his neck. “It has been here since the day we separated.” I stared with wide eyes at his piece of Jade which glistened in the sun, and gasped - it was the other half piece of Jade. How stupid of me. Why hadn’t I ever given a thought to the stone on my neck? I carefully untied the knot on the brittle string with shaking hands and watched as the Jade slid out, gracefully lying on my palm. I held out the piece of Jade towards the other piece on my brother’s hand. A force pulled them both forward. ‘Click!’ the Jades sealed seamlessly.

Sharing a silent smile, we watched as a bead of lustrous-gold circled the completed piece of jade, lingering for a second before vanishing into infinity.

“What are you thinking meimei? You’re smiling like an idiot.” “Not telling you,” I stuck out my tongue at gege, then ran down the streets of Old Shanghai with him chasing behind. I rubbed the completed piece of Jade in my palm, and silently wished that our papa and mama are happily reunited up in eternal paradise, watching us chasing each other like kids, with a smile on their faces, just like how the myth of the Yin and Yang Jades promised we would be.



Fiction

Group 4

Shanghai's Shrieking 20s

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Idan-Cummins, Arya – 14

The smell of alcohol filled the smoky room. Ladies, in short, shimmering dresses moved to the soothing rhythm of jazz. The club seemed to be split in two; at one end sat the English, all very smart looking in bowties with cigars in their hands. On the other side, sat the Chinese. A throng of men covered from head to toe in tattoos. They lounged like lions, confident and powerful. In the centre of the crowd sat a small man. He wore a silk robe with three embroidered small monkey heads.

The man rose, stiffening the room. He was escorted to the bar by three men, his silver robe gliding behind him.

“One Gin Rickey.”

Except for the gentle jazz playing, the room fell silent. The bartender's shaking hand placed the drink on the table and he recoiled behind the drinks. The terror could almost be smelt in the room. The man sipped his drink, the chatting and smoking had started again. The night continued, the jazz almost drowned out by the play of mahjong tiles, the smell of alcohol strong in the air.

As the night grew older, more people came in to enjoy the club. One of them a handsome English man. As he strode in, his slick brown hair stayed in place, his shoulders were squared and his smile was confident.

He headed towards the almost empty bar, sitting down next to the silver robed man.

“Du Yuesheng?”

The silver robed man turned towards him, sending whispers through the room. His three escorts stood, their muscles tensing through their jackets.

“I am he,” Du Yuesheng replied. “What business do you have here?”

The Englishman opened his jacket revealing three bags of an earthy brown powder.

“Just as your men and I discussed: three bags imported from India for three hundred grand.”

Du Yuesheng raised his eyebrows. “Yes, three bags of opium.”

He flicked his hand at one of his men who left the room and came back with a black case about a foot long. Du Yuesheng opened the case filled with 300 grand in cash. Around him

everyone was silent. The Englishman's eyes glowed. He cautiously put the bags on the counter. While his demeanour was confident his hands trembled when he picked up the case.

"A pleasure doing business with you."

With that, the Englishman picked up the case and walked out.

The sun was out the next morning, shining and bright, just like the Englishman's mood. After a successful business transaction, he was in a jubilant frenzy, eager to celebrate, to spend some of his money.

The liquor store was just down the street. The sign was made of wood and the words "Liquor and Cigars" were written in both English and Chinese in a mustard yellow colour. The Englishman entered the shop, the smell of damp wood filled his nose.

"Hello Richard, would you like the usual?" The sales clerk stood by the cigar cabinet, already opening it.

"Hello Mr Lee. Actually, today, the best you have. Something of best quality. I am celebrating today, you see. I need something a bit fancier."

"Well, we have some quality Cubans, but if you want to celebrate may I suggest the Cohibas; they are of the best quality and beautifully aromatic, I would say."

For the first time, Richard noticed how impeccable Mr Lee's English was. He wondered if it was because of his frequent English clients or if he studied the language. He dismissed the thought.

"Sounds wonderful," Richard replied. "I'll have two boxes."

Richard waltzed down the street, holding his boxes in a protective manner. He took a moment to appreciate how close his apartment was to the liquor store. As he walked in a gentle breeze followed him. He hadn't remembered opening the window. Confused, he walked over to find some misplaced folders thrown behind the table. Just as he bent to pick them up, the heavy glass of a champagne bottle hammered into his head. Richard's body slammed into the blue tiled floor, creating a loud thump. Two men in suits watched his chest rise and fall as they stood over his quite limp body.

The two men rampaged his house, pulling out old telegraphs and receipts. The house was a total pigsty. Richard's eyes started to flutter. He was still on the cold floor. His eyesight was blurry but he could make out two pairs of brown leather shoes walking towards him.

"Rise and shine, Richard."

One of the pair of shoes' owners bent down to speak to him, his brown moustache creating shadows on his pale skin. Richard started to get up, the back of his head pulsating, each throb felt like a rock being thrown at his skull. With great effort, he lifted his sore body into a chair helped by the two suited men.

"We know who you are, Richard," the moustachioed man said.

"Who the hell are you?" Richard slurred his words, his brain still foggy.

The two men smirked. "I am Jack Williams and this is my colleague Edward Taylor. We work for MI-6 or you may know us as the Secret Intelligence Society."

Richard's brain was racing as the information settled in his mind.

"What in the bloody hell do you want from me? What the are you doing in my bloody apartment for heaven's sake? I haven't done anything. I am a simple man. Please find your business elsewhere."

Mr Williams turned a crimson shade of red, his nostril slightly flaring as he took deep breaths, trying his hardest to remain calm.

“Look, Richard cut the bull; we all know the little business that you have here, the opium, the women, the alcohol. We also know your connections in India and that you deal with Du Yusheng, the head gangster of Shanghai. We have all the evidence to prove it so cut the innocent act. You’re screwed and there is no point in trying to deny it.”

It was as if a tornado had ripped through Richard’s mind. They knew his business, his secrets, his guilty pleasures. Panic crawled through Richard’s body like a snake. Questions filled his brain, so many questions, yet he couldn’t speak. Every time he opened his mouth his words would be sucked down his throat like a vacuum sucking up the dust in an old basement.

The two suited men sat, their faces now expressionless, they waited for a response from Richard but he just sat there. Finally, Mr Taylor spoke.

“Because of all your businesses, the drugs, women, etcetera, we have to arrest you. Deport you from Shanghai, back to Britain really. There you will be arrested, life sentence. What you are doing is criminal behaviour and the British Empire will not stand one of our own so involved in this filth.”

Richard sat and processed this, he looked as if his life was slowly draining from his eyes. In many senses it was. He would be arrested, rotting in jail, for the rest of his life. No family, no friends, but most importantly no booze, no drugs and not the woody taste of his sweet cigars.

“There must be something I can do, something I can pay. Please. I beg of you,” Richard pleaded in a surprisingly emotionless tone.

“There is nothing you can pay,” Mr Taylor answered hastily. “However, there is one thing you can do.”

“What? Please? I’ll do anything.”

Edward Taylor seemed to roll his eyes at that comment. Jack nudged him lightly and continued.

“So, as you’re probably aware the British and the communists aren’t the best of friends. In fact, they’re a problem and we’d like to ‘minimise’ this problem.”

Richard’s head was still throbbing, he held it in his hands looking fed up.

“What does this have to do with me?” he asked, frightened to hear the answer.

“You have connections.” Edward pointed to a piece of paper with the name Du Yuesheng scribbled on it.

“We suggest that you make use of those connections to help us with the Commies. They are meeting on the twelfth of April, you might want to spread the word if you don’t want to spend your life rotten in a rusty cell.”

Richard’s fists tightened.

“You want me to get Du Yusheng, head of the gangsters to what...? Attack the communists? Are you out of your mind? That’s what you are asking me? To deal with potentially the most dangerous guy in Shanghai, so he can attack the communists? Maybe I am a criminal but I will not risk my life as well as be the reason for an attack on other men.”

By now he was standing up pounding his fists on the table. The calm expressions of the suited men fueling his anger more and more.

“It’s either that or you spend the entirety of your life rotting in a cell living on baked beans on soggy toast.”

Richard raked his hands through his hair; he pressed his temples until they turned bright pink. He stood like that for a few minutes before sitting back down.

“I’ll do it. Bloody hell, I’ll do it.”

The next few days were a living hell for Richard. Trying to organise a meeting with Du Yuesheng without any “trade” was not an easy task.

It was on a warm Shanghai night, the streets singing gentle jazz. Richard entered the club: sequined dresses, smoke and alcohol. Normally this would be one of Richard’s favourite sights but that night he dreaded it. He headed deeper and deeper into the club until three small monkey heads caught his eye, they were on a blue robe this time, on a man sitting in a dark musty corner of the club. Du Yuesheng. Richard approached him, his heart beating out of his chest.

“Hello, Mr Yuesheng.”

His usual sense of charm was missing.

“I have some news for you if you are willing to listen.”

Du tensed for a moment, his eyes sparkled, if it wasn’t for the fear blinding Richard, it would be obvious he wanted to know.

“What about?”

“The communists. They want to close down the bars and clubs. They know what goes on down here: the women, the drugs, foreigners dealing and receiving. They don’t like it. They claim it’s not the communist way. So they plan to shut down all...” he grasped for words, “social facilities.”

Du Yuesheng’s remained calm, worrying Richard. He took a puff from his cigar and asked, “From whom have you heard this information?”

It seemed to Richard as if the room had been set on fire. He was sweating uncontrollably, breathing heavily.

“A lady I have been seeing. I shall not mention her name as she is married. But her husband works for the Consulate, a Mr Williams, I believe. She told me about the communists, she says her husband won’t stop talking about the matter.”

Richard gulped, hoping his lie was convincing enough, though he stopped himself from smirking when he mentioned Mr. William’s wife. His nerves killing him, the silence letting him think of everything that could go wrong. Du YueSheng said nothing, he put the tips of his long fingers together. His sapphire blue ring matched his silky blue robe.

“They’re meeting on the twelfth of April at the local hall down the street,” Richard continued, eager to get the information out. “Mr Yuesheng, they know about your business; by closing down all the bars all the pubs your business will drown. No more dealings, no more women, no more alcohol. The communists, they hate it all, they will do everything they can to shut it all down, everything.”

“I understand.” Du Yuesheng’s voice was emotionless. “April twelfth, you say?”

“Yessir.” Richard’s voice was trembling.

“I’ll see what my men can do.” Du Yuesheng stood up, he was a short man but his power was tall. He walked away, only the eyes of the monkeys looking back at Richard.

It was the twelfth of April. Richard hadn’t heard from Du Yuesheng since they discussed the issue. The suspense kept Richard from sleeping. The bags under his eyes were the same sapphire blue as the robe Du wore when they met. Richard was as white and almost as thin as a sheet of paper. The twelfth of April was the date which decided his fate. Whether he would

rot in jail or be free. Either way, his life would never be the same. He would either be as good as dead or free but secretly responsible for the death of hundreds.

Richard walked up to the hall. Each step unsteady. Each step closer to his destiny. Of course, he wasn't going to be part of the fight, he was just there to observe what would happen if anything would happen.

The communists were inside just as Jack Williams had said. It was as if they were at a lecture of some sort. One man standing, talking. The man was tall; his clothes were a bright red. The more he spoke the more his round face started to match his clothes.

Richard spoke Mandarin fluently. He had a facility with languages in general. Yet standing outside the hall, he could only make out so much, through the thick ancient windows and the sound of his own heartbeat. Here and there he could hear talk of embarrassment and disloyalty and taking action. Richard started to think that perhaps his lies were turning out to be true. Before he could finish the thought he was disturbed by a piercing crash. Richard turned to the window to find hundreds of men all in black robes swarming the hall. Surprise flooded Richard's brain, soon followed by a wave of relief. His deal was done. He was a free man, well as free as could be.

Even though Richard knew his deal was over with, he couldn't help but watch the chaos in the room. The fighting had begun; the gangsters had come in with guns and knives and ropes. They were violent and ruthless, beating and torturing the communists who were mostly unarmed. The shouts and swearing of the men echoed throughout the hall. The smell of smoke and blood flowed down the street as the fighting continued. It was obvious that the communists were the minority in the situation, yet they kept fighting.

The massacre was taken to the streets eventually. For days and days, the bloodbath continued. Blood and sweat staining the grey pavement. Ropes tying people to the lampposts. The shouts and screaming never ending. Richard could hear the blood-curdling screams of people from his living room, where he sat smoking his Cohiba cigar with a copy of that day's newspaper in his hand. The headline reading: "ALL CAPTIVES SLAIN." He swallowed his gin with a twist of guilt and savoured the bittersweet taste of his freedom. At that moment, Richard knew his work had been done.

The Oriental Pearl

German Swiss International School, Chan, Elvis – 14

Staring at the girl in the mirror, I put the final touches to her makeup. She stared back at me with chestnut-brown eyes flecked with black. They were wide and innocent, yet she seemed to know too much. I picked up a cherry-red lipstick from the cluttered surface of her dressing table – it had once been immaculate, but was now coated in smears of lipstick and splotches of mascara – and carefully traced her taut lips. I wanted to look good, to conceal her imperfections from the world.

“Wow, how flattering I must look,” I thought to myself, admiring the way the dress accentuated the curves of my body in the full-length mirror. It was a QiPao, one of Pa’s finest pieces. A stream of embroidered flowers and birds ran along the fringe, complementing the butterflies that I had weaved into my tresses.

Taking one final glance at the beguiling young woman in the mirror, I headed down the stairs. Pa was already standing at the bottom of the steps, resting against the newel post.

“Happy birthday sweetheart!” he exclaimed. “You look gorgeous!”

I nodded a sign of approval before making my way to the breakfast table. Laid out before me was a hearty meal of all my favourite dishes of porridge, steamed buns and dumplings.

“But Pa –” I complained. – I can’t finish all this! ”

“Darling, of course you can. I have cooked the same birthday meal every year and you ravenously devour the food every time. ”

“Pa, have you forgotten about my diet?”

The smile vanished from his face, replaced by a look of concern.

“Sweetie, I love you just the way you are. You don’t need a diet!”

“Pa, but that’s how I fit into your beautiful QiPaos!” I retorted, rolling my eyes. “And do you not realise what a hackneyed phrase that it?”

“Darling –”

“*I love you just the way you are,*” I jeered, mimicking his whiny voice.

He flashed a crooked discoloured smile at me, the wrinkles deepening on his hollow cheeks. It almost seemed painful for him to laugh, gashes appearing every time his face puckered.

Time was a thief; he stole beauty.

I held on to him tight, with my perfectly manicured fingers curled around his arm, as we made our way through the bustling street market. Hawkers shouted from both sides; all around us was the sound of scuffling feet and raucous chattering.

We arrived at the jewellery store after passing through the throng of people. A chime signaled our arrival as we stepped in.

“Welcome!” Mr. Dong greeted us, cheery as always. We were frequenters to the shop. “What would you like to try on this time, Miss Yu?” he enquired politely, gesturing at the glass encasements housing rows upon rows of gold, silver and jade. I noticed the shafts of sunlight filtering in through the window, the specks of light dancing playfully from one jewel to the next.

“Actually, it’s her birthday today.” Pa said.

“Oh, it is?” Mr. Dong exclaimed, feigning a look of surprise. “Well, you better buy her something very special, sir.”

“Indeed.”

I paced the room, scrutinizing the pieces of art. Each sparkled in its own way, invoking stirring emotions, but none in particular caught my eye.

“Are there any pieces that Miss fancies?” he asked pleadingly.

“I’m afraid not at the moment, Mr. Dong,” I replied after a long period of contemplation.

He failed to conceal his disappointment, the sparkle in his eye dying like the final glowing embers of a fire, flickering to nonexistence. Pa motioned for him to come over. After much conferring with each other, muttering and murmuring with their backs to me, they finally came to a conclusion.

“Miss Yu, we do have a special collection reserved for special buyers,” he said, leading me to the back of the store. We walked past several layers of glass encasements, to a well-hidden door that seemed to merge into the wall.

“Welcome to the Dragon Chamber.”

There was a pneumatic hissing sound as the door swung open, tendrils of smoke spilling forward. They curled and unfurled, grasping at our feet and motioning for us to enter. I took a few tentative steps forward, feeling my way through the mist. Gradually, the smoke dispersed, parting to reveal a dragon in the centre of the room. Its ruby eyes glared menacingly at me, guarding the pearl inset in its jaws. Its long body trailed behind it, its scales all beset with gems that glinted in the light. It curled protectively around the pearl, forming concentric circles that surrounded it.

“The Oriental Pearl, Miss,” he explained.

I stood there, entranced by its intricate craftsmanship. It seemed so real that I half-believed it would let out a mighty roar and soar up to the domed ceiling, encircling its prized possession.

“So, what do you think of it, Miss?” Mr. Dong whispered, finally breaking the prolonged silence.

“It’s – it’s simply amazing. I have no words to describe it,” I whispered back, savouring the quietude. Sensing my affection for the pearl, Mr. Dong pried it from the dragon’s clutch and handed it to Pa.

“Be very careful with this pearl, Miss,” he warned. “If you treat it well, it will return the favour; if you mistreat it, it will do the same.” I nodded, enraptured by its glossy sheen that captured the glint of sunlight.

Slipping the ring onto my finger, Pa said, “Listen Yu, I want this pearl to forever remind you that in my mind, you are perfect and flawless.”

To Whom This May Concern:

On behalf of the Chinese army, I regret to inform you that Corporal Li has been killed while fighting in the Sino-Japanese War on the Shanghai front. He died a heroic death on the battlefield, while serving his country and fighting for what he believed in. His name shall be honoured for generations to come.

Please accept my deepest sympathy. We will do our best to assist you in this time of grieving.

I reread the letter, unable to believe what it was suggesting. There was no way that my father could have died. He had been so strong; the arm that I had held on to, the shoulder I had cried on. Life seemed to drain from my body, leaving me lethargic and numb, as if too much anaesthetic had been administered into my system.

Grief welled up inside of me and threatened to capitulate to the pressure. I shook uncontrollably, tears slashing two streaks down my face. Despite the formal statement of his death, a spark of hope still ignited within me. I refused to believe that he was dead.

Time was a thief; he stole love.

As time passed it only worsened. My home was requisitioned by the Japanese Army and the rest of my savings waned, until I found myself scraping together barely enough to stay alive. Holes festered themselves into my clothing, my hair grew out of style and I reeked of litter.

I resorted to scrounging for free meals in the market, prowling through the narrow alleyways in search of prey.

“Miss Yu, you have been standing outside for an unusually long time. Is everything alright?” Mr. Dong asked, his voiced tinged with concern.

“Oh – everything is fine,” I answered. “I’m just waiting for Pa to return.” I couldn’t bring myself to admit that I was now homeless.

“Oh,” he replied curtly, a quizzical look plastered across his face. Furrowed brows framed deep-set eyes that bore into my soul, but he said no more. In the uncomfortable silence that ensued, I twiddled my thumbs, playing with the pearl ring on my little finger.

Eventually, I grew tired of waiting; but the thought of Pa returning became the only reason that I persisted. My hope dangled precariously by a thin thread, threatening to come loose from the fringe of my QiPao.

Soon my nightmare became a reality. My final morsels dwindled to nothing. I had no choice but to sell my possessions. The ring was not an option; I was not ready to let go of the last physical remnant of my lost father. So I decided to sell the only my only remaining asset: my body.

Time was a thief; he stole my dignity.

The building loomed before me. It boasted an imposing façade, but it wasn’t how I remembered it to be. When the war came hurtling in, it had brought along with it a barrage of gunshots and a flurry of commotion. The building’s façade had become marred by the scars of war, with flakes of paint scraped away by the constant fighting and bullets lodged in its once whitewashed walls (now an ugly shade of tar-brown), like the wrinkles on an old man’s face.

I approached the weathered oak door, running my fingers along its grain. It was flanked by marble lions on either side that seemed to welcome me back home. Only this time there was a

spine-tingling coldness in their stone eyes.

I inhaled deeply, mustering the last trickles of courage within me, and pushed.

A flood of emotion surged through me as familiar scents assaulted me from all sides. It was unmistakably redolent of my birthday meal: the aroma of porridge, steamed buns and dumplings pervaded the air. I was on the verge of tears, gripping on with all my might, but I felt my clammy hands slipping.

I bit my lip to stifle the tears. My vision clouded and morphed into nebulous blotches. Scenes from my childhood played out before my eyes like a movie of my life story. Pivotal moments flashed by: my pudgy fingers clinging on to Pa's calloused ones on my first day of school; a comical smile splayed across my face as I proudly showed Pa my first fallen tooth; Pa clapping along to my song during the New Year Festivities...

The doors bolted shut behind me with a loud thud that reverberated through the hall. I snapped out of my reminiscence and wandered further into the house. From the newel post where Pa had stood on my birthday, I could see the banisters casting ominous shadows on the wall, shifting as if they had a life of their own. I ventured up the first couple of steps and peered upstairs.

"Hello?"

My trembling voice trailed off into the depths of the shadows, engulfed by the deadly silence.

"Is anyone here?"

No reply once again.

As I turned, ready to leave, I heard footsteps coming from upstairs. The floorboards groaned, loudening with each step. Out of nowhere, an apparition materialised at the top of the stairs, beginning its descent. My body was frozen stiff with fear. I stood there, unable to resist as the shadow enveloped me in its harsh embrace, suffocating and choking me until my world dissolved into oblivion.

I awoke with a dull throbbing in my temples. Propping myself up onto my elbows, I found myself in a room that was bare except for a bed placed in the centre of the room.

I had been allocated the room at the end of the corridor. My room. It still smelt faintly of lilies, but all my belongings had been discarded. The comfort of my childhood made the pain ebb away, receding into the murky shadows. But every night, the gash was reopened, the pain relived.

Suddenly the door creaked open and a man stepped into the room. He was a mustachioed gentleman, sporting gleaming medals on his lapel that clinked with every move he made. He clamboured onto the bed, pinning me to the bedframe. All struggle was futile, for no matter how hard I thrashed, I could not escape from the phantom that loomed above me. I watched helplessly as he encroached in on me.

"You are gorgeous, my dear," he whispered in my ear.

I shuddered at his raspy voice. Shivers snaked down my spine. It felt like a hallucination, as if he was infusing poison into my bloodstream.

"*Don't call me dear!*" I wanted to spit in his face, but I resisted the urge, choking back the words that were attempting to claw their way out. He left with a satisfied smug at the end of the night. I winced in pain as I headed back to bed, my bruised and battered body hanging as limp as a dead lily.

Every night, these strange men would pace the hall, choosing a pearl that they fancied. Oftentimes I would be chosen, stripped from the warmth of my bed sheets and forced to stand in the cold, undraped.

Time was a thief; he stole what I treasured the most.

Layers of makeup washed away as I splashed cold water onto my face, revealing my war scars for all to see. After peeling back the layers, like a chrysalis unwrapping itself, I found my true self.

I examined the war scars, streaks of red that never fully faded away. I put the red lipstick back in its place next to the pearl ring. It had gone through so much with me, reminding me that Pa was always by my side. Its once glossy sheen was blemished with scratches and scrapes, but it was still beautiful to me. I stared at the girl in the mirror, with haunted eyes and dishevelled hair, and left the smears of blood and blotches of tears on the surface of her dressing table.

The Brush and the Quill

Harrow Beijing, Yao, Caitlin – 14

1
My name is Bamboo; I'm a calligraphy brush, the writing instrument that has been used in China for centuries.

I've dwelled in the city of Shanghai for a long time; served many calligraphers during my existence. Every one of them has a unique story, entwined with this glorious city's past and present.

"I told you, this one isn't for sale!"

It has always been quiet in Yang's antique shop. People paid less attention to the archaic porcelain vases with Qing decorative arts on them nowadays; they would rather go to see the skyscrapers near The Bund. However, on this particular morning, a girl named Estelle entered his shop and demanded for calligraphy brushes. There was only one in the store, which Yang has specifically labeled a "Not for sale" sign on the delicate rosewood case of the brush.

Estelle did not give up, she offered a price that was beyond fair; but it only resulted in the shouting that startled the nearby stores.

"Why?" She asked with great frustration.

Yang pursed his lips and asked her to look at the case closely. Estelle leaned in from the counter and saw a hollow space carved next to where the brush lies; it's about the same length as the brush, but wider.

"A quill should be here, right where this empty space is." Yang said brusquely, "Unless a quill suddenly appears here and make this set of...writing instrument complete, this brush isn't going anywhere."

Somehow Estelle made no further comments at Yang's odd explanation. "Ok, then." On the contrary, she nodded in understanding. "Thank you anyway. Just so you know, sir, I really like that brush, it's nice." She glanced at it once more, smiled at Yang politely and walked out.

Yang waited till Estelle disappeared from view and took out the case again. He slowly traced the outline of the vacant space that took the shape of a quill, lost in thoughts.

The way Estelle's eyes lingered on me was weird, as if she has recognized something familiar. "The quill" is how everyone addresses Feather, a long lost friend of mine. Yang, my current owner, has been looking for her because of an unfulfilled wish. It's a Mission Impossible, the last time I've seen Feather was decades ago, and she could be anywhere in the world right now.

2

I once belonged to Yang's grandmother, Fan Xing.

When she was little, "Well-off" was inadequate to describe the life the Fans lived. They owned a fine house in the International Settlement, where her dad was a wealthy businessman who traded with the British and Americans. Xing's parents always made sure that she and her brother were well provided for. Most people said they lived in the lap of luxury before everything went drastically wrong.

It all started from the cargo ship that cost Mr. Fan a fortune but was shipwrecked in a storm, a storm that destroyed their past and shrouded their future. The Fans had to give up everything they once had and move back to the Old City; but the worst was yet to come.

In the spring of 1935, members of the Chinese Nationalist Party captured Xing's brother, Yu, an ardent supporter and member of the Chinese Communist Party. Rumors said that Yu couldn't stand the torturing, so he gave away the whereabouts of a few of his fellow members, and died after the interrogation.

The Fans no longer lived comfortably in a fancy house, the kind that has a yard in front of it and allows bright, warm sunlight to penetrate the French windows in the morning. Their residence in the Longtang seemed like a tiny hut in comparison. It had a gloomy feeling to it, like the mixture of sorrow and resentment that overshadowed them.

Fan Xing had developed a particular liking for me since then. She constantly softened the stiff tip of mine and stopped her parents from writing with me, because I would wear out after that. She had indulged in an eccentric habit of talking to me; whispering in a mysterious tone, and named me "Bamboo" which made her parents thought she had gone insane.

However, She said it was because I was the only thing her brother, passionate about calligraphy, had loved and treasured; talking to me made her feel like Yu had never really left her.

"Do you wish Yu was still with us, Bamboo?"

It was the question Xing asked me very often. The truth was I missed Yu more than she thought I did, but there was no way I could tell her that. On a morning of early summer, however, her question wasn't responded by silence as usual.

"I'm so sorry about what had happened." A croaky voice echoed through the door, which was left ajar.

Xing walked over and pulled the plank doors open. A tall and lean figure stood outside, she was about Xing's age, a pair of astonishingly blue eyes distinguished her from all the residents in the longtang; but what had caught my attention was the quill she tucked behind her left ear. "Hello." She said casually as Xing stood in front of her, holding me in her hand,

“I’m sorry...should have told someone about this visit.”

“Who are you?” Xing asked in a language she hadn’t used for a long time, looking blankly at the girl.

“My name is Sylvia Wood.” A smile climbed onto her face as she introduced herself, “You remember your dad’s old trading partners? My dad was one of them...I...I heard what had happened after you moved, I just want to see how you and your parents are doing.” She gazed at Xing and added, “I remember you fairly well.”

Xing’s eyes narrowed, her expression was something I’ve never seen before: rigid, her lips curled up unnaturally. “Oh yeah? Want to see how miserable we ended up?” She snarled, “Well, we are doing fine! Why don’t you go back to your perfect little concession world? Girls like you shouldn’t be standing in this dark, filthy alleyway!”

“No, no...you misunderstood, I just...”

“Get out of my sight!” Xing yelled. It was surprising that I had survived from her fist that clenched me so hard. “Why is everyone lurking around us and spying on our life?” She mumbled furiously under her breath, which sent a chill through my body.

Sylvia was twirling her hair ferociously. Her lips moved, but no words came out. Her fingers were trembling as she lifted her arm and adjusted the quill behind her ear.

“So, if Madam Sylvia has no further inquires, please excuse me from this conversation.” All of sudden the burning rage in Xing’s voice was gone, replaced by a cold, icy tone; but Sylvia made no sign of leaving.

“I saw you talking to Bamboo.”

Xing froze. She raised her head up slowly and stared right into Sylvia’s eyes, “Pardon?”

“I saw you talking to your calligraphy brush.” Sylvia glanced at me, repeating the sentence seemed to have drained all the courage out of her, “I’m sorry about your brother, Xing, I really am.” It was the first time she addressed the matter of Yu. Her eyes were suddenly growing misty as her voice trailed off, “I know what it feels like.” She said wearily, “I lost my sister when I was fifteen. She had leukemia, there was no cure for it.”

Sylvia pulled the quill from behind her ear, holding it in a gentle caress, “She loved to write.” Her voice sounded dreamy, “She wrote many things with this quill. Somehow I felt she was still with me when I look at it.” She lifted her head up and met Xing’s eyes, “Just like you, I talked to it and even gave it a name, Feather.”

“That’s exactly how I felt!” The words escaped from Xing before she realized it. She uncurled her fingers around me and showed me to Sylvia as she saw Feather the quill lay motionless in Sylvia’s palm, the edge of the feather was embroidered by golden thread, a letter “S” drawn on one side of it with ink. Sharing a tragically unusual experience in common has brought them closer. It then occurred to me that perhaps a bond has formed between me and Feather as well, since we were both forced to bear the weight of our owners’ grief, pain, and their unwillingness to let their loved ones go.

Sylvia started to drop by more often since that day. Xing would invite her in and make a cup of Jasmine tea for her; the two of them would chat for hours. Xing liked listening to Sylvia talking about the concessions, it would always evoke her distant but pleasant memory of her childhood; when she had nothing to worry about, when her family was still “whole”.

“Mr. Fan was my dad’s main trading partner, he was a nice man.” Sylvia grinned from ear to ear as she talked, “I used to walk pass your house quite often, you and your brother were

always...” She stopped abruptly and glanced at Xing nervously, “Anyway, where does Mr. Fan work now?”

“The Central Mint.” Xing heaved a deep sigh and said, “Minting the commemorative coins.”

“Oh.” Sylvia nodded, “I’ve heard of it...it’s linked to the Central Bank of the Republic of China, right?”

“Yeah.” Xing looked away from Sylvia, she took a deep breath and said, “He was a Nationalist, had different beliefs from Yu. They used to quarrel a lot.”

Xing had never brought Yu up to anyone ever since he died; listening to her telling Yu’s story to Sylvia was the sound of miracle. She told Sylvia everything, from the point when Yu joined the Communist party to when he was captured. She didn’t miss a single detail.

“He made a deal with them...said if he told them the whereabouts they’d have to guarantee our safety.” A tear rolled down Xing’s face as she approached the end, “The Communists called him a traitor then...they have no idea that this bitter rivalry between them and the Nationalists are tearing families apart...”

Sylvia remained quiet as Xing was sobbing too hard to continue the story. She pulled Xing in for a hug and whispered, “It’s all right; it’s all over now.” Feather told me Sylvia played the most important role in Xing’s life: A listener.

Unlike Xing, who dwelled on the memory of the concessions, Sylvia was deeply intrigued by everything in the Longtang. Her eyes would twinkle with excitement as she saw the children holding bowls, going to every neighbour’s house during dinnertime, sampling different dishes; she liked seeing people sitting on cane chairs outside, enjoying the night breeze in summer; she was astounded by the fact that everyone in the Longtang would get involved when two families quarrel.

“It’s always noisy here, hope you don’t mind.” Xing said as she took the clothes off from the clothesline outside, “Where you live is much quieter.”

“No, no, I like this place a lot!” Sylvia shook her head ferociously, “It feels like a big family here, everyone in this narrow alleyway.”

Xing smiled and took the clothes inside.

Feather and I would keep each other in company as Xing and Sylvia chatted. “Her parents have an unhappy marriage.” She once told me about Sylvia, “They are cold and distant people, Sylvia doesn’t talk to them very much; especially after she lost Lorraine...she has been isolating herself until she met Xing.”

It was mid-summer back then, the sprouting friendship between Xing and Sylvia convinced me that days were getting better; I had no idea about the chaos beyond the Longtang, nor that China would soon be haunted by its worst nightmare.

3

“Xing, pack your things by tomorrow, we’re moving.”

“Where to?”

“Kunming. Shanghai isn’t safe anymore.”

1937 marked the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War; people who lived through the eight years would rather erase every piece of memory of it from their heads. The Fans had left Shanghai behind and moved away as Mr. Fan, who worked in the Central Mint, requested to work in one of its branches in Kunming.

On the night before they departed, Sylvia came over to Xing.

“Be careful.” She said, hugging Xing tightly, “Will we ever see each other again?”

“Of course.” Xing tried to sound reassuring, “You’re the one who should be careful, this city has fallen into chaos.”

“I need to show you something.” Sylvia was holding an elongated case in her hand, it was made of rosewood, with two tiny figures carved on the lid; the inside of it has two empty spaces that roughly took the shapes of a brush and a quill. “See this? I made it for Bamboo and Feather.” She said solemnly, “I will bury this under the tree at the end of this alleyway. Write to me before you come back to Shanghai, alright? I’ll then dig this case up and put Feather here.” She pointed the space that looked like a quill, “I’ll put the case back again. If you see Feather there when you come back, that means I’m fine, we’ll be able to meet up soon, understand?”

“Okay.” Xing touched the figures on the lid, “Who are they?”

“You and me, can’t you tell?”

“Not very talented at crafting, are you?” Xing giggled.

“Well, that’s the best I can do!” Sylvia slapped Xing’s shoulder playfully and swung her arms around Xing, “Promise to keep in touch, Xing.”

“Promise.” Xing grinned with tears emerging from her eyes.

“So, it’s a goodbye then?” I said to Feather as we parted.

“Yes. Hope I could see you again, Bamboo.” Feather swayed her soft, pearl-white feather and bid farewell to me.

Xing went to the City God Temple of Shanghai afterwards, she didn’t pray for good fortune like most people did, but only for the safety of her family and Sylvia, who was to remain in the city.

The Fans lived in the safe haven of Kunming for 8 years, where Xing got married and had children.

Xing had lost touch with Sylvia Wood in 1941. The vision of the two of them strolling up and down the Longtang on a summer evening more than 10 years ago have faded completely, but Xing couldn’t have forgotten the girl who constantly travelled from the International Settlement to the Old City to see her when everyone else thought she was lunatic. As the grueling war of blood and anguish ceased in 1945, Xing went back to Shanghai and brought me along.

She returned to Tongfuli Longtang and walked along the alleyway, where so many memories are buried. When she reached the end, a promise she made years ago came back to her.

She walked over to the tree and dug out the rosewood case, the figures on the lid were almost undistinguishable. She opened the lid desperately only to find an envelope lying where Feather should be. Xing tore it open; she blinked several times as if seeing if she has misread the words. After a while that seemed like a decade, sadness, shock and confusion assembled themselves on Xing’s face, it had delicate and undefined features that made her seem vulnerable.

Dear Xing,

Sylvia had died...there were troops everywhere in the International Settlement 2 years ago...it caused a lot of panics, she was killed in the chaos...She had talked about you before, I am aware that you are just as sad as we are. You had been a good friend of Sylvia. By the way, Sylvia had said that if anything...anything happens to her, she'd like you to have her favourite quill. However, her mother had insisted that we take this quill back to London. I would bring it back to you someday if I could.

With Respect and Gratitude
Thomas G. Wood
09.12.1944

Xing had been longing to see Feather again until she passed away in 1998.

When people visit Shanghai now, they'd be amazed at how modern this city has become, the bustling streets; the flashing lights of shopping malls and nightclubs; they would admire the Oriental Pearl Tower in awe. Not many of them would go into the Longtangs, the narrow alleyways and interconnected lanes. There used to be lots of them here. In recent years, some of them are renovated, others have disappeared; the stories of ordinary people there were buried in the demolished residences.

“Hello.” Yang was shocked to see Estelle standing in front of him as he sat quietly in a café the night after they met.

“Have you been following me?” Yang scowled at her, looking alarmed.

“Well, there's something I have to tell you.” Estelle pulled the chair in front of him and sat down, “You are Fan Xing's grandson, aren't you?”

Yang gaped at her, bewildered.

“My grandma was Sylvia Wood's cousin.” Estelle ignored his astounded face and continued, “Does this name sound familiar to you? Have you heard of the story?”

“Yes, my father told me, but how did you...”

“The Woods went back to London in despair after Sylvia died and the failure of their business during the war. The quill Sylvia once treasured ended up in my grandma's possession as Mrs. Wood passed away. I was very curious about Shanghai after listening to Sylvia's experience, so I came with this quill. I've been to countless antique shops, you're the first one who wanted to reunite the brush and the quill.”

“I'm here to return something.” Estelle said finally, taking out a transparent case from her bag. A quill lay motionless inside; its feather was embroidered by golden thread, a letter “S” drawn faintly on one side of the feather. “It belongs here, in Shanghai.”

New Tales of The Old Shanghai

Island School, Saunders, Anya – 14

A mere observer. An agent of natural order. That is what I see myself as. My one rule is to never intervene. I have no name, though you humans have made many. Anubis, Vanth, Thanatos, Tarakeshwara, Grim reaper. You humans think I cause death. That I am the one that reaps their soul. The one that executes them. Misguided, for I merely wait. I wait for the last breath.

The last beat.

The last thought.

Only then do I approach, ferrying the soul to the beyond.

Tonight I am Yama. I sit myself upon a crate in a warehouse not far from downtown. This city port has always been a bountiful harvest. Tonight is no other. I wait as men of both sides scurried into the warehouse, ready to die. I have always found humans interesting. Why do you fight? Why are you so willing to die? Is it for honor? Rewards? What is there that can be more precious than the gift that the Absolute one has given you?

Gun fight ensues.

As I approach the fallen souls, I hear them whisper. They always whisper. To ameliorate their own deaths. Most, dying of old age and disease, would tell themselves they have lived a good life. Some spoke of love. Chivalry. Glory. Honor. I do not judge. I cannot judge. The passage of life and death is equal to you all, dear reader, unbiased and true. Whether you are good or bad, kind or cruel, all souls go through the same route.

Today I hear the same. These men, they had the chance to start over, to lead a good life. Instead they spent their years trying to find their boss. Their childhood idol. Trying to revive him. And When they discovered that it was too late, They rebelled. They echo to themselves that they are avengers. I look down, as 38 names disappear from the list. Each with their own life. Each with their own story.

Next on the list is Lily Chan.

藍玫瑰 (*Lan Meigui*). Blue rose, they called her. She always wore blue. Born to a hostess and a triad boss. Being pregnant was a no go for a hostess; she was given 2 choices: Abortion

and stay, or keep it and leave. She chose the latter. Lily, being her favourite flower, became the daughter's name. Upbringing was hard. With the little income the mother got from prostitution she spent it on alcohol. Each night after school, Lily would be scowled at, sometimes beaten, with the occasional *Why didn't I abort you?* But Lily did not lose hope. She studied hard. Aced tests. Eventually, her mother screamed at her less, until one day, she died in a drunken fight. My daughter she echoed. Lily had no other family, and with nowhere to turn to and no hope to look upon, she went back to her roots. At age 15 she rose in popularity at record rate, and at age 20, was the richest hostess with in the area, marvelled by men and envied by women. So envious, that it transformed into anger. Tonight is Lily's 21st birthday. Unbeknownst to her, her drink, given by her closest friend, was spiked with cyanide. Death by cyanide is not a kind one. To those unfortunate enough to encounter it, I, will become a blessing. The convulsions. Desperate gasp for air. Blood froth rushing out of mouth. Only then, after minutes of suffering, comes unconsciousness. Lily is no different. The trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool.

As her dress shifts into a crimson purple, I approach.

Love and Dignity

Of strangers?

Her name disappears.

I shift to a different part of town. I shift to an incalculable amount of places. All at the same time.

Death is everywhere, even at times you are not aware of it.

Next name: 强刚志 (*Qiang Gangzhi*).

Strong indomitable will

They called him “Iron fist” Gang. Once one of the most powerful man in Shanghai, who now has fallen. At the age of 13, he killed 2 triad captains at the cost of his hand. His parents feared him. His peers worshipped him. They left school and joined the same triad. He listened. He learned. At age 15, he killed the entire gang by setting fire to their hideout. He started his own gang. With a bit of tweaking, he turned cuffs he found into flails. At the age of 26, he was in control of half of Shanghai. At age 35 he had most of the police force bribed and in control. 2 years later, with the arrival firearms, he considered them weak and cowardly. Gang Wars after gang wars power slipped through his unbreakable chains, and in the end, his strength was his downfall. With no friends, nor family, he turned to opium. Eventually, his sole purpose was opium. Doing anything to reach it. His pride was gone. His will as rusted as his flail. “Iron fist” Gang was no more.

Now he crunches in a dark alleyway, clutching the only thing that reminded him of his past. He looks up and a strange image appears in his mind. A girl in blue. Why? He wondered.

“I'm so pathetic” he whispers.

As his face drains of color, I approach.

Power and Satisfaction

Gained from fear. Was it worth it?

His name disappears.

I am here. I was here. I will be here.

No matter what year, what century, what millenia is it is, Death is, was and shall be constant.

張仁生 (*Zhang Rensheng*) is a officer in the Shanghai Municipal Police force. Born and raised in Hong Kong, his father work in the police force, and thus wanted to become one himself. At age 16 he joined the academy, and after half a year finally became an officer. He

and his partner, both held a righteous belief, and would patrol the streets, never taking bribes. People hated him. When usually a small bribe was enough, they were now fined. Eventually this got the attention of the local triads. They captured his partner during control and tortured him to death. The officials called it a KIA and never investigated further. It was at this point that Zhang realised that corruption was essential, and as he got more money, the more he agreed to this system; it was a win win situation. They get their business, we get the money. When Shanghai Municipal Police force needed men from Hong Kong police department, Zhang saw it as a money making opportunity, leaped at the chance. With how rich the local gangs were, Zhang quickly gained money. Soon he was one of the richest in the city, though he kept it a secret, he was drunk in money. He grew arrogant, and began challenging people with more influence as he bullied the poor. At first, triad leaders were unaware. But as Zhang began to touch upon their territory, taking their money, they became enraged. On this night, they sent squads. Zhang, realising the situation he was in, quickly grabbed his possessions. With no place to run, he went to civilians. Those that he robbed from. Those that he oppressed. Of course, they slammed their doors, rejected him, overlooked him. With each door slammed on him, he became more enraged. "I am a police officer!" he screamed. "I PROTECT you!". "No you don't," they would respond "run, but karma will catch up." He tried offering them money, food, jewelry, but nothing worked. He became more and more desperate, and came upon a dead end. As men pile up behind him, he breaks down. He pleaded. He begged. He offered everything he had. But they would take none of it. Of course they wouldn't take it. They can always loot his body. His screams echoed throughout the alleyway as dozens of blades collapsed onto him. He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have. His greed was his downfall.

As a river of red runs along the street, I approach.

Survival

At the cost of others?

His name disappears.

Each death is marked with a time; I am but a timekeeper, who recalls those how have met their time. It is law.

Death is immutable.

Down the list is Joshua Flanders.

Raised in a farm, his family was not a religious one. It was through his catholic High School teacher, Mr Cooper, where he started to attend church. At this point in his life, the farm was bankrupt, his father a drunkard and mother ran away with a man in a italian Bianchi Landaulette, which frankly, Joshua thought was rather ugly. He spent majority of his life in the church. It became his second home. Mr Cooper, who also happens to be the father of the church, became his father too, or at least that was the way Joshua thought of him. When Joshua was 24, Mr Cooper was diagnosed with cancer, which, in a rural town like theirs, was basically a death sentence. They prayed everyday. They prayed and prayed until Mr Cooper was too weak to kneel on the floor. Still they prayed, until Mr Cooper was too weak to speak. Yet they prayed on. Mr Cooper's last words to Joshua was Deus Vult. God wills it. And so Joshua knew what he had to do next. He was determined to share God's love. If a man dying can still believe in God, there is nothing God cannot do. With the money he got from Mr Cooper, who was surprisingly rich, he went around the world. He made himself a missionary. Sent himself on a quest. He gave to the poor and weak, and fought against the strong and greedy. Eventually he ended up in Shanghai. "This city," he thought to himself "is full of sin. I must save it!". As he walked around he was disgusted by what he saw, how corrupt and shameless

people were here. At least 30 women have offered sex for money since he arrived. Frustrated, he approaches one. Thinking she was going to get a customer, she was utterly disappointed when the white man asked her why she was doing this and asked her if she wanted to accept the lord and saviour Jesus Christ in a crappy accent. Annoyed, she kicks him. Disgusted, he walks on. The corruption was horrible. The Paris of the east, they called it. Quite romantic, is it? I see a worker held at gunpoint. Preposterous. Christ shall protect me, he thinks. He charges in, a crusader, the one who vanquishes evil. The robber notices him. As if this was routine, he shifts the gun towards him. “Stop! Violence is not nec-”. Gun shot. In the heart. People walk on as if nothing happened. His faith made him strong. But strength does not stop death. God does not stop what is planned.

As he finishes his final prayer, I approach.

Deus Vult

How naive.

His name disappears.

All things that start must end; all things that live must die.

Death is inevitable, dear reader.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai - Under the Sky

Malvern College Qingdao, Lu, Novia – 14

It was a dark winter's day. Below the blue sky, thick, yellow fog hung low on the streets of Shanghai. Wide-eyed, I sat staring out from the old, rickety rickshaw – an expensive kind of transport only reserved for the wealthy. My mother was next to me, like always. Her long, blonde hair brushed over her shoulders and her dark blue eyes met the road in front. She rarely showed emotion but no matter what, she always made me feel comfortable. I leaned softly against her, she had a queer old-fashioned thoughtfulness deep in the eyes. I only wish I knew what about but all I could do was imagine. Maybe she was questioning the very same thing as me – why am I here? She shot me a glance, and said, “You are very similar to me...” These words did not resonate with me, and sometimes I'd prefer to call her Mrs. Cedric, rather than mom.

I am Cornelia Cedric, a girl born in China, of French descent. My mother Mrs. Cedric, is a beautiful French lady who came to China in 1900 with her husband, Mr Cedric. He was a soldier in the Eight Power Allied Force. I had never met him but my mom has told me his story several times. Mr. Cedric is not my father, but his story allows me see what he was like.

After one day of cruel aggressiveness, the Cedrics were tired of killing, robbing, and burning everything – bodies, houses, treasures. They wanted to run away and give the treasure they've got back to where it should be. Unfortunately, their discussion was overheard by a stranger. When they noticed that, they went off immediately. Mrs. Cedric succeed, Mr. Cedric, unluckily, went the wrong way and was killed. Mom escaped to Shanghai by train. Twenty years later, she met a handsome but poor man, and at the age of 38, she had me. However, the man, my father, threw us away. My mom sold all our things and opened a shop.

The rickshaw had arrived at the Bund, which I would be living around for a long time. As my first step made a mark on the moist, frozen cold ground, my eyes swiveled around and I felt perplexed. The sky was full with a rainbow of colours, and all the buildings seemed to be totally different from the traditional Chinese ones printed in my memory. These structures

were new and fresh and there was a sense of a lively atmosphere that made me feel a bit dazed. “The Bund,” I mumbled with a voice that was soon overshadowed by the noise of others. “Do I really belong here,” I muttered again.

“Come inside, my dear,” mom whispered softly, trying to disguise from the hundreds of people that we were new here. I went into the house, and was led by my mom to the second floor.

I woke up with a fright in the middle of night. Outside the window, things were surrounded in mist, the bright lights and the noise were gone – only the roar of wind could be heard. I couldn’t shake my feeling nervousness, so I went to my mother’s room. Mrs. Cedric was having a good sleep. Nonetheless, she welcomed me into her arms and like that, I was out like a light.

Hours later, I got up from an empty bed, the quilt was quite warm, yet a frosty pressure almost made me unable to breathe. “Mom?” I said. No-one answered, but a letter on the the nightstand caught my attention. It has Mrs. Cedric’s handwriting on it, “Dear my Cornelia, I am going to our old house to get our appliances. Don’t worry. Breakfast is on the table, don’t forget to heat it before you eat.” I got off the bed, picked up some clothes hastily and went out of the room. I saw the food on the dining table. If it was a ordinary day, I would probably run to it and enjoy the delicacy. But this time my mind was elsewhere, I was thinking about the old house. ‘It is not too far away...I’m gonna go,’ I thought to myself. In a minute, I rushed out of the house running toward my mother.

I had nearly reached my old home when a strange sound appeared. I looked up to the sky. I had never seen anything like it before but I immediately knew what it was – an bombardment aircraft. Just as I caught my attention on it, a bomb rained down on where my old house was supposed to be. BOOM! The first attack had been made. I ran. Suddenly, the atmosphere had changed. Houses were destroyed. Dirt and rocks were flying, and the broken ground engulfed screaming people. “Mom!” I shouted, as I saw a woman fall down, but she was not my mother. I ran and ran, searching for her long, blonde hair.

The planes had gone but they had left a city that was disfigured beyond recognition. I had lost my sense of direction. Raindrops leaked from the red, cloudy, sky down onto my head. It felt like...human blood. Not a single soul was seen in this lost world. I almost sank into the depths of hopelessness. Then, I noticed a distinguishing piece of wood that was used by my family among the debris. “That’s...Oh! It’s my home! Mom, where are you?” I said rummaging for clues. Finally, I found a photo of Mrs. Cedric (at the time she was young), gripped in my mother’s hand, beside a collapsed wall, under a huge rock, with a rebar through it. The photo had blood splashed on it. I pulled my mom’s corpse out. Her long, blonde hair now a dark shade of red. At that time, I knew, the best mother in the world was now nothing but a dead body. She would never open her charming eyes again and give me a warm hug when I needed. “Why has this happened to me? It’s unfair!” I cried, “Mom, please...please don’t leave me alone,” my voice choked as I wept.

On Sunday night, I sat on the bed, held my mother’s photo in both hands, while tears dropped down; tomorrow is my first birthday by myself. Tap tap -- someone knocked the door. “Who would that be? It’s late at night,” I said to myself as I dried my eyes then grabbed a coat and went to open the door. “Good evening, my lady, I’m sorry for bothering you,” said a young man dressed in a suit. “I need a place to sleep for a while. Can you help me please? It doesn’t need to be a bed, just anywhere,” he asked gently. “Sure, come with me,” I answered right away and lead him to one of the empty rooms. As I lay in bed that night, I couldn’t help wonder who he was.

In the morning, I decided to get more information about the man, the only things I knew about him was just that he is young and handsome. We had breakfast together. His name was Yimou Yang, the young master of a wealthy business family in Shanghai. Yimou was 20 years old, who lived far away and when he was moving to the Bund, his mother, father and sister were killed by the Japanese. I felt sorry for him and told him he could stay longer. I told him about my story and I could feel that his heart trembled when he heard what had happened to mom. "You know we are kind of similar, don't you?" I said sincerely. After a while of chatting, Yang told me he had something to tell me. He told me he wasn't just a rich son. He also had a job as a mole planet in the Japanese Army to find out information for the Chinese. Feeling alone, I agreed to see whether this would be a good career for me.

Yang taught me the basic methods of pretending and a few things I could do. One day, he brought me to a meeting of the Communist Party. I learned quickly. Yang said I was so intelligent and he believed I was born to be a spy. Eventually, I was given a new name and identity – Miss Carter. My first job was to sneak into the Japanese Army Headquarters without being seen. I went to leave to start my mission but Yang grabbed me. "There's a party being held on the Bund next week, the Japanese will be there then. That will be the perfect time for you to start your mission," he said. I wasn't happy but I knew I had to wait. In the coming days, I went and bought many new clothes, learned a few Japanese words, practiced my mother tongue – French, and spent lots of time talking to Yang. I like him...

Friday came. I sat by the window, looking at the magnificent scenery of Shanghai at dusk. The colourful sunset glow brought me back to the time I spent with my mom and I knew at this moment, I had to avenge my mother.

Clang, Clang. It was six o'clock. I left to head towards the banquet. When I got there, I was admired by everyone. Many officers and men came and spoke with me, including the Japanese hunters. Yang was well-known in the upper stratum, he pretended he didn't know me and gave me a greeting as a man who had an interest on me. At the end, a formally dressed man went to me, "A pleasure to meet you, my lady, may I have your name?" "I'm Co...Carter, Caroline Carter, a pleasure to meet you, sir," I replied, within a short look at his emblem, which revealed his status – a high-ranking official. "Can I ask for the honour to have a drink with you on Monday, please?" I answered after a quick thought. "Sure, sir, if you'd like to." "I'm Hidetora Tojo, meet you there at Monday at the eighteenth quarter, have a good day, Ms. Carter." Then, he left.

I had successfully found a way in and managed to build a nice relationship between Miss Carter (me) and Hidetora Tojo. Yang's father had been forced to work for Tojo before and when Yang's father died, he was forced to carry on for his father.

It was Monday. Yang told me he sensed danger was coming. I was worried. In the afternoon, I quickly finished the appointment with Tojo and went off to the restaurant. In the twinkling of an eye, a familiar tall figure fell down to the ground together with splashed blood and a single bullet. I was shocked, not by the huge sound, not by the brush burn, not by the guy behind me who was saying "calm down", but by the guy lay weltering in blood. "Yang! Don't die! Don't leave me!" I cried. It was a familiar feeling. Tojo came up to give me a few words of comfort, afterwards he just disappeared into the fog, with another guy who held a silent gun. Following that, hot tears welled up in my eyes and I quickly walked away from this dreadful place, right before I would lose control. I was alone... again. His sweet handsome face lay on the ground in front of me. I couldn't do anything.

Days passed and my grudge against Tojo had doubled. I decided to form a plan and kill Tojo once and for all.

Two days later, in the hotel room, I was picking up my clothes and some Japanese soldiers cropped up and gave me a punch, then everything just turned dark. When I came to my senses I was sitting in a cell and Tojo was looking down at me. I could feel that I was being bound tightly. “Why am I here, Mr.Tojo,” I asked. “You really don’t know?” “... no,” I whimpered. “All right, tell me where the organisation is?” Tojo shouted. “What organisation?” “Don’t disguise any more, the Communist Party! WHERE ARE THEY!” “Ok, last chance, tell me where it is!”

I bit through a capsule kept inside my mouth. “Now, tell me where it is!” Tojo shouted. Sweat came out from my forehead, my brain felt like it was trouble. “Renmin Tearoom,” I answered after all. Everything became blurred. The last sight before my world had switched off again was soldiers going out, and Tojo look back at me with a smile.

Eventually, I regained consciousness. There were few Party members beside me, I could see the happiness and sadness appeared on their faces. Thus I knew, my enemy was dead. But I knew I would be soon as well. The capsule I bit through was the antidote of the drug but it was also poisonous. I have told Tojo the trap address with packs of dynamite in it, and the price for blowing up them is my life. My last wish was that I could go and see the Huangpu River once more. Therefore, the others brought me there and left me alone as I watched on.

Waves rolled in on the beach, water was flowing past in an endless stream. It took me back to my childhood. I walked into the water and put my entire body in the cool water. Looking up, the cloudless azure sky seemed to be within my grasp. My eyes closed gradually, but this time, I saw brightness.

Walls of Freedom

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Wong, Pauline – 15

That summer my father walked out of our house's door and never looked back.

I was six years old.

It was a few days of seeing that empty chair at our dinner table when I popped the question. "We Chinese are very strong, stronger than those laowai..." my mama replied while furiously scrubbing the belly of our teapot.

That teapot was a wedding present from my father. Mama loved it dearly and paid more attention to it than any fittings of the house, treating it like a pearl on her palm. She loved it dearly.

"It's what reminds me of Papa," she once said to me.

I stared at her frantic movements in silence before she sighed and put down the teapot gently. She reassured me that he went to join the army and would be back very soon.

I wasn't sure. There was an edge to her voice. I wanted to ask more, but one death glare from those obsidian eyes and I dropped the topic.

Our family had few to our possessions. We were quite poor. Everyone was poor. Everyone but the corrupted government officials that only smoke opium all day. They lay their backs on the hard-wooden beds, one hand holding the long pipe to their mouths, another holding a Dragon Li to their chests. Mama loathed them. I envied their children. They carried around their guoguo when they went out onto the streets, their chirping filling hustling streets.

My only toy was my bamboo-dragonfly. Made of dark oak wood, the wings were a handsome shade of brown as it gleamed in the sunlight. Despite not being the toy I could wave around and catch somebody's eye, I was proud of it. My father bought it off the streets for three dollars when I was five. Ever since, it had been my companion when my parents were busy with their mundane work of fishing and sewing, I would allow the porous tissue to slide between my palms, before releasing it as it rose higher and higher into the air, gliding along the winnowing wind before my very eyes, piloting into the binding rays of the sun, before dropping onto the ground meters away.

Every day I would bring my dragonfly with me, going to wherever it took me, exploring the city, delving into narrow alleys, climbing onto rooftops. Time passed, the sun hid herself

behind the horizontal line, and the chants of my mother calling me home echoed through the streets, the alleys, the rooftops.

Every day was the same, until that night when I met mama's solemn face as she sat at the dinner table. The usual Lion's Head Meatball and rice was served, and with a slight nod I slipped into my regular seat, a sideways glance at the empty chair where my father usually sat.

Mama must have caught my eye. "He's not coming back," she whispered.

"Wha?"

"Bombed up by a canon, neighbor Lee told me earlier. Hers was gone too..." she drifted off, her fists clenched tight. She took a deep breath, slamming down her chopsticks. "Those DAMN laowais." With that, she pushed herself away from the table and left the room.

I stayed at my seat, eyeing at the empty chairs around me, frozen. I was still confused about what had happened.

The sun shone brightly as usual the next day, contrasting the darkness that hovered over the village. In just one night family members had been lost, tears had been shed and life moved on despite the lingering shadows under red watery eyes. Life could not wait.

I stayed at home with mama and sat next to her while she sobbed into her shawl. I didn't really understand what was happening, but I knew something was wrong. Mama was strong and she never cried before, not in front of me.

"Mama, did Papa go to Tian?"

I could see her posture stiffen slightly, but she tried hard not to show it. Slowly her eyes lifted from the dampened fabric, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Yes, son. He went over the walls into Tian where he's living happily now," she took a deep breath. "He died a hero."

The walls.

For centuries, they had guarded our beautiful city of Shanghai. Each and every piece of the strong bricks was laid upon each other by the hands of our ancestors. They went through blood and sweat, hoping that this wall would bring us peace, protecting us from jeopardy. For centuries, they had left enemies out of reach, their weapons too powerless to bring the walls down. We took pride in these beautiful walls, and we cared for them regularly.

They had protected our city for centuries.

They would protect our city from the British too.

After lunch, I took my dragonfly out again. Again and again it flew down the streets and passed people, going to wherever the winds took it. It skidded around the corner and landed at the foot of a magnificent wall of stone bricks.

I sprinted over to where the dragonfly lay in the soft stubbles of verdant grass, to where men had worked on and on for centuries building this structure.

It was what defined peace and ease in Shanghai.

I allowed my fingers to run along the cracks of the walls, the ebb and flow, the wax and wane. The small crevice that reached my fingers triggered my curiosity.

The sea. It was vast and blue. Fishermen relied on this beautiful expanse for their living, the moat between the walls and the sea was also what have kept us from danger and trouble for so long.

It was peaceful, until I saw that grey ship firing red balls at a distance, and it was coming towards us.

Almost immediately the gongs were struck from the watch tower, the boisterous ring enveloping the entire city.

Mothers came out of their homes carrying their babies; children waddled out of their backyard, ball in hand, dolls cradled in arms. It was a split second when everything turned to chaos. I saw mothers scooping up their young ones and taking the hand of another, their faces were a mixture of fear and worry. The air was clouded with a new sense of danger, and the gong was still ringing in our ears.

Mama had taught me what to do when the gong was struck: get home immediately, and find yourself a hiding place.

My instincts acted first before my brain did. I was halfway home when I realized I left my dragonfly by the walls. At once, I did a sharp turning of my body and started running back to where the walls were, close and closer to danger. I slipped past waves and waves of bodies, parents that were rushing back home at the sound of the gong.

“Chao!” I heard a voice call my name. When I turned around I saw Lee running towards me, her expression frantic. “What are you still doing here? You have to go back home right now!” A loud barrage resounded at the tip of her words.

I shook my head, that dragonfly was my everything. It was my only toy and my only memory of Papa, I would not let it go. Lee seemed frustrated. “What are you waiting for? RUN!”

I made no move.

With a grunt Lee took me by the hem of my sleeve, and started dragging me back into the crowds, back into the town, away from our walls.

I shrieked, pulling myself from her firm grip, clawing at her arm. I broke free finally, and quickly disappeared into the shades of the crowd. I could hear her voice echoing in the crowd, her frustration and fear reflected onto her desperation to find me, but as I ran faster and faster her voice finally resembled nothing more than a whisper in the wind.

I didn't stop until I reached the deserted piece of greenery, where the walls were closer, and the cracks on the walls more distinct.

Only they weren't the walls that have protected us anymore.

What once had stood tall and proud at the end of Shanghai now turned into a pile of ashes, the broken pieces of the stone bricks lying around bashful and still. The air was brimming with dusts and flakes, it's no longer quiet uptown.

When the approaching men in red and blue came into sight, I slowly backed away from the debris, before breaking off into a sprint down the streets. But my little legs only took me a few steps when a loud explosion landed behind me and I tumbled and fell.

And then it was darkness.

When I opened my eyes, the sky was dyed in a shade of grey and blue, and the streets were desolated. With aching arms I lifted myself off the ground, my limbs covered in dry dust. I rubbed my scalp, and tried to shake off the cobwebs. Slowly, I dragged my body back home, my legs hardly bearing my chest that was now lead-weighted.

Home?

The place I once proudly called home was now shadowy and dilapidated. Our once humble vegetable yard was now stripped of its abundance of cabbages and carrots. They lay abandoned by the trenches, cold and barren. Our door was swung open with force as it now hung precariously by the ledge. Our “fu” word that was written by Papa was ripped off, the red shreds dangling like a rag doll.

The house was deserted, something I have always feared since a young age. No love, no one to come home to. Nothing.

Slowly I stepped into the room. All the furniture in the house was destructed in a way-

the dining table was flipped over, the plates scattered on the floor. Our chairs, the three chairs that linked our family together during every meal, the legs fractured apart, a broken family. Flowers, the beautiful Peonies that were once placed nicely in a china vase were now lying on the floor, the petals scattered around the stems. The china vase which was a wedding present from Papa now lay in broken pieces around the petals. It was a horrible scene.

It wasn't home anymore.

Yet, my innocent heart still failed to acknowledge what really was going on. I was confused. Did Mama have a tantrum again? She was always in a bad mood these days.

"Mama?" I called out, my small voice echoing in the deserted house. I gazed around the room, reading the cracks on the wall as if it would give me some sort of hint of where Mama was.

Minutes passed and... nothing. I started panicking, I ran across the rooms, crouching and crawling, looking high and low, still, there was no sight of my beloved mother. It was when I got to the front yard did the emotions of fear and anxiety kicked in and I started screaming "Mama! Mama!"

Memories flashed back to olden days, when our family was one and Mama was happier. As a child I was less attracted to strangers. In fact, I was terrified of them. I would much rather play with myself than play with other children of the village. However, sometimes, drawing on sand or playing with pebbles were just not enough. Mama and I would play together whenever she's free. I would sit by her side as she sewed fabric together, my eyes watching in wonder as those threads weaved in and out of the needle, until my torn clothing was good as new, a patch added as an addition decoration. After that we would play hide-and-seek at home, giggling as I caught Mama hiding behind the chairs, laughing when I was scared from behind, discovered from my hiding place. I could always easily find Mama, not today.

My screams and shouts must have alerted the neighbors when I saw Lee running from a distance.

"Chao... shhhh little boy shush," she whispered in an undertone. "How could you run away from me yesterday? Did you know how dangerous it was?" Her angry voice did not help my situation as I continued to sob. I watched with teary eyes and a blurry vision as her eyes softened. "Okay now, it's okay. You are fine. What would your mother say if she knew you have been crying, hmm?"

My head sprang up upon the mention of Mama.

"Mama?" I said, I didn't know if it was a question or not.

"Yes, Mama," she said. "Go get your Mama, okay?"

"Mama where?"

Her eyes narrowed and her eyebrows furrowed in worry. "Chao, have you seen your Mama?" I tilted my head and looked at her in confusion. Slowly I shook my head no. I watched as Lee's face transformed from worry to realization as the horrible truth hit her.

"No, this is not good. Oh my heavens where did she go?" she whispered to no one. She turned to me. "Chao, go in and play by yourself okay? Don't leave home."

I nodded, my tired body now finally hitting my senses. Almost drifting off, I tumbled back to the house and climbed into bed, falling asleep almost immediately.

When I woke up, there was a buzz in the house. I could hear Lee talking loudly, shouting out orders to people. With groggy eyes I went into the background, where at least 5 people were gathered around the household well. It was for a while until the crowd noticed my presence and Lee immediately ran over and scooped me up, putting myself in her arms. She patted my head, gently pressing my head into the crook of her neck. It was supposed to be a

sign of reassurance, of comfort and love. But something was wrong. The atmosphere did not feel right. She was hiding something from me.

I confirmed my instincts when I looked up, as she immediately tried to take me back into the house, but alas I saw what happened.

There, by the well, a body laid lifeless. The crowd was grave with misery and whispering to one another, shaking their heads. I couldn't see the face clearly, but one look at their hand and I knew who it was.

Clutching my father's teapot in her hand was my mother's body, her clothes damp from the well. "Did she get splashed by the waves when she went to wash our clothes by the sea?" I asked myself. My eight-year-old self was innocent and too childish to understand the truth.

"MAMA!!!" my shout was full of happiness, delighted to see my beloved mother again. I could see the crowd smiling at me, but the smiles looked forced. I wanted to ask questions but all I could do was to continue kicking at Lee, shouting for my Mama as she quickly brought me inside the house.

It took months, months of explanation when I finally understood that Mama wasn't coming back anymore. It took a long time, years until I understood what really happened. Mama had hidden herself in the well, ready to wait the night till the chaos were over. Over the night, the oxygen in the well was used up and she died of cerebral hypoxia. Even by death, she held close to Papa's teapot.

A few weeks later I clung onto Lee's hand, and watched as the tall soldiers marched into our beautiful village of Shanghai. All the villagers were standing by the streets as these strangers took over and invaded the village. Tears were shed and anger was expressed. The years went by and I lost count of the days. I was brought up by Lee till I was an adult. I worked hard for a living and got married. I made sure that my children could grow up in a complete family- being an orphan was one of the most painful experiences I have ever encountered. Every day was the same work and the same routine. Life wasn't interesting to say the least.

Three generations passed and I watched as my great-granddaughter sat foot on where I once called home, now a popular tourist spot of the 21st century.

I gazed down upon her as she held her sketchbook close to her chest, looking around at the old city of Shanghai. She was an artist, a very talented one may I say, and she's back at my hometown to find inspiration for her new project. I had always enjoyed observing her as she drew, each and every stroke of that pencil a story itself, and she made sceneries of landscapes and buildings turned into stories.

Right now she is standing near the walls, which has been dismantled and built again over the years. They still look the same as old days, but the memories are wiped away.

She is looking at something. I watch as she settles down on the grass and takes out her pencil. I allow myself to move closer and peek behind her back. I smile.

Laying between the stubbles and grass is a single toy bamboo-dragonfly. It is made of dark oak, and the blades gleam in the sunlight. It looks just like my very own toy that has been lost in the war.

The New Tales of Old Shanghai

Marymount Secondary School, Lowe, Kate Ellen – 16

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my worn out folding chair, listening to the radio. “September 15th, 1951.”

There had been small heroin seizures all over the city, and the police were embroiled in the hunt for the kingpin. That second part wasn't on the radio- I had colleagues on the case. I guess compared to them, I wasn't much of a police officer, but it was a tumultuous time in Shanghai, and my only experience was as an overnight traffic light operator afraid of the dark. I was not inclined to seek out a heavier assignment.

The control tower was an unassuming thing in the middle of an intersection, rusting inside and out. It overlooked the Bund, though there was nothing to see in the dark. All you could tell of your location was the sound of waves lapping at the harbour overnight, romantic when I started, but after almost a year's time, relentless. I sat there alone night after night, shuffling between green and red for the sparse traffic. There wasn't much on the line. But there was a girl.

The boredom that swirled like fog in the tower stilled when she walked past. From five metres up and two lanes of traffic away, she was the size of a figurine. She wore a yellow floral cheongsam, and her hair was always immaculate. She would cross the street just before dawn, walk into the sleeping Jewish liquor store, and come back out half an hour later, cross the same street and leave in the same direction as the river. Watching her disappear into the distance felt like waking up from a dream.

I hadn't yet figured out what she did in the store, but I liked to think there was a secret switch in there that turned the silent street on every morning, and it was her job to flip it. When she strolled away, the shop doors would open in her wake, and you could hear the tram engines rumble at the depot nearby.

Schoolchildren knotted their ties, businessmen read their newspapers, and the port began to bustle. When the sun rose on Shanghai and the reds and greens of its streets emerged, everyone knew it was morning.

I had been up all night in a grey capsule. The ghostly glow of the traffic lights made faces appear in the dirty windows. Sometimes, I felt them lunge at me, felt the tower start to fall over, caught a glimpse of my own body on the ground five metres below. I had had no rest. To me, she was the morning.

I didn't know her. All I had ever seen her do was walk and open a door. Yet, for some reason, I mourned our alternate timelines, thought about her sleeping while I was awake, imagined her activities as I fell asleep. Five metres up and two lanes of traffic away, her presence gleamed so bright it felt like company. I imagined opening a window one morning and calling out to her. Perhaps she would stop in the middle of the crosswalk. If there was traffic, I could keep it safely away from her as long as I wanted. She would look up, her hair shining, and her eyes questioning, and I would manage to stutter something sufficient to convince her I wasn't a maniac. And later on we would get something to eat.

The imagining didn't amount to much. Not long after she left that September morning, I finished my shift and met a friend at a bar nearby. They weren't strictly open, but the owner knew it was my dinner time and always had a meal ready for me with their breakfast. We sat facing the street, already abuzz with people.

"How's the heroin bust going?" I asked him. His name was Arjan, and he was one of the rare Sikh policemen who'd survived the disbandment of the Municipal Police two years before. He was tall and imposing, but quick-witted too, and probably not afraid of the dark. An all-around effective officer.

"That's one of the reasons I wanted to talk. We found the stockpile yesterday afternoon, and a man to go along with it."

"Wow! Where was it?"

"This'll interest you. In sight of your post. That Jewish liquor store is a front."

I froze.

"The guy we got looks after the place full time, but someone does come around at dawn to check on the stockpile. He won't give us the kingpin, but we made a deal.", he went on. "He helped us with a sketch of the middleman who does the checks. If he plays along until tomorrow, he walks. We're planning a stakeout tonight- that's why we needed your help."

The street before us slowed down. "What do you need my help with?"

"We'll have men around the store, but they can't be visible. Our eyes will be in your control tower."

"Well," I searched for words. "You'll have a hard time figuring out which of the 20 people who goes in there every morning is the middleman."

"Oh, no, we won't," his eyes glinted. "She's a woman."

-

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my folding chair. Only this morning, there was no radio and my hands were gripped unusually tight around the controls. I didn't know what I had expected- maybe that the sun would never rise, that the universe would conspire with me to give her enough time to figure things out and escape. But just like me, the universe messed up. I thought about the many millions of ways things could have turned out differently. If just one out of hundreds of mornings I had opened a window and called to her, perhaps she would have stopped in the middle of the crosswalk-

"Ease up", Arjan said. "You don't have to do anything differently. Just act like we're not here."

It was hard to ignore the crackle of the walkie-talkies, but I wiped my brow and stared at the street that ran alongside the Bund, waiting for her to appear. I didn't know her, but I had

wanted to. She was the only one who ever kept me company in the mornings. She was the one who turned the street on. Maybe I had created a mythology out of her, but I wasn't going to let it be ruined.

A dot of yellow appeared in the distance.

As it drew closer, my palms grew sweatier, slipping off the traffic light controls. I could see the gleam of her hair, and now the floral pattern of her gown, and now her presence filled up the capsule I sat in, and washed over the police officers crowded behind me. The street was silent. She was serene.

I let go of the controls and flung open a window.

“Hey, you!”

She stopped in the middle of the crosswalk and turned to me, her eyes questioning.

“What the hell are you doing?” Arjan yelled.

“Grab him!” I heard.

I leaned almost out of the window and locked eyes with her.

“Run!”

She blinked, saw the policemen emerging from the shop doorways, and took off in the direction of the river. That was the last thing I saw before someone yanked me back into the room and knocked me out.

-

I woke up in the police station, but they didn't keep me there for long. No one said a word to me for hours, then at 2 p.m., someone growled, “You can keep your job.”

I stumbled onto the street, bleary-eyed. It was well past my bedtime.

-

“She got away, but they're not going to go after her.”

I turned to see Arjan in the doorway.

“What are you doing here so early? My shift doesn't end for an hour.”

“I thought you might need someone to talk to. I don't know why you... did that, but she's off the hook.” It was 6 a.m., five metres above an empty street, but he lowered his voice to a whisper. “There are talks that the government is behind the stockpile. The heroin was due to be smuggled to Osaka. No one wanted a fuss. That's why they let you out just like that, too.”

He sat down next to me, not demanding a response, but added after a second, “She probably won't be showing her face back here.”

Morning dawned like it always did, on me in my worn out folding chair, listening to the radio.

“September 16th, 1951.”

Decades to Wait 'til Sunrise (I've Heard of You)

Shanghai American School, Cheung, Lauren – 16

It started out with whispered prayers, spoken by the elderly who still remembered a time long past. I've heard, some of them said, reverent and wistful, *that they're coming back*. Word spread quickly, like tufts of dandelion seeds dispersing; people spoke into the wind, and in turn the wind told the birds as they began their annual migratory journey back into the city. They flew with zephyr and soul under wing, carrying with them the desire to find their way home and bitten-out wishes they had caught in the wind.

(I've heard, I've heard, I've heard that—)

In the city, telephone wires hummed with energy electric-sharp; streetlamps winked to a rhythm of a song only they heard; trees shivered, leaves tousled.

The susurrus of the wind blew southwards. Whispers became murmurs, disjointed and jumbled, kicking up leaves and dust and sand. The birds watched and listened to snatches of thoughts left unfinished.

(—they're coming back.)

A thrush landed not a meter away from the foot of a drunkard who laid prostrate in an abandoned back-alley. *Haven't you heard?*

I've heard that—if you repeat something enough, it will come like manna from heaven—that they're coming back.

The bird chirruped. The man stirred. Oh, it'd been so long since he's heard the sweet whistle of birdsong.

Come back, the bird sang. Come back.

And he listened.

Listen:

There was a man who, in the middle of a ferocious revolution, could do nothing but stand at the sidelines and watch as buildings fell into smoking ruin, watch as bayonet tips

became spotted and rusted with blood. *Do you know, he asked the wind, how quickly buildings can crumble?*

The wind ruffled his hair in consolation and in reply.

I will make sure, the man vowed, that memories will not erode as quickly.

The people fought for him. His name fell from their lips in a litany of battle songs, swelling into a chorus above the wind as their hearts beat in tandem to rapid machine-gun fire. The man swallowed, tasted ash and copper in the back of his throat as bullets defaced the marble façades of buildings and marred the bodies of young revolutionaries foreign to the throes of battle. *I'm sorry, he doesn't say, because the people never asked for his forgiveness, only for his blessing. He kept vigil under the archways of Shikumen buildings, un ange qui pleur, and he learned:*

There is no dignity in death.

There was a man who used to pick up empty wine bottles and hold the lip of them to his eye like an explorer would to a spyglass, looking towards city horizons distorted and tinged green (*he saw nothing*). An explorer he became, a self-learned connoisseur of wine and liquor, an imitation sommelier of the city rats; the captain of a barque ship sailing endlessly towards the horizon, towards the bottom of a bottle. He jumped from city to city, chasing the sun, his own shadows, the sour taste of liquor on his lips. If alcohol could cleanse wounds, he reasoned, then perhaps it could absolve his body of sin.

Come back.

The man heaved himself up from his place in the gutter, limbs controlled by a clumsy-fingered marionettist, feet tripping over cobblestone. He regarded the bottle in his hand with little more than a sharp exhale and pressed his knuckles to his rheumy eyes. Blinking rapidly to drive away the swarm of spots that danced in and out of his vision, he looked up and saw—huh.

Curious. Just who he'd been looking for.

Under a streetlight stood a dainty figure, a ghost in the dead of the night. The harsh fluorescent light cast a ghastly pallor to her skin; she was a sculpture made from mortician's wax, or perhaps the subject of a blurry high-exposure photograph. Her *qipao* was diaphanous, woven with neon and faded starlight, ethereal in her intangible beauty; at the crown of her head rested the city skyline, a glittering diadem of concrete and glass and steel.

As planets are drawn to the sun's gravitational pull, he found himself inexplicably stumbling towards her, movements sloppy and unbidden.

"Hey! Over here!" He cried out, waving his arm about carelessly.

She whipped her head towards him, drawing up to her full height. A bird tittered nervously overhead.

"Who goes there?" She coughed; her ribs creaked in protest.

Her posture was indistinguishable from that of a proud sovereign, unperturbed and calm even in the dingy and crudely-lit alley behind—he looked up at the street sign—Fu Xing Road. It was under a different name last time he was here.

The man scoffed in mock affront. "What, you don't recognize me?"

"Should I?" She rasped, wrapping her shawl tighter around herself. Her hands had become bloodless in the stinging bite of the wind.

"Maybe. I don't suppose you do. It's been quite awhile since we've last seen each other, after all."

The wind whistled, filling in the silence. *Haven't you heard?* it said, but the woman did not hear.

She exhaled sharply. “No normal person has been able to see me in a long time. How—” she paused, scrambling to find the right words. “How are you doing it?”

The man lifted his bottle and stretched his lips into a grin in lieu of a verbalized answer. “Alcohol is hardly a hallucinogen.”

“No, it isn’t. But I still see a lot of things.” He paused to take a swig from his bottle and swiped his mouth with the back of his hand, barely hiding a grimace. “Bah. You are what you eat. Or drink, I suppose.”

“So, you’re an alcoholic.”

“Sure.”

“What, you drink to forget?” She asked. Her lips twitched downwards, hiding no small amount of disdain. “I hardly find that an honorable... pastime.”

“I don’t suppose you do.” He let his eyes flutter shut. “But no, I drink to remember.” It was difficult, he realized, to look at her directly without being blinded by her presence, highlighted in stark contrast to the shadows surrounding them. Light seemed to bend towards her in a fluorescent halo, energy and radiance amassing behind her head as if she was the subject of a Renaissance painting dappled in chiaroscuro.

“Nothing that drives you to the point of alcoholism, I think, is worth remembering.”

“Names,” he sighed out. “Names and faces and dates of battles.”

“You’re a veteran?”

“Of sorts, I suppose. Though I believe I am a better historian than I am a soldier.”

“There hasn’t been an uprising here in decades,” she said slowly, “and you can’t possibly be older than—”

“I’ve been around for a very long time,” he swiftly cut in.

“I don’t understand.”

“On the contrary, I’m quite sure you do.”

“Tell me,” she said challengingly. “I have all night and more.”

The wind murmured in assent. The man’s lips thinned. “Alright,” he acquiesced. “You know where we are, yes?”

“Somewhere in the French Concession.”

He nodded. “There was a great battle here back in the late thirties—a lifetime ago—and I am here to keep a promise to those whom I’ve lost.

“I was here at that time, on this very street, you know. I watched my comrades fall one by one...” He trailed off momentarily. “Route Lafayette, this road was called. Yes. I remember now. I couldn’t do anything for them.”

“And you were there to see it all happen.” There was a quaver to her voice.

He wet his lips. “I was.”

“You couldn’t do anything to help?”

“I couldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t, or couldn’t?”

“I couldn’t interfere. That’s not my job.”

The woman recoiled, her face contorted into a mask of disbelief. “It’s no wonder you’re a bad soldier. Mutiny,” she hissed. “How could you have abandoned your blood-brothers, stood idle as you watched them fall?”

“Ah,” he continued, paying no heed to her accusation, “think of your brethren. Think of Xi’an, with his hair still dusted with terra-cotta after several millennia. Think of Beijing and the way she threads concrete highways through the temples of old. How do you think they came to be? I just gave them the hint of a suggestion, a push towards the right direction.

“You were there at the battle, too.” He smiled mirthlessly. “So young a city you were, and yet you dealt with the mire of war like no other. You and I both marched with those who came to fight voluntarily. All these revolutionaries came of their own volition.”

She wavered where she stood, uncomprehending. The gossamer sheen of her clothes seemed to dull all at once. “You know I’m a city?” She shook her head. No. Her revealed identity mattered not now, not when she could recall absolutely nothing of what the man spoke so fervently of. “What battle? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“But of course. I know the cities like no other.” He glanced downwards at his knobby hands, worn and weathered with time. “*Think,*” he said, his voice edging on desperation. “Remember the city that rests beneath our feet. Remember the people who fought for us—for you—so dearly.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Her voice was sharp, acerbic.

“The Battle of Shanghai, back in the thirties.” His eyes hardened with sober clarity. “Look around you now. The *Shikumen lou* behind you, once pockmarked with bullet-holes, are now being pulled down by apathetic machines. The people—your people—are forgetting their mother tongue in steady increments.

“There was a woman I once knew, storm born and made of heavenly spitfire, a maelstrom of rage and beauty and vigor. Her hands, once battle-hardened with callouses, have gone soft.” He looked at her pointedly, voice rising like the tide. “What has become of her? Where is she when the people need her? How—”

A car sped past; the man broke off in the middle of his diatribe. The first strains of sunlight filtered through the clouds, muted and watery.

“And to think you didn’t recognize me,” the man finally wrung out. “No—I was wrong. I am the one who doesn’t recognize anything. I dared to hope for the best. I’m sorry for wasting your time.”

He’d hardly finished his sentence before the wind cut through the air in recrimination. *Can’t you hear can’t you hear can’t you hear*, it shrieked. *Come back come back come back—*

The woman gasped as wind tore through her lungs, ripping through decades-old accretions of ash and dust and smoke that had settled in her bronchioles. Sunlight broke through the clouds in the east; understanding dawned in her eyes.

“*Liberty,*” she breathed. Her voice rang clear and true; absently, she noted that his name on her lips tasted of dried plums and *huangjiu*. “It’s you, oh, how could I have not—?”

As she stepped out of the sickly lamplight, the telltale signs of fatigue shadowed her with every step and clung to the lines of her body. Tears welled into her eyes: sweet morning dew.

“I’m so sorry,” she choked out. “I’m so sorry, oh, I remember it all now—how could I ever forget? All that grief, and I carelessly locked it away, oh, Liberty, nobody remembers what happened here—”

Liberty quirked his lips humorlessly and enveloped her in his arms. “Welcome back, Shanghai.”

In the trees, the birds broke into their morning song. *Welcome back. Welcome back.*

A Father's Gift

*St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Albano,
Lauren – 16*

Did you know that in 1559 during the Ming Dynasty, Pan Yunduan built Yu Gardens as a comfort to his father, the minister Pan En? Unfortunately, the expense helped ruin the Pans. Idiots.

My father and I don't have the best relationship, if we're going to be quite frank about it. Honestly, it's not much of a relationship, we keep out of each other's hair usually and we do what mom tells us to do. This way, everybody wins- no expectations, which means no disappointment, meaning no conflict. See? Everybody wins.

There had been a time when it was just my dad and I against the world. We were, I thought in my little four-year-old mind, invincible and no one else mattered- not even my mom or Cora. He'd hoist me up on his shoulders and we would walk through the city and I towered over everyone while he laughed introducing me to everyone who cooed at me as his little man. Some days we would sit at the breakfast table and he'd talk to me "mano a mano" like an adult although I'd have to admit that sometimes I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about. And then I think he decided that being a father meant raking in money for us and he switched his job and I barely got to talk to him.

"Oh for God's sake Oliver!" He pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation, "Can't you see that I'm busy?" my mom ushered me out of the room quickly and told me in a hushed voice. "Your father needs time to adjust to his new work, you can't bother him right now give it time." That was the last time I ever asked to play. I was five.

Cora had made it very clear that when we were young that mom was hers, which I see now was a very smart move on her part because mom usually did all the cooking and her favourite was very clearly Cora. Dad had no favourites, he didn't have time for that.

This changed a couple of years ago when mom got into an accident, now neither Cora or I had a parent who favoured either of us.

"Mr Chan says that he wants to talk to dad about something." I said to Cora one morning over breakfast, she was chewing toast lazily, looking at one of my paintings on the wall. The

kitchen's walls- actually, the whole apartment's walls were filled with my paintings. Grandma said that one day I held a pen with my right hand and just began drawing on the walls and then when I got tired I switched to my left hand because I didn't want to stop.

Cora continued to chew her toast not even bothering to glance my way. She had been gone a few months on a study tour maybe a year after mom died and when she came back there was something about her that had changed. She wasn't my annoying older sister, she took care of me- she did the best she could anyway, she was graduating from high school soon and she wanted to do law, she had to work really hard to get in on a scholarship and even then I know that it's crazy expensive.

I tried to snap her out of her blank stupor "Where's dad?"

"He had to get to work early." She looked at the clock "You better get to school."

I want to be an artist when I grow up. I'm not good in school like Cora. I go to school because it made my mom happy, like I said before I tried my best to not cause as much conflict as possible but I'm wasting my time. I've tried reasoning with her in the past but she says that before I become an artist I need to finish school for my dad. I've never seen him pull me out of bed to go to school as he's never here so really I did it for my mom and that means while I'm in school I still have to deal with double history today.

"So will you tell him to come later?" I asked Cora again, "make sure he doesn't forget."

Cora just waved me away with her hand with an exasperated sigh.

I bounced out of my apartment on my way to school, sometimes in my head I make paintings, right now we're learning about Old Shanghai in History class. Old Shanghai was famous for its city wall to protect the town from Japanese pirates, 10 meters tall with a moat and a lot of guards. In my painting I have the whole wall up, guards galore with me and Cora right outside the walls and right in the middle of the walled city is dad.

I try my best not to complain about dad never being there, especially after mom but I always feel like even before she died he had this wall around him and no-one could ever break down.

"The wall was demolished in 1912 not 1910 and it's the Opium War that happened in 1842 not World War II!" Wren slapped shoved Peter out of the way. "I gave you all of the information, how hard is it to copy it down?"

I stayed after school to help with our project on Old Shanghai, Wren had been constantly nagging at us to get it done for weeks.

I didn't have to do anything but design the poster but Peter had an old trick that he used every time to get out of doing any work and that was playing dumb. I caught his eye behind Wren's shoulder as he said, "I got some of the stuff you wrote down wet so I just made some stuff up." It was clear Wren thought him a moron as she roughly grabbed the poster and began writing it herself while Peter's eyes filled with mirth.

By 6:00 pm I made my way towards Mr. Chan's classroom where he told me the meeting with my father would be held but as I walked in I immediately noticed that my dad was not present.

In his seat was instead Cora.

"Where is he?" I questioned her wordlessly with my eyebrows.

"Work." She mouthed. I could tell she knew that I was not happy, she nodded at me to sit down next to her while I realized I was still at the door way.

I hadn't heard a word of what Mr. Chan said, by the way Cora was gushing I think I did something good, I don't know. I just wished it was dad who was saying it instead.

“I’m sorry dad couldn’t make it.” Cora said again once the meeting was over, “I know you’re really bummed out over it.”

“No,” I was still looking at the ground as I said this. “No of course I’m not bummed out.”

I remembered when I was young, every time I wanted to do something with my dad and he’d say he was too busy my mom would never implore him to change his mind, she never pulled that whole “bond with your son” thing, it had always been “give your dad some space” I had learned never to complain, especially because mom always said that he’s doing it for us. Whatever that means.

I’m in my room drawing the Small Swords Society, the rebel group that captured Old Shanghai City in 1853. In this drawing Cora and I have joined the Small Swords Society and we’ve broken into the city and I’ve taken dad hostage.

I’m having dinner in my room again, the smell of microwaved popcorn fills the room. Usually I never wait up for dad because he gets home really late so we eat separately in our own place. I hear the door open around 11 and I know dad is home.

Cora’s always awake to greet dad when he gets home, I stopped doing that after he took up an extra project at work and tonight I was still a little resentful that he couldn’t turn up at the meeting.

I’m drawing a jail cell to throw dad into when there’s a knock at my door.

“Olly, we should talk to dad about the meeting.”

I don’t want Cora to think I’m mad at dad because I told her I wasn’t but I really don’t want to talk to him. “I’m tired,” I pout. “I want to go to sleep, you can talk to him.”

Later I’m sitting at the table with a scowl on my face. I don’t know how Cora manages to do it but she always seems to be able to make me do things that I don’t want to do.

“Mr Chan says that Olly won the sixth grade Avant-garde competition- he says that he thinks that Olly has real potential and that he could get into art school.”

I whip my head so fast my neck cracks. Art school? That’s all I’ve wanted to do but mom used to say that we would never be able to afford it. I turn to face my dad but see that his mind seemed to be wandering.

“Art school?” he said slowly. “What about you?” He looked at Cora, “Didn’t we just pay for you to get into law school?”

Cora’s animated face stopped and her mouth was agape.

“I’ve been paying for Oliver to go to art classes as a hobby, but being an artist won’t get him anywhere. You know that.” My dad continued, “He’s going to be a doctor or an engineer, something professional.”

Woah what? Where did this come from? I always thought my dad had no expectations for me, I thought he thought that it was pretty clear I was going to be an artist when I grew up.

I was about to retaliate when Cora kicked me under the table.

Later I was lying in bed thinking about how the conversation had turned, I couldn’t sleep I was drawing another drawing about the walled city, dad had gotten out and I was betrayed by the Small Sword Society, I was the one in jail now and Cora was nowhere to be seen.

I began avoiding my dad from then on. This continued for a few weeks and I slowly began to realize how little I saw of my dad. I began to resent him for his absence but it was the final straw when one day I saw Cora crying. This was a shock, Cora never cried about anything ever.

“Cora?”

She had her head bent over the table, you could hear her sniffles every few seconds.

I began shaking her arms to make her look at me. I flinched when I saw her bloodshot eyes and running nose.

She looked at me and smiled sadly, there in her hand was a letter.

“I didn’t get it.” A tear ran down her face. I was scared, I didn’t know what it was that she didn’t get but I didn’t want to ask her.

She answered it anyway, “I didn’t get into law school.”

I didn’t have anything to say to her, I never wanted her to go to law school, then she would have to leave me but I knew this was a selfish thought. I let her speak.

“Dad’s going to be so disappointed.”

“Who cares what dad thinks.” I said.

She looked at me with her swollen eyes, “you shouldn’t say that, he’s done a lot of things for us. He only wants what’s best for us.” She sniffed.

After a while she went to bed. At 11:00 pm I heard dad come through the door, I was still sitting at the table drawing the pirates who had whisked Cora away from the walled city.

I saw him standing by the door way with a blank stare, he hadn’t even taken off his shoes and put down his briefcase. He was exhausted, he was gazing at the painting I had done for an art competition last year and he smiled. I had never heard my dad praise my work, he had never even mentioned it and sometimes I wondered whether he even knew that I liked art.

“Oliver?” he called to me, “Why are you still up?”

“I-uh-“ I cleared my throat, “do you want a glass of water?”

He just shook his head and turned back to my painting, “You know, when I was your age I never would have been able to paint something like this.”

I stared at him with confusion, “Can you paint something like that now?”

He took his glasses off and placed them on the table next to me and took a seat, “Don’t you remember when you used to sit on my lap while I painted when you were a toddler?”

My mind drew a blank. “You do art?”

“I gave up art.” He said, his voice sounded airy like he was lost in thought. “When I switched jobs, I hated it honestly the first few months I was up to my eyeballs in paper work and the only thing that made me stick to it was you and Cora.” He paused, “Cora called me and told me what happened. I don’t want either of you thinking that you disappoint me. Ever. I want you guys to be happy.”

In my head I was painting something else, I was painting Pan Yunduan and Pan En in their garden together. I thought it was dumb how someone could love their father that much but maybe Pan En had sacrificed just as much as my father had.

I went back to bed that night deep in thought, I had never asked what my dad was before he switched jobs and I had never realised how much he had sacrificed to be able to pay for us to live where we were and to be able to pay for all my art lessons and Cora’s education. I knew that my dad was preparing me for the day when I had to face it all on my own. I looked at my computer, the tab of Pan Yunduan still opened. I got up and started another canvas and started a new painting of my father and I.

From Shanghai to Hong Kong

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Chun, Jasper – 15

It was dark, cold and windy when she finally arrived back home. Her clothes, ruffled and increased now lay upon her simple wooden table, the sweet scent still coming out of the wood after 12 years. She set about preparing dinner for herself and her father, when the door suddenly opened and shut quickly, and there stood a man in a soaked through shirt and pants, as if he came directly off a boat. She rushed towards him, shouting “Father! You’re home!” and grasped him tight, but the man, once a very happy man, just grunted and walked in, and sat on the lacquered wooden chair.

The man was called Victor, and his daughter was the one thing he cared for, more so than his work, that he slaved off many hours arguing with his sponsors just to get a new position in the company, the East India Trading Company, the largest trading company between the seas separating the two continents. He had been forced to take up a position in Shanghai, for one, because he wanted a new life away from the cold, dreary weather commonly associated with Britain, and two, to let his daughter explore more places, just like how she wished, long ago, together with her mother. His daughter has since gotten over it, but she still had the lost look in her eyes as she saw her mother get washed off the deck, back when she was 4, a young toddler.

It was a hard decision, but it was either to leave their friends and family behind, but keep working in the company in which he had helped build, or to leave the company and find a new opportunity. He was sorry that her daughter had to say goodbye to her long time childhood friend, who has stood by her for many an accident. The child had promised to marry her when she came back, and she would wait for him, but Victor knew that would never happen.

Victor and Maria were now situated in a fairly wealthy position, due to his position as one of the few operators in Shanghai overlooking the transportation of goods sold by the company, He would have been content with the job, if not for the terrible conditions the

ports were kept and built, and the working hours that came with the title. Every morning, he would wake up at 5 in the morning, and come back at 9 at night, so he was forced to lose a lot of time with her daughter, which, as she grew up, made much more friends of the Chinese variety than of her own kind. But of course, she also made many enemies, due to her blood not being Chinese. Because of this, she got beaten by many older kids, each throwing rocks at her. She often came back slightly bruised.

“Father, dinner’s ready, are you eating tonight?” said Maria, breaking into his train of thought.

“Hm... Oh yes, don’t mind my earlier temper, work was just terrible today,” he replied.

“Are they asking you about the sales of the powder again? Because my friends say that their parents have bought a lot of pouches! Some of them even snuck some from behind their parents’ back and sniffed some themselves, they also offer-” “NO!” he immediately roared out, “You cannot take any of the powder, you hear?” he then said, calming down, seeing his daughter cringe in shock and pain.

“Y...yes, Father...” she replied in a quiet voice, slowly sitting down to her dinner.

Their dinner was quiet all throughout, and when she said nothing even after her washing up, he felt like he had crossed the line. He walked up to her room and sat next to her bed, where she laid down.

“Maria, honey, I’m sorry for yelling at you, it’s just that there were some reports that I had received from the company saying that people who took the powder in large quantities eventually lost themselves...I don’t want to lose you, so this was just for your own good...” he mumbled out to her, hoping she would forgive him, “I’ll buy you that bag of sweet candy you always want, if you forgive me?”

She turned around, tears in her eyes and a smile on her face, “Fine, but I want the ones with lots of syrup!” she said, quickly sitting up and giving him a hug.

He then stood up, said goodnight and walked outside, back into his office to clear the mess he had received back from Headquarters.

In the letter given to him by urgent call from the crew abroad one of the company’s many trading ships, it stated the possibility of a Chinese Government intervention, as they were getting suspicious of their silver count, and that the sale of opium may soon be sold under secrecy. His task was to get as much merchants and customers under their wing and keep them to a secrecy binding, so they don’t go off selling their providers off. He sat, bent down in his chair over the table, and tried to think on how to best distribute the powder without arising suspicion, when an idea struck him, “What if...” he mused to himself, as he slowly sat back, yawning. Tomorrow would be a very interesting day.

The next morning, he woke up early to go down to the shop and bought the candy for his daughter. When he came back, she was in the kitchen making traditional Chinese breakfast for herself.

“Hello, I didn’t know today you didn’t have to go to work... I was planning to go out with my Chinese friends, we were planning to go watch the Chinese opera. I promise it won’t be very long, I’ll come back as soon as it finishes!” Maria blurted out.

“No need to worry, dear. Just be careful, and if you see those mean Chinese kids, run the other way,” he said, “In fact, could you talk with your friends today and see if they can get their parents over. I’d like to hold a special party. After all, It’s nearly your birthday, and I’d like to see what suggestions they have on hosting a party. I know you’re 16 now, but every year, just us two and a small cake seems boring,” setting down the box containing the still-warm candy.

“Sure. I suppose, but why something like this all of a sudden?” she said, slowly sitting down and eating her bowl of congee.

“Oh nothing, don’t worry too much about it,” he mumbled, half to himself.

That night, a couple families met up together to have a discussion and the teens were left to themselves. The adults quietly extracted themselves from the room at the request of their host, and made their way to a sideroom.

“Tonight, I have asked my daughter to ask you all to come under the false pretense of having a meal together to plan for a future banquet. The real reason for this meetup is to discuss a small problem I’m facing. I believe we all here can benefit from this arrangement. I work for the East India Trading Company, and it has come to their attention that our highest source of income may soon be threatened.

Of course, I’m talking about opium, the drug you all here have purchased some time in the past. No doubt you all have tried it and are now hooked, according to your children’s report to my daughter.” He then took a breath and continued on, “I believe it would be in the best interest if we can sell this off the books, if you would like to help be a supplier of this, you may stay. Else, please leave, and forget everything spoken here tonight.”

He gave a small break, waiting for any potential loose lipped persons to reveal themselves now. Seeing that none leave and now having caught their attention, he went on and described how he planned to make this all work.

By the end of the meal, all the kids were chatting among themselves, and waiting for their parents to bring them home. The parents themselves now had practically become loyal workers to Victor, hanging on to his very admittedly broken Chinese words like it was pure gold. They all left, knowing that they would one day become rich.

The next day, Victor was walking back to the shipyard to oversee the arrival of a new shipment of goods from India, containing herbs and spices of an assortment, fabrics made of silk, and many other jade ornaments, when a coolie stopped him in his tracks, grabbing his shoulder, panting for air, and collapsing beneath his feet.

“Coolie, what do you think you’re doing? It’s not yet break time, tell me, who is your commander, I must report of this atrocious incident immediately,” Victor roared, picking up the scrawny man by the collar.

“Please...Sir...the captain...he...he is requesting a meeting with you... I don’t know why... please forgive my slacking off of my duties...” the coolie replied in a quiet whimpering voice.

“Fine. Be off with you, and tell your captain I will meet him on his ship shortly,” he replied, turning around and walking off quickly.

After finishing his rounds, making sure no loiterers were around to try to steal the cargo and checking to see if any of the shipments were externally damaged, he looked around the port where the previous incident occurred, and found the boat of which the coolie came from. He just walked up the gangboard when the captain, a rather slim but able-looking man, in an oversized suit, walked up to him, and shook him by the hand firmly.

“Mr Victor, I presume?” said the captain, in a strangely high pitched voice. “Yes, that would be me, how may I be of assistance?” he replied with a prompt response. “Well, you could start by coming below deck, to the meeting room, we have a special someone who wishes to speak with you urgently.” “In that case, let us be off,” Victor said, with a slight confusion surrounding him.

“This way, Mr Victor,” the captain said, as he suddenly stopped and turned around. “How terribly rude of me, my name is Walters, Captain Walters, but you may call me Walt,” Walters said.

“Of course, Captain Walters,” Victor replied, his mind still thinking, deep in thought.

“Here we are. You will be going in yourself, I have been instructed to stand guard outside,” he said, saluting and holding open the door.

“Thank you,” he replied, hastily walking in, to prevent the man inside from waiting much longer.

Inside, it was nothing like the world outside, all classic wood and brick. Here, it was lavishly decorated, from the red carpet to the plush seats to the crystals hanging down from the ceiling, reflecting what light there was from around, making the room that much brighter. In the middle of the room was a table, and on the table was food, piled on top of each other. The man sitting behind the table looked up. He saw Victor, and promptly invited him to sit down.

“Hello, Victor, nice to see you again,” said the man.

“And to you too, I suppose,” he replied. “Why are you here then? Don’t tell me you are the one who summoned me, unless you’re the last surviving person from headquarters to tell me of the downfall of our company.”

“Why, I’m deeply pained, brother dear, to have you view me as such a monster. If you recall correctly, I did try to keep you in England, but no, you had to argue with our sponsors,” the man replied quickly, as he now stood up, moving away from the shadows, where the crystals failed to illuminate.

The man had a rough chin, as if it had not been shaved for a few months. Typical, Victor thought. He is still worried about his face. Just as when he was a child then. “Don’t call me brother. You got me sent here, I could have stayed in England, I could have just quit the company and took my money. But no. You had to come in and suggest that I be the manager of this port. I even had to lie to my wife and daughter on why we moved here! The whole town was talking about how one of the top members of the East India Trading Company was demoted to doing such work, not to mention that during the passage, my wife...my wife fell overboard and--”

“Either ways,” his brother said, cutting his speech and pushing him back towards his seat, “I’ve come here not to discuss such squabbles. You would be compensated by the company for your loss, but not as of this moment. Today, I have asked you here to see what you have done about the message that should have arrived the day before.”

“Fine,” Victor grunted, sitting back down, previously unaware that he had stood up and was practically yelling and spitting in his brother’s face. “I have asked a couple of local merchants about how we will exclusively sell the product to them. They have accepted the roles they will play in this scheme, and with the company backing us from both the underworld and actively going against the Chinese Government rule, we may soon succeed on monopolizing on this trade.”

“Good job, brother mine. You know, the sponsors have reconsidered, and they said, based on how well you do here, you could come back and take back your previous position...” his brother started.

“Well then. Tell them we may only have a couple months to know how well this scheme will end,” Victor said, standing up. He turned around, knocked on the door, and was escorted out by Captain Walters.

“Say, Captain Walters... I do not mean to offend you but... are you by any chance a female?” Victor asked, in an inquiring tone.

Gasp “How... did you know? No one on this ship knows... Please sir--” she suddenly fell to the ground, losing her composure “- don’t tell anyone about this, they must not know,

I must keep this job, sir!” she said, looking up with teary eyes.

“Don’t worry about it, your secret’s safe with me, but you must come and find me to explain yourself before this ship sets sail on its way back to England,” Victor said, crouching down and picking her up. She stood, wiped her eyes and said, “That’s fine. As long as you keep that secret, I’ll oblige to your request.” She smiled, and straightened her back. Then she continued to guide him back to the port.

The week went by, with him slowly receiving more information on when and how to distribute the opium, slowly gaining more power in the underworld as the only conduit to obtain the powder. Soon, the triads caught up with him and he was sent to have a meeting with the leaders of the triads.

He managed to negotiate with them, so that he would keep supplying them with more opium for them to sell, and in return he was to be one of the main leaders in the Shanghai triads. The triad leaders feared him and the power of the company behind him, and let him have complete control. His daughter also got the same protection he was afforded by the triads. Now the mean kids started running away at the mere glance of the men standing behind her, acting like kind passersby.

But this was not all smooth sailings. Over the next few months the government had started to sense a potential issue, and they had started disputing with the company and England over the trading rights. This had slowly grew, from being minor headlines in the newspaper with whispers stating that it was all just a lie, to military officials starting to arrive, and locking the place down in preparation of war.

The officials had immediately rounded up all workers of the East India Trading Company that they could find, but they never caught the supplier of opium. The triad had scattered, with most of them hiding in nearby cities, and the ones who didn’t manage to run away before the military arrived were sent to the guillotine along with the East India Trading Company workers.

But, Victor and Maria both escaped just in time. There was an executive order straight from India to evacuate as many high ranking officials working there as possible. This included them both, as two days before, Victor’s brother had arrived in another ship, this time with a signed letter, vetoing the decision they made all those years ago, and gave him a pardon, along with a compensation fee for the death of his wife during a work related incident.

Victor and Maria both returned to England, where they watched the war between the Chinese and English unfold from their telegrams on-board the very same ship in which Captain Walters commandeered. The captain invited Maria to come along for a tour of the ship. While this happened, Victor sat in his room, looking back at Shanghai: a tiny speck in the distant horizon.

A few years after the war had ended, Maria, now newly wedded with her long time friend in England, came back to China, in a new city which England annexed as part of the peace treaty. This land was called Hong Kong, and it was, in it’s own way, just as beautiful as it was like in Shanghai. Victor also came along, in the poor health that he now had from working in England, helping with the ship constructions. As Victor walked down, Walters by his side, as she promptly retired as soon as she docked back at England, and married to Victor to fill in the void left by his deceased wife, he took in a deep breath, and smiled.

A Forbidden Romance

St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School (Secondary Section), Ho, Kyra – 15

Elliot Thompson. It's been almost 8 months since I've last seen him. I was starting to think he wasn't coming back, but the long awaited day is finally here. Today is the day he said he is to return. I waited 6 long months for his promised letter to be mailed to me. I was starting to lose faith in it ever making it here. I often wondered if he had forgotten about his word to me, or if he had simply forgotten about me. But there in his letter in his very own writing, it read he would be arriving here in Shanghai on the 20th of August, 1838. And after months and months of waiting, here he comes, exiting the ship along with his colleagues. I limp up to him as he steps foot on the harbor. He chuckles at my struggle to run around in my lotus shoes. He would always call them silly and say they looked like shoes that belonged to elves. Whatever those were.

"I've missed you Liang Qiujiu," Elliot says just as I come up to him.

"I've missed you." I reply. He leans in for a hug but I take a step back. "Not here." I shyly break a smile and look into his blue grey eyes that I adore. He smiles back in acknowledgment. Elliot and his three friends all follow me into town from a distance. He and his friends bought a big house near the port the last time they were here, as they were told they would be starting to come more and more often in the months to come. This part of town isn't necessarily the friendliest, or the safest. And although I told him not to buy the house here many times, he did anyway. He told me they liked this location because it was near the coast, but I knew he was lying.

I try my best to go through alleys instead of open streets, and take some long routes instead of shortcuts just in case any of my Baba's officers are patrolling those areas. Once we're at the street their house is on, I duck my head so my Nainai's friends working in the food stalls won't see me. Elliot and his friends followed about 10 steps behind me. I open the door with the key he gifted me the last time he was here and enter their house. They follow several seconds after and begin to settle in. The house looks a lot less homely than I remember. There used to be a nicely carved wooden table in the middle of their dining room, it's now replaced with a cheap wooden table struggling to stand on its own. The walls used to hold bright

white wallpaper and now it's ripped down in random places and there's even a slight dent in the wall. I can still see the little red spots on the floor that I tried to clean up. At least the beautiful hand crafted sofa is still intact.

"What are you thinking about?" Elliot startles me with his hands on my shoulders and his head rested on top of mine, interrupting my thoughts.

"Nothing. You're going to mess up my hair." I laugh and break away from his grip. My Nainai just fixed it into a sleek bun. She is going to question why my hair would've gotten messy. I turn around and these boys are already starting to heat up the opium on the carpet in front of their sofa.

"Will you be joining us Liang?" Harry asked, one of Elliot's friends. His wound I sewed up for him on his right arm is starting to look better; it's healing well.

"Yes I will." I straighten out my dress as I sit on the floor, joining Elliot. Scott is rolling the opium while Eli heats and softens them for him, the other two friends of Elliot's. Harry's lying down, holding their pipe as Elliot helps heat the opium for him. Soon there's enough for everyone and the pipe gets passed around. We're all lying down on the carpet and helping one another heat the bowl. Inhale. Exhale. The opium hisses and fizzes; until we've all had a chance. There's five of us in the room but I feel as if I'm alone, relaxed and warm, lost in my own thoughts.

THUD. I'm awakened by a loud noise. "Sshhh." I hear someone shush. I flicker my eyes open and see a mess across the floor near the table. I turn my head and see the dark night through the windows. Oh no. "What time is it?" I panic and quickly stand up.

"It's half past 6 in the evening," Elliot says as he approaches me from fixing up the mess on the floor. My eyes widen and I make myself to the door while tidying dress. Why didn't anyone wake me? My Nainai must be worried sick and Baba will be home any minute.

"What's wrong? Can I take you home?" Elliot questioned. He's always wanted to know where I lived, and he's always wanted to meet my family. But I never allow him to. My family would never allow me to see this man. And for Elliot's sake, he should never meet my Baba. Who knows what might happen to him? He might even receive the death penalty.

"I must go." I quickly say and open the door

"Okay. Come back tomorrow." He instructs. I nod, smile and rush out.

I make my way home with the limited amount of light being illuminated through the houses. At least no one will catch me at this time of night. Luckily I know these streets inside out and hurry home as fast as I can. When I reach the front door of the house, I notice the lights are off. I quietly unlock the door and attempt to sneak in, when I'm presented with my Nainai sleeping on the sofa and no sign of Baba. I sigh in relief and walk over to my room to change into my night gown. I prepare dinner and wake up my Nainai to eat. She bombards me with questions at the dinner table about my whereabouts today. The night gets darker and Baba still hasn't returned home. I'm starting to worry. He's never late. The clock strikes eight and I make my way to bed. I can't sleep with the amount of rest I had this afternoon so I lie here with my eyes closed, and I can't help break into a huge smile thinking about the wonderful day I spent with Elliot Thompson. I wish I could take him home and introduce him to my Baba and Nainai, but they would never accept us. I wish I could tell him about my family, about my Mama. I want to tell him everything.

The bright morning sunlight shining through my curtains awakens me. Elliot; I think and smile to myself. I get up and bounce to my dresser and put on one of my favorite dresses, one that belonged to Mama. I go to the living room and notice something off. Where's Baba? I ask my Nainai and she says he never returned home. That's unlike him. Maybe he worked

overtime and fell asleep at the precinct. I sit at the dining table and eat the delicious congee my Nainai prepared while she combs my hair into a ponytail. She questions why I'm wearing my Mama's dress if I'm only going to be taking a trip to the market today. I respond to her by saying I missed my Mama dearly. After breakfast, I slip on my shoes and head out the door. I happily walk through town and go to Elliot's house. I reach their place awfully early in the morning; I bet they're still asleep. As I'm about to unlock their door, I notice it's slightly open. I push the knob and feel something sticky on my hands. And as I step into their house, I'm shocked at what's in front of me.

Blood smeared all over the wooden floor. Bloody handprints on the wall. The table knocked down. A rifle on the ground. And three English men all beat up in the living room. Eli and Scott are sitting on stools. They have bruises all over their body and several scratches on their arms and chests. And Harry looks the worst; he's lying down in agony on the sofa. He has a black eye, blood running down his face, a huge scratch on his other arm and a lot of smaller cuts all over him. But where's Elliot? I run over to Harry and question him. He says he's fine and to just go check on Elliot.

"Where is he?" I ask.

"He's outside, back of the house." His voice languishes in pain. I immediately stand up and run to the back door. "He's fixing himself up," I hear him faintly from a distance. I push open the back door and see Elliot on the ground, washing his wounds.

"Not again." I say to myself. He sees me and his eyes soften. He looks worse than Harry. He looks exactly as I found him the first time. "Come inside," I instruct. He obliges and follows me back into the house and into his room. "What happened?" I ask him as I sit him down on the bed. He closes his eyes, nods and sighs in shame. "You promised." I pout.

"I know." He says softly while I examine his body. He has a huge scratch along his cheek, so very close to his eyes full of shame. Deeper scratches on his chest than his friends, a more severe head injury seeping down his neck from behind his ear, and a cut resulting in a gory mess on his back I spotted when he sat down.

"Stay here." I have to go back home and grab my supplies. These boys have nothing in this house that could do any good to them. "Don't move until I return. I'm going to get my things." I tell him. His eyes follow my movements until I reach his door.

"I'm sorry." He says just before I leave.

I run back home through town, passing the river and up the hill. I double check my attire before entering so that Nainai won't suspect anything. "Where are the ingredients?" She asks me. I forgot. "I left my wallet at home." I lie and quickly walk over to my room to fetch 'it'. I grab Mama's box of supplies I keep in my drawer and leave in a hurry before Nainai can catch me. I rush back to Elliot's and find him patiently waiting for my return. I go to the back of the house and fill up a bucket of water then enter his room and sit next to him on his bed. "Turn around." I say. I need to treat the stab on his back first, it looks the worst. I clean up his wounds with an old rag and begin to sew him up. He moans and groans in misery and pain. "You want to tell me what happened?" I ask to distract him. He sighs.

"We just got into a fight." He admits and continues by saying, "They beat us up. There were more of them, and they were older. They had swords and knives and daggers."

"You had a gun." I say. I continue to fix him up, then his friends. Hours pass, it's now 3 in the afternoon and I just finished helping Eli. I have no time to stay and chat, I still have to go to the market. The boys thank me and Elliot kisses me goodbye, inviting me to come by again tomorrow, after promising he would never do this again. I make my way out, go to the market, buy the ingredients for Nainai and hurry home. Tonight at the dinner table is no

different than yesterday. Endless questions about my whereabouts and still no sign of Baba. This is really unlike him. I want to go out and search for him but I'm absolutely drained from the events of today and doze off right after dinner.

I'm awoken by the shining sun again. Anxious to see Elliot. I ready myself in minutes and walk into the living room to find two of my Baba's officers with Nainai. The three of them turn their heads as I enter. Worry starts to fill my heart. My Nainai's in tears. Baba's officers are gloomy. Oh no. After a while of staring, "Your Baba was found in the Yangtze River." one of them says. He continues to explain the situation but I can't hear him over my thoughts. I'm in utter shock. I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to feel. How did this happen? I keep asking myself. Baba was a good man; he was respected by the whole town. Who could do that to him? I leave Nainai and the two men in the middle of their conversation. I can't stand to hear any more about this. Moments later, I find myself back at Elliot's house. I knock on their door and Elliot answers. His face drops.

"What's wrong Liang?" he asks. I walk inside and he sits me down on the sofa. "What happened?" He asks again and wipes a tear from my cheek I didn't realize was there.

"My father," I stutter. "He was found in the river." I cry with my hands over my face, covering my tears. Elliot puts his hand on my shoulder to comfort me. He rubs my back as I cry my eyes out then offers me his handkerchief from his pocket.

"How did you find out?" He asks and I look up at him. He's flushed.

"Police officers found him. They came by my house this morning." I sniff, struggling to breathe.

"Where? Do they know who did it?" His voice shakes.

"I couldn't bear to hear it. I don't know who would do that to him. He was a good man." I cry some more. He leaves me alone on the sofa after I've calmed down and goes over to his friends in the dining room. I hear them faintly but I can't manage to make up their conversation.

"Hey." I hear Elliot's voice waking me up. I didn't realize I fell asleep. My cries must've tired myself out. He sits down and joins me on the sofa as I sit up. "Liang, I have to tell you something," he admits and I look into his eyes, awaiting his news. He takes a deep breath and says, "Me and the guys - we must return to Britain tomorrow morning." What? They just got here.

"Why?" I ask in shock.

"We were instructed to." He answers.

"By whom?" My voice rises. He can't leave. I just lost my Baba, I can't lose him too.

"I'm sorry." He replies and puts his hand on my shoulder, leaving my question unanswered. I take a few deep breaths to swallow all that's happened today. First, my Baba. Now, him? What did I do to deserve this pain? "Liang, I think you should go now." Elliot says. Is he kicking me out? "It's getting late." I look out the window and see the sun setting. He's right. My Nainai must be so worried and heartbroken about the news. She's home alone, I must return.

"Okay." I say to Elliot.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Liang. And I'm sorry for leaving." He says to me at the door. "I wish it didn't have to be like this." He caresses my face. "I wish it could've been like the last time." He says. I wish that too. I wish we could've snuck out to the river again, and I wish we could've gone on spontaneous walks down the street in the dead of night. He walks me out the door, we say our last goodbyes and I walk back home in sorrow.

I find my Nainai still with two of Baba's officers. "Where were you?" Nainai asks.

“I took a stroll around the village. I needed some air, I needed to be alone.” I lie to her face again. I assume the officers were comforting her all day since she would’ve been alone. I prepare dinner for all four of us and we dine in silence. After dinner, I sit down with them and the officers explain again what had happened. They said that my Baba was murdered in the middle of the night yesterday and dumped into the Yangtze River early morning. They found multiple gunshot wounds saying that was his probable cause of death. Five other officers were with him at the scene, but too unstable to say what had happened that night. Why would anyone want to kill him? What has he ever done wrong? I wonder. Before leaving, the officers say they would tell us more if they hear anything. After their departure, we both make our way to bed in silence.

Something doesn’t feel right. Who would do such a thing is what I keep wondering to myself. My Baba was a good, well-respected man around town. He knew everyone and everyone knew him. If he ever got someone in trouble, he was only doing his job and doing well for society. And to dump his body in the river is so cruel. What kind of person would commit such crime? I have so many unanswered questions. I fall asleep before they take over my mind.

Elliot. I think to myself again the moment I wake up, just like every other morning. I lie in bed longer today as he is leaving this morning. Thoughts of my Baba’s death and Elliot’s sudden departure flood my mind. Elliot, I think. He was beat up the other day. And so were his friends. He said they had knives, and... he said, he said they were older. And that, um... They had daggers and swords too. What else did he say? Wait, what did the police say? They mentioned... Guns! The rifle I saw lying on the ground!

Did Elliot kill my father?



Fiction

Group 5

The Collection

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Tse, Rie – 16

Shutting the door after some words with the man behind it, I lugged the groceries he delivered to the kitchen. Mankind has surely reached the pinnacle of technology with online ordering and delivery, I thought to myself as I put away the groceries. Making sure the pantry and fridge were well organized enough, I shut myself back into my study once again, where I now spend most of my days.

The study itself is a work of wonder by itself, if I must admit. My collection of figures, maps and scrolls, all accounting for varying periods of history line the walls and shelves, being my very own miniature museum right in the comfort of my home. As I viewed my own hoard with astonishment, my gaze fell upon one of my most treasured possessions. Captured by its beauty per usual, I found myself picking it up and admiring it as I've done countless times, feeling hypnotized by its craftsmanship. A small-scale figure of a terracotta warrior, its artisanship could compare to that of its brethren in the actual chamber. I could barely believe I found this treasure in a humble street stall, buying it without a thought as it stood out amongst the rest of the junk there. Each time I look at it, I realized, I discover another bit of detail put into the figure, finding myself more and more bewildered at the creator and his unprecedented handiwork, from the wrinkles of its face down to the creases on his hand. With such attention to detail on such a small sculpture, I couldn't help but be captivated by its allure.

With the figure still in hand, I turned towards my current undergoing project, which may challenge the warrior for the title of my proudest possession. Taking up most of the floor, a small-scale model of the city of Old Shanghai lies before me. I couldn't help but crack a smile at my work; modelled clay buildings, markings where the rivers would be, and of course the clay walls surrounding the city, making for a near perfect replica of the city's old layout. It was quite comforting to know all those months of work were absolutely worth the effort. Staring at the model for a while, I mindlessly crouched and put the terracotta warrior at the wall, right outside the city. Realizing what I'd done, I chuckled to myself. The figure seemed like a giant next to the city, perhaps the fearsome titan warrior has come to terrorize the citizens of Old Shanghai, I amused myself. Historically inaccurate, but amusing nonetheless.

I decided I should finish my project as soon as possible considering it's close to completion, albeit it needing some polishing up and final touches. Tiptoeing around the city to make sure nothing gets knocked over, I pulled up the chair at my desk and sat down to finish up the sculpture of the front gate of the city. Just as I picked up my modelling spatula to resume my work, an impatient pounding at my front door caught me by surprise, causing me to nearly drop my tools onto the unfinished gate. Scowling at the possibility of the details I worked hard on being smudged, I turned my glare towards the sound, checking off in my mind a list of potential unwanted guests. It couldn't be the mailman, he'd leave letters at my mailbox and be off on his way, and I just had my groceries delivered. I settled for ignoring the person in hopes that they'd go away after they came to the conclusion no one was home, although the incessant knocking and doorbell ringing was incredibly frustrating. What sensible person would even make such a ruckus?

A short while later, the obnoxious noise from the surprise visitor stopped all at once, and I breathed a sigh of relief. That is, until I heard the click of the front door unlocking and a familiar voice.

He shouldn't be back. He can't be back. Even after all that mess? I was too in shock to hear what the voice said, but the echoing of footsteps was enough words. Eyes widened, I scrambled off my chair and picked it up, hoping to jam the door with it, but maneuvering around a tiny city while carrying a chair was seriously hindering my efficiency, and I tried my best to be hasty yet careful as I heard the footsteps slowly approach my study.

"You know, you really shouldn't leave your key under the mat like they do in cartoons," I called out to the empty living room before me. I briefly inspected my surroundings, although I wouldn't be surprised if everywhere but his study has been covered in layers of dust by now. I glanced towards the trashcan, seeing how overfilled it was. The rubbish stacked so high in such peculiar ways that a Jenga tower would be jealous of it. I sighed, thinking about how I'm the one who has to bundle it up and throw it out for him. I should get this over with, I thought. Ignoring how much of a wreck the rest of the apartment was, I went straight towards his study.

I stood in front of the study door, the thing he uses to lock himself from the rest of the world. I try the handle and, to my surprise, the door swings right open, accompanied with nervous footsteps and small shrieks. The sight that greets me was odd, to say the least. There he was, standing behind the door cradling a chair in his arms. I suppose he was trying to bar the door, but couldn't he just use the lock? Or was he too panicked to even realize?

You'd think his study would be in tip-top condition considering how much he cared for his collection, but everything was a cluttered mess. Scraps of paper and maps seemed to be tossed around, and figures and sculptures were placed randomly, some right at the edge of shelves that were in danger of falling off. What truly surprised me was a mini ancient-styled city on the floor, complete with walls and proud gates barricading it. He wasn't an expert at sculpting, but he managed to make the walls and buildings quite detailed, which most likely took up way too much of his time. Not that he had anything else to do, anyways.

"Well, it's been a while," I commented, still taking in the view of the study. He muttered gibberish as he slowly tiptoed around the city to put back his chair, which was pretty obvious he was trying to stall the inevitable conversation as much as he could. I sighed as I waited for him to put it back, and he made his way over the other end of the room after, with the jaded

expression printed on his face every time I tried to talk to him.

“I know it’s hard for you, but you can’t keep on going this-”

“You said you wouldn’t come back.”

He turned towards the wall, reading the maps he stuck up on it, purposely facing his back towards me, avoiding eye contact. His words caught me off guard; I honestly didn’t expect him to say anything, all he’d ever done was sit there quietly until I left. I realized it had been months since I’d last heard his voice, or saw him smile, or laugh, for that matter.

“I...my anger got the best of me that time. I shouldn’t have exploded like that, at you.” I slumped my shoulders in defeat. “I was too frustrated, frustrated at trying to help you, you wouldn’t say a word to me, you wouldn’t look at me, not even now. And I let my emotions take over and called you all those horrible things, when you had your own problems you’re dealing with too. I’m sorry, it was terrible of me, but I want to help you, I really do.”

The silence was deafening. When I was about to apologize again, he spoke up.

“A hermit. A recluse. Good for nothing. No one will be there for you in the end.”

“Look, I really shouldn’t have said those things but-”

“What I’m trying to say is, I drove you to the point where you stopped caring and started yelling. We’re playing a game of stubbornness, and I’m pretty sure I had won right there and then. I didn’t expect you to come back.” He finally turned around and looked at me with a small, weary smile. I finally saw his face up close for the first time in a long while. He didn’t have bags under his eyes, but it seemed like all the energy in him had been drained out. The light that used to shine in his eyes had been lost long ago. “You don’t have to bother anymore. You’re trying to help, but I don’t need it. I’m my own person, and I’m the one who decides what to do with my own life. You don’t have to juggle two lives to handle anymore, I’ll be fine.”

He turned towards his city and picked up a clay warrior next to the wall, and stared at his creation, lost in thought. I was at a loss for words; he wanted me to hate him, wanted me to leave him alone for good. Did he honestly believe I’d give up on him just like that? I’ve spent too many hours worrying, trying to find ways to help him, and here he is, rejecting it all in a single blow. I felt my fists shaking, too worked up to hold back harsh words,

“You want to be disconnected from the world entirely, from everyone, from your friends? Stay here another year, another decade even, you say you’re your own person, but you clearly have no idea what’s good for you.” I clenched my fists, emotion overwhelming me once again. I grabbed him by his shirt, pulling him back up to look me in the eyes. “You deny you need help, and push away whoever tries to get close. To lose both your parents at such a young age is unbearable, but you can’t keep living this way, locked away as a slave to your sorrow and guilt. The first step you need to do is open up; let people in and tear down the walls you’ve built up these months.” He struggled against my grip, protesting in weak mumbles in attempt to brush off my words, but I hardened my clutch on him.

“You can’t get over grief in a day, but you’ve spent too long in solitude. Do you honestly think your parents would be proud of you now? To see their only child drop out of college from heartache and become a recluse?” Hearing those words, he snapped his head towards me, glaring daggers and visibly agitated.

“You don’t even know the full story,” he hissed behind clenched teeth.

“Enough to know you’ve drowned yourself in your history obsession in order to blind yourself from your future. Your savings will run out, and I can’t afford time to help you anymore. What will you do then? Starve on the streets?”

I was about to continue when he finally managed to wrench away from my grip; it was clear

he was in obvious distress. Time seemed to slow down the next few moments; he pulled free but the force made him stumble backwards, which in turn caused him to trip over the model of the city, considering it took up most of the floor. And he fell, right on top of his creation.

The aftermath wasn't pretty. The clay buildings were knocked over, some cracked, some with pieces or whole chunks broken off. The wall surrounding the city was struck just as bad; parts of the wall were knocked over or obliterated completely, the gates have had parts broken off, with the roofs where he spent so long sculpting each meticulous detail chipped off and ruined. Even the warrior he had been carrying around had his head broken clean off. He laid there in a state of shock; he couldn't even register the damage done. He gawked at the city, and then turned to me, with hopelessness in his eyes, but I was just as horrified about the situation as he was.

We stayed in the same spot for what felt like hours as we stared at each other, unable to process the circumstances we've found ourselves in. He had lost his most personal treasures in his collection, he'd either have to start anew, or abandon his project, where he wouldn't have the heart to even look at his collection. I didn't expect to accomplish it like this, but the walls had been torn down; it was up to him to decide if he takes the help he needs or rebuild his old fortress back.

Down the Memory Lane

Down the Memory Lane

Shanghai Singapore International School, Immaneni, Karthik – 15

Hazel was typing furiously on her decrepit laptop. It was late and she felt a dull ache pulsating within her head, but she couldn't afford to stop. The publisher had been accommodating for the last three months but last night, he didn't mince his words.

“If I do not receive the script by Saturday, you can forget all about it!”

I'm too much of a perfectionist, she thought. She had written and re-written the script until she thought it was perfect.

It wasn't until the warning message flashed on the screen that she realized her battery was low. While rummaging through the jumble of papers and files on her desk, in a bid to find the charging cord of her 13-inch 'scrap-book', she swept most of them on the floor. Plugging in the cord, she tried to read through the script.

“I was walking through the narrow jagged street. Rows of houses with wrought iron gates, a hawker shouting out advertising his wares, the laughter of children running around... it was a different world...”

She rubbed her eyes. The weather reflected her mood. It had been raining since morning. The sky was invisible under a thick cloak of clouds. The patter of rain on the windowpane was drowned by the shrieking noise of the air conditioner, which pumped out lukewarm air ineffectually into the bitterly cold hotel room.

Her eyes fell on the dripping umbrella and her wet shoes by the door.

This morning she had been so optimistic about finishing her book. She had gone to interview Mr. Chen and found his house locked.

She waited till noon, hoping he would turn up. While she waited, she had a few steamed baozi at a stall nearby – it was all she could afford now. Eating at a western restaurant was out of the question. By the time Mr. Chen came to the door, it was evening.

Despite her pleas, Mr. Chen was disinclined to talk.

“Please, Mr. Chen, I just need you to tell me a few things from the past... I am writing a book...”

“No! I don’t talk to reporters. You are all bad. You will write something, you will write lies, and I will get into trouble! Go away!” He said, getting red-faced.

“I am not a reporter!” She protested but it fell on deaf ears. He waved her away and went inside.

She turned to the young woman who had walked in just then. “Please, can you explain to him that I am not a reporter?”

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“My name is Hazel. I am a writer. My grandparents were living here in 1940. My grandfather was French. My grandmother was Chinese. They moved to France after my mother was born. My mother used to tell me the story of how they met and so many things about Shanghai. My dream was to write a book about their story. My mother knew only that my grandfather was a musician who used to record music in that ‘Little Red House’ ... and that my grandmother used to live here, in this building.”

“That Little Red House is a restaurant now.” said the young woman.

“Yes, I know! I have been there... no one knows anything. After a lot of research and questioning I came to know Mr. Chen is the only one who might know something. Are you his relative?”

“I am a volunteer from an organization which takes care of the elderly. My name is Lily. His children live in another city.”

“Oh, I was hoping you would help me to convince him...”

“He is very old you know, I am not sure he remembers anything...most of the times he forgets where he is and wanders off. That’s why I come to check, to make sure he is fine.”

“Please, if he would listen at all, I just want to ask a few questions. Maybe he might remember something. This book is my life’s work. I really need to complete it, and I don’t have much time. I don’t have much money left, either.” Hazel pleaded.

“Alright, I will talk to him. But it’s late now, he should eat his dinner. Why don’t you come back tomorrow morning? He is always in a better mood in the morning. I will explain your problem to him now.”

“Thank you! Will you be there tomorrow morning? He might feel comfortable with you around.”

“If you want, I can come over tomorrow. Here, take my number. Give me a call tomorrow morning. I will tell you whether he is willing to talk or not.”

“Thanks a ton!” Hazel felt relieved. But the shadow of doubt was lingering as she made her way back to the hotel. Would he talk tomorrow? If not, she was in real trouble.

As she took her key from the desk, the manager came to her. “Is everything alright, Miss?” he said.

“Yes, except the room is too cold.” She replied bluntly.

“No, Miss; I don’t mean that. I want to check with you if anything is amiss with your work.” He placed special emphasis on the word ‘work’.

“Why are you asking me such strange questions?” Hazel asked.

“Just that some men came enquiring after you left...” The man stopped in mid sentence. The clerk at the desk was shaking his head.

“Who? I don’t know any one here... what do you mean? What did they want?” Hazel asked.

“Oh, nothing, nothing, its not you, sorry my mistake.”

Puzzled, she made her way to her room. It took her a while to realize something was different. When she left her room in the morning, it was a mess. Most of her papers were

scattered around the table, as she had tried to search for her charging cord.

She was in a hurry but she remembered well that the first few chapters were still in a folder on the table. But now, the first chapter was lying on the floor along with other papers. Hazel was furious. She had left specific instructions at the front desk that her room was not to be cleaned. She was scared that someone had misplaced her papers.

She dialed the front desk. “Yes, Miss?”

“Did you send a cleaner to my room?”

“No, Miss, you said not to, no one went into your room.”

Hazel was puzzled. She remembered well that the first chapter was still in the folder on the table – ... or did she forget? She had not slept for few days. Maybe her mind was playing tricks with her...

She woke up with a start. She must have nodded off in the chair while thinking ... It was past midnight. Was that the door? She walked to the door, opened it and looked out. No one was there. I am working too hard, she thought. Better catch a few hours of sleep. Then she went to bed.

Next morning, she called Lily. She felt her heart pounding as the phone rang on the other end.

Lily’s soft voice sounded excited “ Hello Hazel, I have good news. Mr. Chen says he will talk to you.”

“Oh, thank you! I will be there in half an hour.” Hazel felt giddy with relief.

Hazel knocked at the door. Lily opened the door with a smile. Hazel went in and took out her notepad and recorder.

“Good morning Mr. Chen.”

“What is that?” He asked pointing to the recorder.

“It’s a recording machine, Mr. Chen, to help me if I forgot to write something down.”

“No no... I am not talking to any machine.” he said distrustfully.

“Oh, alright, I will put this away. I will just make notes, is that ok with you?”

“Fine. What is that you want to ask?” Mr. Chen said.

There was a commotion outside the door. Three uniformed men burst into the house and two of them grabbed her arms on either side. The third one took out a pair of handcuffs. Hazel started to scream.

“Wait, what is this? Why are you arresting her?” Lily protested.

“Arresting?No, no you got it wrong... She has escaped from the Shanghai Mental Health Center!”

Mr. Chen and Lily stood stunned and speechless as they led Hazel away.



Fiction
Group 6

Shanghai Noodle Surprise

King George V School, Hoeflich, Alex – 13

Setting: Shanghai

Characters: Lok, Father, mother

Time: 1966

Conflict: A boy who wants to become a famous chef

In a very tiny and dirty kitchen made of old wood and iron roofing, 7 year old Lok was cooking was a family favorite noodle. This noodle has been a family secret recipe. His mother told him that the recipe has been with them for 100 years.

“You will be famous cook. And you will have your own restaurant Do not tell anyone the secret, remember this, son,” whispered Lok’s mother, who looks sickly and wearing a very old dress, liked she had this ever since.

“Yes, I know. I will keep that promise,” answered the son, as he puts the noodles into two big bowls, got chopsticks and gave them to his mother.

“Your father will be proud of you,” she said as a little tear fell.

After many years Lok is now 20 years old. His mother died sadly.

Lok opened a small noodle shop. It went well.

Many people went to his noodle shop. But there was a man who spread bad things about the shop. He said that Lok’s noodle was trash and badly made.

Lok said, “Who is this mad man?”

People said, “It was your father.”

He said, “My father is long time dead. I never saw him before.”

One day the man walked in the noodle shop and ordered noodles.

Lok gave the bowl to the man. The man tasted the soup he close his eyes and took another scoop.

“Where did you learn to make THIS soup?” the man asked.

Lok told the man that he got the recipe from his mother.

So the man asked what is his mother’s name, where he lives, what is his name, and his other relatives.

“You must be my son. I was in a war with Russia. Many people died.

Tales of Old Shanghai

King George V School, Kwok, Jonathan – 13

A long time ago in the old town of Shanghai, people lived and worked together harmoniously. They rarely fought and quarreled. The old town was quiet and peaceful. Lived there was an elderly Chinese couple. They were Grandpa Wu, a humble fisherman and Grandma Ling, a hard-working street vendor. They had a son and a grandson. But the son's family went out to the sea to hunt for fishes three years ago and never came back. The old couple, and the town people's way of life was very simple, until a group of foreigners came.

One morning, a man with a loud bell-ringing, was heard shouting. "Listen, listen, listen! A foreign ship is coming towards our town," he announced. He quickly gained the attention of the town people, including Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling, who were on the way to their work. "Everyone must stay at their houses," he added. The crowds on the streets got panic and rushed home. At home, the elderly couple talked about the coming of the ship. Grandma Ling asked, "Why is there a ship coming?" After a moment of thinking, Grandpa Wu walked towards the window and looked over the ocean. Then, he replied to his wife, "I do not know. I really don't know." He was worried and alarmed for he felt something unfortunate might happen to the old town.

Finally, the huge, foreign ship arrived at the port. A group of foreigners who dressed elegantly came out. Some ladies worn very fashionable clothes, with a hat on their head, while the gentlemen arrived in their formal black suits. The town people were told that some of them came to visit, and some came to stay.

"I find this place very nice," said Mr. Raleigh, a retired British general. "Absolutely right!" said Mr. Courbit, a French businessman. The group of foreigners walked towards the street and called for a taxi. Then, a weary, old Chinese driver came. "Where to?" he asked. "You bring us to the Palace Hotel," answered Mr. Raleigh.

Few months later, Mr. Raleigh decided to buy some lands in the south of Shanghai. The people who lived on the land were not happy about it. They confronted Mr. Raleigh, which later became a fight. Also, Mr. Courbit began to knock down old historical buildings and develop new tall buildings, bars and shopping malls near the waterfront of the old town. He

even built western-style mansions and gardens in the west. “I find these mansions wonderful,” said Mr. Lebedev, a white Russian who planned to settle in the old town. “I want to buy one,” he added. Most of the rich foreigners in town bought mansions too. Because of these many foreigners, the old town became very crowded and there were many drunken people in the night time. The town people became more and more uncomfortable about the presence of many unfriendly foreigners.

One afternoon, a seven-year-old boy wandered around a busy street of the old town. He went to a restaurant and snuck inside it. His tummy growled as he had not eaten for two days. The young boy was so starved that he went searching for food in the garbage bin. Then all of a sudden, he heard a few heavy steps coming towards him and a loud voice shouting, “Go away! You filthy young boy!” The scared boy hurriedly ran away from the restaurant. Afraid that the furious restaurant owner might catch him, he ran as fast as he could.

Suddenly, a drunk man, holding a bottle of whisky, came out from the famous Maxim’s Bar. The young boy bumped into him accidentally. The drunk man fell on the ground. The young boy helped the drunk man to stand. “Please forgive me Mister,” he asked. The drunk man, instead of being grateful, pushed the young boy harshly. “Don’t you have eyes!” he yelled. He hit the bottle of whisky on the young boy’s head. The boy’s poor head bled. A loud whistle was heard, everybody was stunned, the police officer came. Threatened by the policeman and angry town people, the evil foreigner fled and left the old town.

Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling passed by and tried to help the poor young boy. “Where are your parents?” asked Grandma Ling. The boy answered with sadness in his eyes, “My parents died because of the cholera disease a week ago. I have no home to go back to.” Grandpa Wu replied, “You are welcome to stay with us if you wish.” Grandma Ling echoed, “We will take good care of you.”

Finally, the young boy took the hands of Grandpa Wu and Grandma Ling and they returned home. And they lived happily ever after.

Tales of Old Shanghai

King George V School, Pek, Maxx – 13

Old Shanghai lasted for just over 100 years from 1843 to 1949. There were many foreigners living in Old Shanghai. Some foreigners were French people, British and Americans. Some buildings built by the foreigners could still be found in Shanghai now. Most of the people living in Old Shanghai were Chinese, but it was not ruled by them. It was run by foreigners. The foreigners lived in their own world and they didn't need to talk to the Chinese. They thought they were better and more superior than the Chinese. The Chinese also live in their own world.

Old Tales of Shanghai

King George V School, Sommerville, Ethan – 13

Once upon a time in the city of Shanghai lived a boy called Ming who was from a very poor family. They lived in a hut on the outskirts of Shanghai near a paddy field. They were so poor that they could not afford to eat 3 meals a day.

Ming's parents decided to sell him to the one of the biggest restaurants in the city when he was 12 years old.

When he arrived at the restaurant it smelt like nothing Ming had ever smelled before. He looked around at all the food there was and he could not believe it.

In the restaurant Ming had to clean dishes, tables and floors and advertise the restaurant. Having worked so hard and doing all his work, he did not earn anything. The owner treated him very badly and only gave him a bowl of rice once a day.

He slept in a tiny room that had rats and cockroaches running around on the floor.

Everyone who worked in the restaurant was disgusted at the sight of Ming as he was very smelly and had no clean clothes.

Since Ming has been treated so badly he started stealing food from the restaurant every night when everyone was asleep. Ming always dreamt about going back to his family with some money. One morning Ming's owner found some food crumbs on the floor which he knew were from his food. He then checked the fridge and found that all the food was gone.

The owner observed Ming for a few days and noticed that he was getting fatter and fatter and looked much healthier. He also noticed that Ming wasn't complaining about the food anymore and so the owner suspected that Ming was the one that had been stealing from him.

One rainy evening the mean owner kicked Ming out of the restaurant when they caught him stealing food.

Ming ended up living on the streets and begging for money so he could buy food. This lasted a long time until one day a rich family helped him. They took him to Shanghai. The couple had wanted a son for many years. This couple treated him with so much love and kindness. Ming loved his new family but he still remembered his own parents and wanted to give them a good life just like his. He decided to ask his new family if his own parents could live with them. The kind couple said that they would buy them a house right next to theirs and would give them work so that they would be able to feed themselves.

A few weeks later Ming went to his old village to visit his parents and he told them the good news. Ming helped his parents pack their things and took a train to the new house. Ming's parents and his new family met at the new house and it was around Christmas time. So they had a magical Christmas together with lots of Ming's favorite Chinese food and presents.

As time went by Ming studied hard and got a degree in business. He then started his own company in the big city of Shanghai. He focused his business on the food industry that grew very popular over time.

During this time Ming got married and had 5 beautiful children. Over the years Ming's family monopolised the food industry all over China that made them very rich.

A special ride at the Shanghai Tower

Korean International Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 11

Alan and Kate were two Americans from New York who loved to travel. Some of the countries they have been to include UK, Germany, Sweden, Korea and Japan. For Chinese New Year 2017, they decided to travel to Shanghai, China. When they got to Shanghai, they were happy because the weather was very sunny.

First, they checked in at the JW Marriott Hotel at Tomorrow Square. After checking in, they made their way to their first stop which was the Shanghai Tower. Alan and Kate were very excited to go because it was the second tallest building in the world. They were going up to the sky deck to meet Mario and Luigi. Mario and Luigi were their friends from Japan. They were going to celebrate Chinese New Year in Shanghai together.

They planned to meet on the 120th floor of the Shanghai Tower. While Alan and Kate were on their way up, suddenly the elevator went rocket fast!! Alan and Kate were surprised, worried and scared. Two seconds later, the voice of the elevator announced, “Kung Hei Fat Choy! Happy New Year of the Rooster! Hope you enjoyed the special ride! You are now on the sky deck, enjoy your visit!” Alan and Kate were more relaxed now and went to meet their friends Mario and Luigi.



Fiction
Group 7

Old Tale of New Shanghai

King George V School, Ashfield, Jamie - 14

In 1842 the British establish a concession which is a forced treaty with the Qing dynasty after they lost the opium war. The concessions are ruled by occupiers with no effect on Chinese law. The French, Japanese and Americans also did the same. The Taiping Rebellion Had Caused a lot of people to die. In the 1930s Shanghai is Asia's most important port. Western banking firm built set of houses which American and European traders traded tea and Indian opium. During that time you no need visa and passport to access. During WW2 shanghai has become a home to Jews fleeing Nazi Europe, over 2000 Jews arrived. In 1937 then the Japanese invaded Shanghai and bombed the city Jews of shanghai were forbidden to leave the city. Most of secession became Japanese. The Nationalist and Communist struggle against the Japanese in the Battle of Shanghai. The Japanese controlled Shanghai until Japan's defeat after WW2. The Allied Countries abandoned shanghai during the war and signed their territorial concessions to Chiang Kai Shek. In 1949 Mao's resistance army fought against the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War with Mao winning Resulted into Communist rule in China as the People's Republic of China, and few remaining foreigners left China. China was cut off from the rest of the world. In the 1950s to 1980s China was Struck By a huge Famine swept across the nation, huge factories are rising. The city became the largest contributor of tax revenue.