Shorts

2010-2014

Student-created short stories for reading and appreciation



NET Section, CDI, EDB

INTRODUCTION

Shorts 2010-2014: Student-created Short Stories for Reading and Appreciation is designed to be a celebration of five years of student achievement in Shorts: A Short Story Writing Competition. This publication will also serve as a valuable resource for students and teachers who are interested in reading and appreciating a variety of short stories written by student writers in Hong Kong.

All of the short stories selected for *Shorts 2010-2014* were among the prize-winning entries over the first five years of the Shorts competition. Not every prize-winning entry was selected. Those considered to be the best texts for instructional purposes for the Short Stories elective module in the Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum were given priority. The book features stories that demonstrate effective character development, an appropriate setting and a well-crafted plot, as well as those that use effective narrative writing techniques and literary devices.

The chapters of this publication are organised by story genre or theme:

In Chapter 1, Fables and Fantasy, 'The Sentimental Reaper' resembles a morality play in which the characters personify human attributes. 'Morpheus' Dream' is a modern-day fable with a moral at the end. 'The Golden Phoenix' presents the reader with a fantasy world along the lines of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis.

In Chapter 2, Ghost Stories, there are three ghost stories, each one different in point of view, tone and style. 'The Black Widow' is told from the point of view of the ghost and has an ominous ending. The main character of 'The Candle' follows his grandfather's spirit back to his hometown in China. 'The Person Next Door' has a clever twist at the end, which leaves the reader feeling unsettled.

Chapter 3, Relationships, contains stories about various human interactions. 'Á Secret Love' features complex love relationships within a family. In 'An Unrequited Suitor', the self-conscious main character falls madly in love with a new colleague, but his desperate attempts to win her heart go unrequited. 'Last Goodbye' depicts a beautiful but sad relationship between a mother and her terminally ill daughter.

Chapter 4, Trials and Tribulations, features characters who are conflicted in various ways. In 'Sacrifices', a trapped miner reflects on his family's hardships in China. In 'The Second Life', a young boy with low self-esteem contemplates suicide. In 'The Most Precious Thing', a young girl endures the hardship of living with an abusive parent.

Chapter 5, Other Stories, contains three different story genres that are worthy of inclusion. 'Crossroads' is a coming-of-age tale about a young, talented athlete with a big dream. 'Midnight Cyclist' is a crime story full of action, drama and suspense. In 'The Machine', a sci-fi thriller, the main character is faced with a moral dilemma of his own making.

The short stories in this collection have been edited to varying degrees primarily for readability, but also to enhance their appeal and usefulness as instructional texts for the Short Stories elective module. It is hoped that the short stories in this collection will be read and appreciated by students and teachers in Hong Kong and will inspire other young writers to keep on writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Regional NET Coordinating Team (RNCT) at the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Section, Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), Education Bureau (EDB) would like to thank all of the schools that participated in Shorts: A Short Story Writing Competition over the past five years, since the 2009/10 school year when the first Shorts competition was launched as a pilot project.

The RNCT would further like to thank all of the teachers who have attended the Writing and Presenting Short Stories workshops and have supported students for the competition.

Finally, the RNCT would like to thank all of the students who have worked hard to collaborate on original short stories based on visual prompts for the competition.

The following schools and teams deserve special acknowledgment. Their stories were awarded top prizes by our judges and selected by the RNCT for this publication, *Shorts 2010-2014: Student-created Short Stories for Reading and Appreciation.*

Shorts 2010

The Golden Phoenix
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PANG Yin Seng, Anthea
HURIP, Nicole
Marymount Secondary School

The Black Widow
LEUNG Ling Sum
WONG Yeung Man, Vivien
TSANG Wing Hei
CHAN Yan Kei, Clarissa
Belilios Public School

Shorts 2011

A Secret Love
CHAN Hoi Man
CHAN Tsz Kwan
HO Man Yu
LEE Ting Ting
Jockey Club Government Secondary School

The Machine
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shorts 2012

The Person Next Door
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An Unrequited Suitor
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The Second Life
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LEE Tim Lok
CHAN Ming Ho
PANG Wing Man
Pui Ching Middle School

The Most Precious Thing
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LEUNG Siu Ling, Rizel
WONG Man Ho, Jerry
HO Hiu Tung, Cathy
TMCC Holm Glad College

Crossroads
LO Lezhi
LUK Kin To
PANG Chun Wah
LUI Yat Wai
ELCHK Yuen Long Lutheran Secondary School

Shorts 2013

The Sentimental Reaper
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Morpheus' Dream
NG Chong Yi
SZE Hon Ping
TSO Wing Yan
WONG Hiu Lam
Ju Ching Chu Secondary School (Yuen Long)

The Candle
CHEUNG Shing Chun
HUI Ka Fung
LEUNG Yuet Ching
WONG Chun Kit
SKH Bishop Mok Sau Tseng Secondary School

Last Goodbye
CHAN Wai Suet, Gigi
CHENG Ting Chi
POON Long Wing, Sylvana
Queen Elizabeth School

Sacrifices
TSANG Po Lam
WONG Shu Ting
LAM Sze Hon
LO Ka Shun
Carmel Secondary School

Shorts 2014

Midnight Cyclist
FAN Chun Fai, Wallace
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YU Shing Chit, Alvin
St. Joseph's College

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Fables and Fantasy

Chapter 1



There is a forest somewhere, far away from all the hustle and bustle of the big cities of this world, a forest that is a stranger to Men and their queer ways. Well, mostly. No part of this earth has been left completely untouched by human hands.

In a run-down shack at the heart of the leafy canopy, there once lived a man and his dog. The man was not like other men. Not for him were the towers of concrete and twisted steel that so dominate this era, the bleary streets and smoke-clogged fumes of automobiles. His heart belonged to the wide woods and sweeping fields, with Mother Nature and her ageless charm. And the dog? It loved his master dearly, and was happy wherever he was. They lived a happy, simple life. The forest provided them with everything.

One day the man went out to chop some firewood and he left the dog at the shack. Night was fast approaching when he returned. The dog perked up his ears at the sound of snapping twigs and cursing, and beheld his master stagger his way clumsily through the door. Bright beads of crimson blood dripped steadily from his right hand, which was bound up with a handkerchief.



“Hey old Joe”, the man greeted his dog amiably, smiling through the pain. “Your darned fool of a master done gone and cut his thumb off with that thrice-damned axe, so no fire tonight buddy, sorry.”

The man reached with his left hand and rumpled his ears in that endearing way of his, and the dog licked his face fondly and whimpered.

“Don’t you worry about me, I’ll be fine.”

But in a week’s time the wound had swelled into a pus-filled crevice. The man kept to his bed all day now, coughing and cursing in turns, for he had contracted some form of tropical disease. The dog smelled the sickness, and knew the man’s time was near. It sat at the foot of the bed, ears drooping and flicking its tail in melancholy.

Then, on the night when it seemed the man would pass away, there came a visitor, the first and last to ever come knocking on their humble door.

Knock, knock, knock

The dog gave a start. He had not heard any footsteps. And the air all of a sudden felt decidedly queer.

Creeeeeak

Then the door swung silently, almost apologetically open, and though no shape passed through it, the dog sensed a dark presence enter the room. It snarled.

“Who are you, strange man-thing that I cannot see?” said the dog in the tongue of its kind.

Strangely enough, the man-thing answered, its voice quiet and husky, a voice that spoke of dry, withered things, of moist earth and silent decay. It made the dog’s hair prickle at some nameless dread.

“You know who I am”, it said, and the dog felt that it did.

“Why are you here?”

"You know that as well."

"No!" said the dog, "Do not take him yet! My master is yet well. When he is gone, who will feed me, who will speak softly to me in man-words I cannot understand, who will pet me and scratch my belly and ruffle my ears, and who will pluck the itchy lice from my hair? Please do not take him yet!"

"Do not be troubled," the presence said in a not unkind voice. "I am taking your master to a better place. It will be swift and painless, I promise you, and I will treat him kindly all the way. There is nothing you can do for him, and I am bringing him whether you like it or not. Duty compels me."

The dog hung its head in sorrow.

"Ah, if only I knew the strange magic of Men, I would heal my master. I know there is nothing I can do to keep him from you, so I ask of you one favour Great Spirit: take me with you. For life without him would be meaningless."



And Death, for that was his proper name, was moved by this. But Death could not take a living soul, for it went against his rules. So he said:

"There is a place you could take him to be healed. Humans call it a hospital. In it there are great magicians they call physicians, who could work their magic upon your master. It lies in the big Man Nests they call cities. I will give you until daybreak to take your master there. Go in the direction where the sun sets. Remember, only until daybreak will I refrain from taking his soul."

And the dark presence faded away. The dog immediately began barking and howling, running over the bed and scratching his master's side, trying to wake him. But all to no avail. The creeping sickness had spread even to his mind, already he was in the deep sleep that borders death. The dog gave up trying to wake him and seized his collar with his teeth, dragging him forcefully out of the bed (for he was a big, strong dog) and on to the floor. The man groaned in pain but otherwise did not stir. The dog slid him out the door and from there proceeded to push and heave him along the leafy trail. How long he toiled, for the life of him he could not say. Mud and leaves clung to the clothes of the man, hindering the progress greatly, but the dog pushed on. The going was painstakingly slow. An eternity seemed to pass before they were clear of the shrubbery and out in a field of dandelions stretching as far as the eye could see. But, just over the horizon, the dog could barely make out the faint outlines of the massive stone dens that he knew to be part of the great Man Nests called cities.

"A little more to go master..."

Muscles trembling and breath coming in short gasps, the dog carried on. Inch by inch, yard by yard they gained ground, until finally they were past the field and a mere half-kilometer away from the city gates. Then the dog's lungs gave out and he let loose one long piteous whine and collapsed next to his master, and, try as he might, he couldn't find his feet again. He snuggled his battered form close to the man's side.

"I'm sorry. I can't go on any more. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

And he licked his face one last time. Then he felt the dark presence surround him once more, but this time he felt no dread, just this calm resignation. He waggled his ears feebly as Death leaned close and stroked his neck with the gentleness of a mother.

"Brave, beautiful, noble beast, do not be troubled. For now you can go and be with your master and stay at his side through all of eternity." And he took their souls in his arms, and carried them gently, oh so gently away.

Up above, the clouds of ghastly night broke away and the bright beams of morning light shone through to herald a new day.



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In an unknown time, Morpheus lived alone in a quiet and remote village. He could not remember how long he had been kept in this dark, dusty shed. He thought that it was the whole world until…

*****

A bright flash of light blinded him.



“Look! Grandpa! Look at that beautiful kite hanging on the wall!” exclaimed a small child, rushing towards Morpheus excitedly. The child was poking Morpheus and pulling on his face quite inconsiderately.

Fortunately for Morpheus, the child’s grandpa intervened.

“Stop being so rough with that beautiful kite!” he chided. “You might break it!”

The boy let go of Morpheus and looked at his grandpa. Tears welled up in his eyes.

"Hey, let's go kite-flying on the hill!" grandpa suggested more cheerfully. "The weather is fabulous today!"

Without hesitation, the child grabbed the kite and galloped up the hill. This was the first time Morpheus left his dark world.

*****

Since that fateful day, the child visited Morpheus from time to time and brought him out from his dark world and into the light of the sun. Every time Morpheus was out, he admired all the wonderful things underneath him. He particularly enjoyed flying over the sunflowers on the hills, but he wondered why they were always looking in one direction.

"Why are you always looking in one direction?" asked Morpheus on one occasion.

"Because of our beloved sun," they replied in unison.

One thing that annoyed Morpheus was the line that was always tied to his back. The child would pull the line this way and that to control him. When Morpheus was enjoying the most spectacular views from the top of the sky, the boy would pull him back to the ground and then lock him up again in the darkness of the shed. The bright world would disappear until the next time the boy came along.

One day, the wind lifted Morpheus up to a greater height than ever. He wished that he could fly even higher so he could dance with the white clouds. However, no matter how much he tried, he was unable to separate himself from that abominable line. He felt helpless and became irritated with the clouds.



"Are you laughing at me?" he asked them.

"No, Morpheus," the clouds replied. "You must learn that you can't escape from fate."

Morpheus did not fully understand what the clouds were saying, as he was being pulled down by the boy and their voices grew too soft and distant for him to hear.

Gradually, Morpheus began to envy everything around him. He envied the sunflowers which bloomed freely in the sun. He envied the wandering clouds which floated freely in the sky. He wished that he could be free. He hated the line that was restricting him.

*****



One day, Morpheus asked the passing birds to peck at his line. They did as he had asked and, eventually, the line snapped. At that moment, Morpheus felt that he was the happiest kite in the world.

He floated over the hills, lakes, streams and villages. He felt overjoyed. He was free!

He admired a mosque below him and the people kneeling in the courtyard.

He saw men in ragged clothes trying desperately to climb over the fence of a stone building.

He saw boys running around in a field. "Where are the girls?" he wondered.

Most disturbingly, he saw a blind-folded person about to be hanged.

Suddenly, the wind stopped and Morpheus glided down, down, down. He feared that he was falling into an abyss, until, relieved, he found himself dangling from a branch like a musical rest on a stave.

*****

Days passed. Overcome with feelings of loneliness and despair, Morpheus gradually lost all hope of being freed.

One stormy night, a bolt of lightning struck, lighting up the tree and charring its branches. Morpheus was caught up in the angry flames.

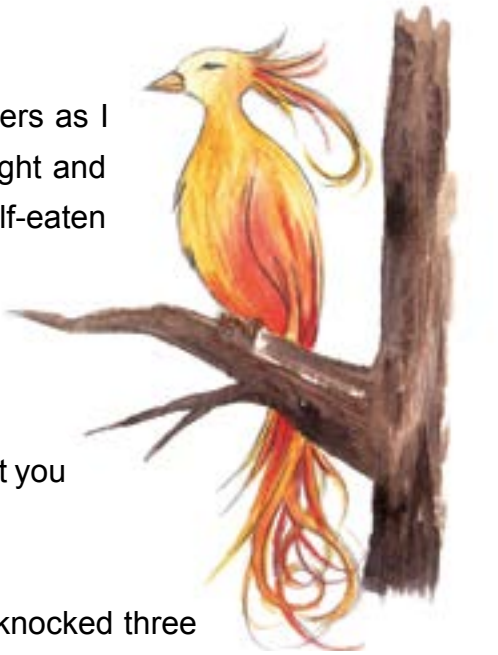
In his final moments, Morpheus lamented his 'freedom' as flashes of the past appeared: the sunflowers, the clouds, the feeling of being restrained. A distant and familiar voice resounded above him.

"Morpheus, you can't escape from fate."

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"Do you know what it's like to feel trapped …"



Christopher's new song, 'Trapped', blasted from my speakers as I attempted to tidy my room. I had some friends over last night and everything was strewn across my room – clothes, CDs, half-eaten sandwiches. No wonder my mom had a heart attack. I was singing along when I heard a knock, and my mom's head appeared around the door.

"Claire," she said, "an old lady just moved in next door. I want you to take this box of cookies over."

Sighing, I obeyed and went over to the house next door. I knocked three times. The door opened to reveal an old woman standing in front of me.

"Yes, dear?"

"Um, welcome to the neighbourhood," I stammered. "I'm Claire and I live next door." I gave her the box of cookies.

"Why, thank you. How nice of you!" Her eyes gleamed. "Would you like to have a drink?"



She opened the door wider, and I was suddenly hit by the delicious smell of freshly baked bread. I took an involuntary step inside.

The old lady closed the door behind me, offering me a glass of lemonade. As I took a sip, I slowly surveyed the spotless living room. I noticed that the old lady had a rather extensive collection of antique pictures, big and small, dominating the mantelpiece.

The old lady, who introduced herself as Mrs Harris, told me to make myself comfortable, so I went to have a closer look at the pictures. They seemed to be mostly birds of various species. A particularly large picture caught my eye; I recognised a younger Mrs Harris smiling from within.

"I was beautiful then," Mrs Harris said, startling me. "You like the frame?"

I nodded, continuing to admire it.

"I think there are some more pictures in the attic. Wait here."

"There's really no need, Mrs…" I began, but she was gone before I could finish.

To be honest, I was quite pleased to be left alone to wander around the house. The house was old and quiet, with corridors and long hallways. After a while, I was struck with the urge to use the bathroom, but Mrs Harris was still nowhere to be seen. I started frantically opening doors, but they mostly revealed forlorn bedrooms. I finally found a bathroom after what seemed like opening every door in the house. After using the bathroom, I started down the stairs.



"Eeeeeek!"

I almost jumped out of my skin.

"What was that?"

I looked around, and to my enormous surprise, a magnificent golden phoenix was perched on the branches of a tree. Then, to my amazement, the beautiful creature looked at me, and its piercing gaze seemed to look right through me. Its eyes were flat black, yet eerily empty, sending shivers down my spine. I shook my head and told myself I was dreaming.

Suddenly, I heard more screeching. I swerved but saw no sign of any other birds. Try as I might, I couldn't ignore the terrifying birdsong. It gripped me, drawing me along, towards the source of the sound. As I walked along the corridor, the noise grew louder. It seemed to be coming from the last door. I reached for the door knob. Abruptly, the screeching stopped. Feeling uneasy with the sudden lack of noise, I pushed the door open.



A completely alien landscape greeted my eyes. Behind the door was a clear blue sky, a wide green pasture dotted with tents, and a burbling stream. It was as if I had come into another world. The burbling stream chuckled invitingly.

I ran on to the green field, relishing the cool breeze whipping through my hair, and approached one of the tents. It turned out that all the tents held birds. Lots and lots of birds. But there was nobody there.

Every one of the birds was either exceptionally rare or beautiful. There were brightly coloured ones and magnificently plumed ones. As different as they all seemed, they all had one thing in common: their eyes were all as black and empty as those of the golden phoenix.

"What happened to you all?" I murmured to nobody in particular as I stroked one with dazzling silver feathers through its cage.



"You must get out of here."

I was astonished. "It can't be," I thought, gaping at the little bird.

But the bird continued: "Listen to me. Mrs Harris is a witch. She turns children into birds. I was a young girl like you once, before she turned me into this..."

The silver bird's eyes glistened with tears.
I remembered the song I had listened to just this morning: "Do you know what it's like to feel trapped..."

Suddenly, all the birds were banging against their cages.

"Quick, you must help us," whispered the little bird. "You are our only hope."

I nodded dumbly.

"The pictures are the key. Smash them, and we'll be free. The witch will be destroyed. Open our cages! We will cover for you."



As it was whispering, I saw a dark shape approaching. I threw open the cages, and the birds burst out. I ran back to the door as fast as I could. Once inside, I began to do what I was best at: making a mess.

Somewhere above the sound of breaking glass, I heard the relentless shrieking of birds.

Then, unexpectedly, it quieted down to one wailing shriek, and then the flapping of wings. After that was silence. I shuddered, and ran home as fast as I could.

That night, just as I was about to drift off to sleep, I suddenly saw a flash of gold outside my window. I peered out and saw the golden phoenix perched on my window sill. It gave me one long look, before climbing into the air and disappearing into the inky blackness.

This time, I could swear I saw a twinkle in its eye.

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GHOST STORIES

Chapter 2



I could not attend my own funeral as I was firmly bound to the great elm tree by which I had died. I stood there next to the tree until I saw my family's old car slow to a stop outside the gate. Amelia hopped out of the car dressed in black mourning clothes. With her head hung low, she slowly trudged in my direction.

I smiled. Amelia and I had been the closest of sisters. We had spent many afternoons with each other under this elm tree that I am now bound to. This tree held many precious memories for both of us. It was our tree. I reached out to caress the bark of the tree, but my smile disappeared when my hand passed through it. I am dead now. I am invisible. I am no longer part of the living world and my sister cannot see me. I turned my attention back to Amelia, only to be faced with an expression of horror and a shaking finger pointed at my face.

"Y…Y…You…You're here! You're see-through! You're transparent! This is impossible! I'm just dreaming…"



Amelia's exclamations turned into unintelligible mumbles as she turned to leave.

"Wait!" I reached out to stop her, but to no avail. My hand passed right through hers.

"Can you see me?" I called out desperately as she ran into the house. I was left by our tree staring at our former home. She stared back at me through the window, tears trickling down her face. I could not move from my place by the tree. I could only stand there. Waiting.

*****

Three days passed before Amelia slowly made her way towards me again.

"Is it really you, Emily? Why are you here? Aren't you al… already dead?" She stuttered tentatively on the last word. I smiled sadly.

"I can't move on. I need closure. I don't remember anything about my death. I need to know how I died. I really need to!" I insisted, watching as Amelia's shoulders slumped at the painful memory.

"It was a spider bite," she finally said after a few moments of silence. "It was entirely my fault. I shouldn't have let you stay out here reading under the tree so long. I should have come out to look for you when you didn't return. Maybe you wouldn't have died then. I'm so sorry," Amelia continued shakily.



"A spider bite killed me?" I asked incredulously. She nodded.

"It was a black widow spider with a venomous bite. I don't want to talk about it anymore. Let's change the subject," she implored.

So we talked. We stayed under the old elm tree for hours talking about old times.

"I've always been jealous of you," Amelia told me.

"Why's that? You're the smart one. You always get good grades. You have an IQ of 140! You're basically a genius," I laughed.

"It's all about you," Amelia continued. "You have all the friends, the happiness, the wonderful social life. Parents and teachers always praise well-mannered Emily, kind and pretty Emily, popular Emily," she muttered bitterly as she tried to crush a termite beneath her shoe. Scuttling along the bulging roots of the old elm tree, the termite escaped up the trunk and out of sight.

"Did you really hate me that much?" I asked.

Her head whipped to face me in shock.

"I didn't mean… I was only… I…I need to go!" Looking frightened, she jumped up and ran back into the house.

*****

Two weeks passed. Each day, Amelia came to the tree to talk with me. The rainy season had started, and now our tree was infested with termites. Amelia and I watched the small white critters crawl in and out of holes in the bark, gnawing and chewing their way through the wood.



"You should tell mom and dad to hire an exterminator," I said, shuddering at the sight. Amelia shook her head.

"It's too late for the tree," she said. "The termites have already chewed their way through the trunk. The wood is rotting."

We stood in front of the tree for a while before she spoke again.

"I used to think I hated you. I was blinded with envy. It was only after you were no longer next to me that I realised how much I loved my elder sister. Now, it's too late."

"It's not too late," I replied.

She looked at me.

"If you call the exterminator now, you can prevent the termites from destroying the rest of this backyard," I continued, giving her a small smile.

She timidly returned the smile and we stood side by side in comfortable silence.

"Emily?" Amelia ventured softly.

I turned to her.

"Why are you still here even though I told you how you died? Don't you want to move on?" she asked, crouching to hug her knees to her chest.

“I still haven’t been able to feel at peace. I need more,” I admitted after a moment of contemplation.

“Oh. Is that so?” she replied.

*****

Many weeks passed before I saw Amelia again. She was holding something behind her back and while her black hair sparkled in the sunset, her eyes were disturbed.

“It wasn’t an accident. It was planned,” she said. “When you fell asleep here, someone set the black widow spider free right next to you.” She spoke with determination. “It bit you and you died. Everyone assumed it was an accident. The attacker got away.”



I had a peculiar feeling of déjà vu, but I pushed the thought away.

“Amelia, how do you know this?”

Amelia stared at me intently.

“Because I killed you.”

From behind her back, she pulled out a cage containing a large black widow spider.

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I sensed the air beside me and I could feel him.

When I looked back at the time we were together, it seemed just like yesterday.

He whispered in my ear.

*****

I double checked my luggage, combed my hair neatly, tied my shoelaces tight and left home. I carefully held the candle, not wanting anyone to ruin it.

I walked past the playground, where we used to play together. I listened to the song he used to sing to me. I walked along the road where we used to walk together and chat. He never left me.

The candle was the final gift that grandpa had bought me. Two days later, he was rushed to hospital because of his weak heart. I had been preparing for this day, but I did not expect it to come so soon. In his final moments, he asked me to come forward. With his dying breath, he whispered his last words to me. For this reason, I had to leave home and go to China.



Still holding the candle in my hand, I caught a taxi to the airport. In order to forget the sadness of losing my grandpa, I had tried burying myself in endless paperwork at the office. I was tired. However, I could see my grandpa's face whenever I closed my eyes. Then I would remember him.

I had lived with my grandpa since I was in kindergarten. My parents worked far away so grandpa looked after me and raised me as his own son. He was once a kind man, before my accident. I was only seven years old. I was hit by a car on my way home from school. He regarded it as his fault and regretted it very much. He started drinking and his personality changed. He turned into a man I no longer knew or understood.

Upon arriving at the airport, I looked at the candle again. A lit candle can guide the spirits of the dead, he once told me. I wasn't sure if it would work, but I could feel his presence whenever I held the candle in my hands.

You don't have to do this, son. I know you care a lot for me…

"No, grandpa, I will fulfil your will," I thought as I headed to the boarding gate.

The two-hour flight seemed to last for days. Finally, I set foot in Guizhou, the province where I had grown up with grandpa. After spending years in the city, I felt unfamiliar in this rural environment.

"It's been a long time since the last time I was here," I thought. "The air is still fresh, the scenery gorgeous. Nothing has changed. Should we rush to our old house now, grandpa?"

Let's go, young man!

I looked at the once-familiar streets as I walked from house to house in search of the old neighbourhood. A short while later, I entered an entirely unfamiliar world: where once there had been fields of crops, I found myself lost in a maze of buildings.

"Grandpa – where has our house gone? Where are we?"

Look for help, boy. Help is always around.

"Excuse me, sir," I said to an old man passing by. "Do you know of an old house that was

somewhere around here twenty years ago? It had a thatched roof and it was painted deep brown. There was a plaque near the front door and a flower garden in front."

The old man raised his head and looked at me, nodding slightly. Then averting his gaze, he shuffled past me.

"Excuse me, sir!" I cried out impatiently. "Where is it now?"

He walked on ahead, quickening his pace, not bothering to answer. Despite his indifference, I followed him hoping he would guide me to the house.



"Why are you holding that candle in your hand?" he growled when I caught up to him. "Does it hold a secret?"

"Please, sir, it was a present from my grandpa. He's dead now. I believe it can help guide his spirit back to his homeland."

The old man paused, and grandpa whispered in my ear.

This is an old friend of mine. Just tell him my name.

"My grandfather was an old friend of yours – Wong Fu Gui!"

The old man frowned. Then his face lit up.

"So you are his grandson!" he exclaimed. "Your grandpa was a great man. He saved my life once. I will take you to your old house. Follow me," he said.

I thanked him and we walked together, side by side.

"It's been a long time since I last saw your grandpa," the old man said sadly.

After walking in silence for nearly an hour, we came upon the house.

"Here it is."

The house was long abandoned. Weeds grew in through the window and only a few flowers had survived. I carefully took out the lighter from my pocket and lit the candle. The flame was bright and full of life.

I sat in the house with the old man till nightfall. To our great wonder and surprise, grandpa's spirit appeared. He looked as lively as when he was a young man and he was pleased that I had finally led him back to Guizhou. His spirit was finally rooted back to the soil of his homeland.



Grandpa had one final request. I still had to take him to another place – to the sea of flowers up on the mountain not far from our house. We used to go there when we were living in Guizhou.

I wish I could go back to the sea of flowers again. To see the flowers…

These were grandpa's final words, his dying wish.

As evening fell, I started the walk up the mountain with the lit candle in my hand. The road was slippery after the heavy rain the previous day. With the aid of grandpa's spirit, we finally reached the sea of flowers. It was more beautiful than I had remembered – a sea of crimson, shades of dark and lighter pinks swayed gently in the breeze. Colours combined together to form a breathtaking landscape. Graceful and beautiful, someone must have taken good care of it over the years.

So beautiful! Thank you, my boy. You set off without hesitation to fulfill my selfish dream. I love you, I always did, I always will…

"Don't leave me grandpa! Not just yet. Please don't go!"

Tears ran down my cheeks.

A gentle breeze softly stroked my skin.

CHEUNG Shing Chun
HUI Ka Fung
LEUNG Yuet Ching
WONG Chun Kit

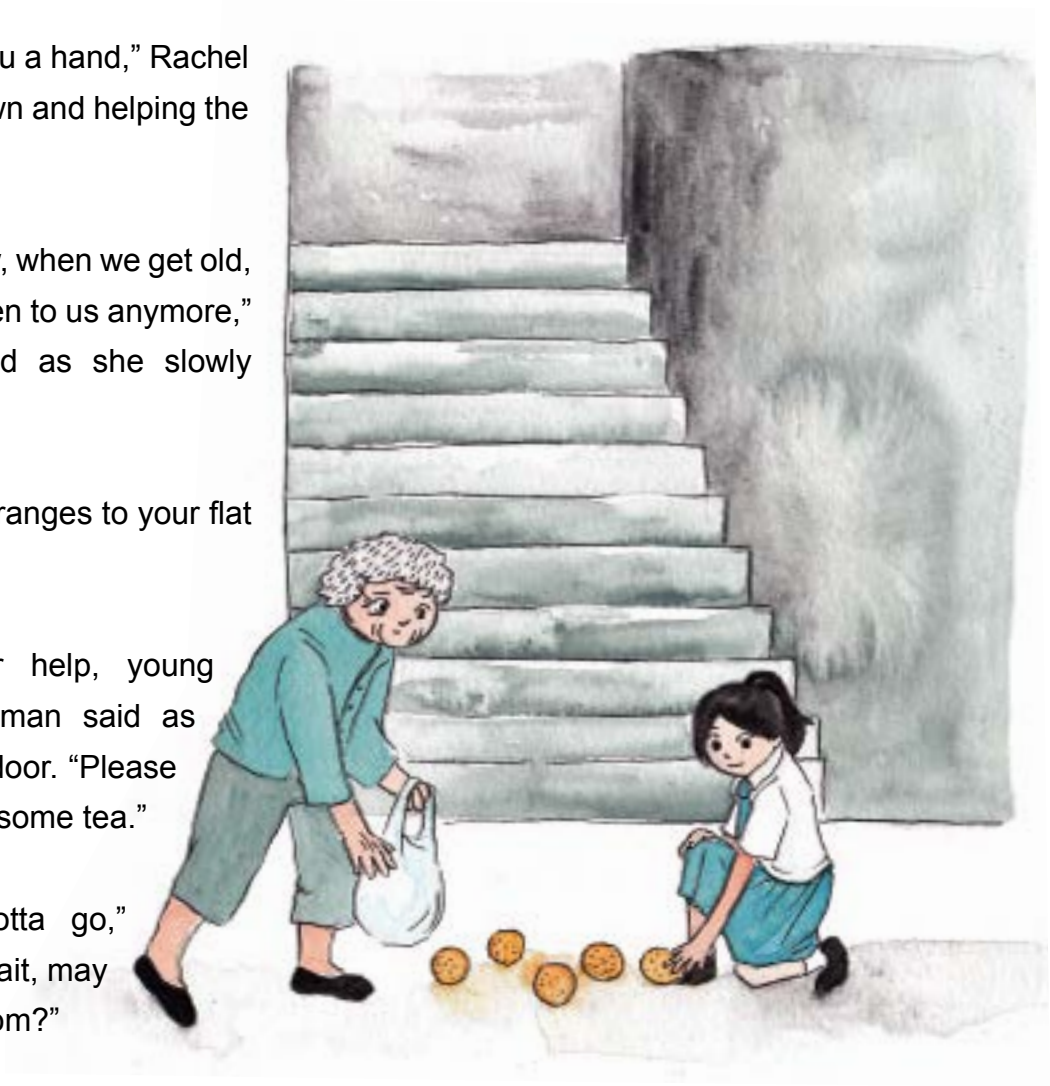
SKH Bishop Mok Sau Tseng Secondary School

The Person Next Door



"Good morning, students," announced the social worker. "Today we are going to visit some elderly people who live alone in the public housing estate across the street."

Rachel was in the same group as her friends, Mary and Cherry. When they arrived at the public housing estate, they checked the name and details of the elderly person they were assigned to visit. While they were walking up the stairs, Rachel had to answer the call of nature, so she left the group in search of a washroom. On the way down the stairs, she saw an old woman trying to pick up the oranges she had dropped.



"Hi! Let me give you a hand," Rachel said, squatting down and helping the old lady.

"Thanks. You know, when we get old, the body won't listen to us anymore," the old lady joked as she slowly stood up.

"Shall I carry the oranges to your flat for you?"

"Thanks for your help, young lady," the old woman said as they reached her door. "Please come in and have some tea."

"No thanks, I gotta go," Rachel replied. "Wait, may I use your washroom?"

Coming out from the toilet, Rachel said goodbye to the old woman and promised to visit her again the following week.

*****

A week later, Rachel went to the old woman's house as promised. She knocked on the door a few times, but there was no response.

"Maybe she's out shopping at the wet market," Rachel murmured to herself.

As she turned to leave, Rachel noticed the old man next door peeking at her from his door frame. She walked over to his door.

"Excuse me, sir. Do you know where the old woman is – the one who lives next to you?" The old man's face turned pale.

"Are… are you talking about the old lady who lived there?" the old man asked, pointing a trembling finger towards the old woman's door.



"Yes," replied Rachel, puzzled by the old man's reaction. "I visited her last week and we promised to meet again."

"Erm… I don't know the whole story, but one thing is for sure," said the old man. "The old lady who lived next door died of a heart attack about a month ago."

Clink.

The thermos in Rachel's hand fell to the ground. It was the gift that Rachel had bought for the old lady.

"That's impossible!" Rachel exclaimed. "I visited her just last week. I went to her flat and had a chat with her. How could she have passed away a month ago?"

"I don't know! I don't know! Don't bother me!" the old man muttered as he slammed his door shut, leaving Rachel alone in the long dark corridor.

Rachel bent down to pick up the thermos. Her hands were shaking uncontrollably. Sweat glistened on her skin and her heart was in her mouth. The old man's face kept appearing in her mind. She didn't know what to do. The only idea that came to her was to knock one more time on the old woman's door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

No one answered.

She tried pushing on the door. To her surprise, the door swung open. She jumped backwards and gasped. The old woman was standing there in front of her, smiling.



"What's the matter?" asked the old woman, noticing the distorted expression on Rachel's face. "Why do you look so frightened?"

Rachel took a deep breath and tried to calm her nerves. She told the old woman about her encounter with the man next door. She told her what he had said about her having died of a heart attack about a month ago.

“That makes no sense,” said the old woman, looking very confused. “The man next door died of a heart attack in his flat last month. Nobody lives next door anymore.”

CHENG Marcus
LEUNG Derek Kin Hei
MOK Siu Hin
LAI Cheuk Kwan

Wah Yan College, Hong Kong

Relationships

Chapter 3

Beep!



Ninth floor, Gynaecology & Obstetrics Department.

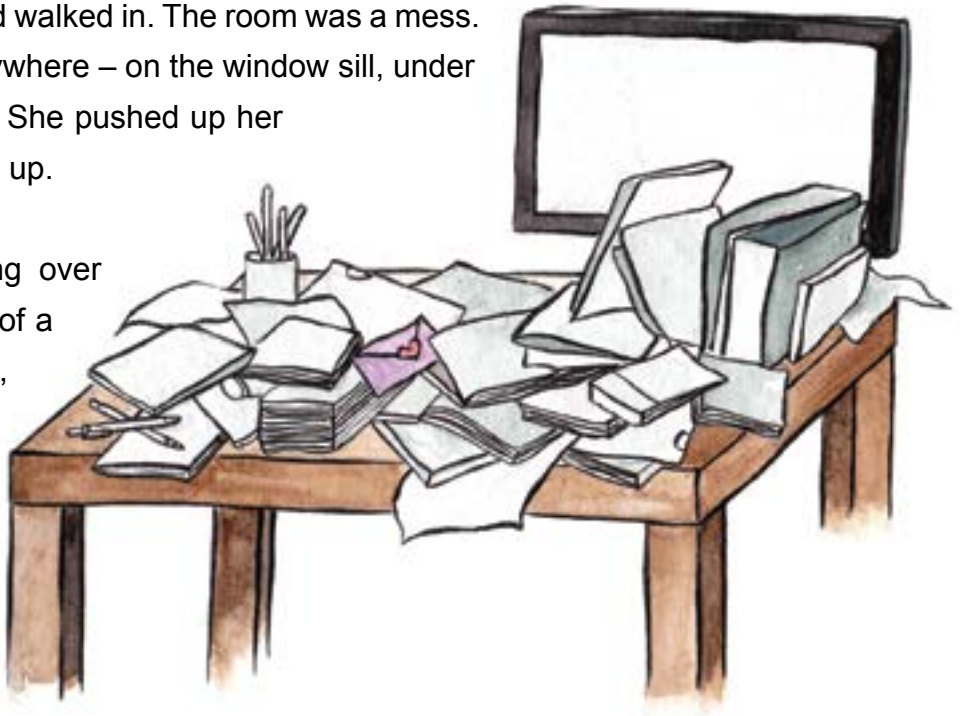
The elevator door opened. Out marched Dolly, a girl of 18, carrying a handful of books. She was smart and energetic, loved by everyone. Having a father that brought new life into this world was a glory. Since she was a child, Dolly had been hearing about the impressive work of her father. He was a role model to her, someone she adored and worshipped.

"Hi, Dolly. Waiting for Doctor John again?" greeted the nurse.

"Is he busy with another surgery? Will it take long?" Dolly asked hastily. "We're going to the cemetery. You know, today's Mom's memorial day, 19th May."

"The surgery was delayed, but I'm sure it won't be long," the nurse assured her. "Why don't you wait in his office?"

Dolly turned the handle and walked in. The room was a mess. Books and files were everywhere – on the window sill, under chairs – it was intolerable. She pushed up her sleeves and started tidying up.



"Wa!" she yelped knocking over a bundle of books. For all of a sudden came a cockroach, scaring Dolly to death. Fortunately for her, the cockroach fled to the door and disappeared.

After calming down and taking in a breath, she spied a lavender envelope peeping out from one of the books. Out of curiosity, she pulled out the letter and opened it.



Dear John,

19 May 2005

It's been 5 years since you left me. My days without you are long and lonely. I still remember your last words at the airport. You're a gynecologist and married with a daughter. I'm very happy for you. Lately, I've been very busy, case after case. Yet I go to our old place every weekend.

I'm sorry to bother you but our days together are always on my mind. Why can't we stay together? Why did you marry that one? You don't love her, do you? Come back to me, please.

Lots of kisses,

Peter

"There must be some misunderstanding," thought Dolly. "Surely that John couldn't be my father, could it? Nor could that Peter be Uncle Pete!"

Suddenly, her father walked in. "The operation was a success!" he exclaimed. Confused and hurt, Dolly dropped the letter and ran out of the building.

The sky turned dark and it started raining. Tears brimmed in her eyes and raindrops ran down her face. The image of her father, whom she loved and adored, was shattered. Her heart weighed heavily. Cold and alone, she headed towards the cemetery and knelt before her mother's grave.

In the mist, a figure appeared and whispered into her ear. "Dolly my dear, forget the past of your father and forgive the 'him' standing right in front of you, for we all make mistakes. What matters is that we love each other." The voice then died down and the shadow faded away.

"Mum? Mum!"

Aroused from the vision, Dolly was startled to find herself in the arms of her father. They clutched each other and embraced. Gradually, the sun shone through the clouds. Together, father and daughter stood in front of the grave.

"Daddy, did you ever love Mom?" Dolly asked.

Doctor John looked at his daughter gently and smiled, turning his wedding ring.

CHAN Hoi Man
CHAN Tsz Kwan
HO Man Yu
LEE Ting Ting

Jockey Club Government Secondary School

An Unrequited Suitor



I looked at myself in the mirror. My front rabbit teeth were my biggest imperfection.

Last month, a girl called Elva was transferred to my department. From the moment she appeared, I was captivated.

She had a stunning appearance. She always smiled. I never thought that I would work with such a beautiful girl. She used a pleasant-smelling perfume that attracted me. Her fragrance and her smile aroused my curiosity. I wanted to know more about her. I could not stop thinking about Elva. I had developed a crush on her.

Elva was pleasant and sociable. It was not difficult for her to make friends. She mingled with other female colleagues in the department. However, I noticed that she seldom hung out with men.

At the 45th anniversary of my company, all the employees were invited to a high table dinner in the Malaysia Hotel. That night, Elva wore a white skirt. The white colour suited her. She was just like an angel. Her dress attracted many men's eyes. She kissed most of the female guests on the cheek but none of the men. I hoped she would kiss me.



A man with crooked teeth came up to her. He was one of the wealthiest men in the city. I couldn't hear their conversation clearly as I stood far away from them. However, I did hear her say, "I don't like your crooked teeth. Please get away from me." The man blushed and walked away.

Her words repeated in my mind a thousand times. I decided to have my teeth fixed. Then she might pay more attention to me. I was determined to be her boyfriend.

After a few days, I found a famous dentist and I asked him to help me with my teeth. No matter how much it cost, I knew it would be worthwhile. It would get me closer to Elva.

After the surgery, I felt great with my perfect teeth. I looked forward to going to work to see Elva's reaction to my new appearance.

This morning, I had breakfast with Elva in the canteen. I showed her my teeth and said, "How about my smile? I know that you do not like crooked teeth. So, I took sick leave to get some work done on them. I want to tell you that I am really into you. I want to start a relationship with you. Can we go out together?" Elva laughed loudly and said, "Come On! Don't you know?"

At that moment, it dawned on me. I could not say anything in reply.

WONG Cheuk Fai
LAI Wen Jian
LIU Ka Po

TWGHs Li Ka Shing College



"Do I look pretty in this dress, mommy?" asked Katie as she twirled in her new dress.

"The prettiest princess mommy's ever seen," I said.

I looked at her once angelic face, now swollen and weary, and choked back my tears. After all the suffering she'd been through, I couldn't believe we had to give up.

When most parents look back on their children's first few years, they think of the first cry, first baby steps, first word, and then first sentence. When I looked back, all I could think of was Katie's first signs of leukemia, the first hospital visit, the first bone marrow transplant.

When most parents imagine their children's future, they see them graduate, get married, and have kids. I used to imagine Katie's future too, now I know I'll have nothing to look forward to.

The doctors said there wasn't any hope and there was no point for Katie to suffer any longer. I wasn't sure if this was the right decision to make, but I couldn't bear to see Katie being tortured anymore. I never told Katie why I brought her back from the hospital, but I guess she knew.

"Mommy has a surprise for you. Close your eyes," I pulled out a kite and Katie screamed with joy.

"I thought you said we couldn't afford it, mommy," said Katie, staring at the kite in awe.

"Nothing matters more than you, sweetie," I said as I pulled her in for a bear hug. "Now, who wants to go kite-flying?"

I watched Katie run around flying her kite near the sunflower garden where I first met her dad. I watched her and only her, trying to remember every single detail – her freckles, her dimples, her eyes, her laugh – exactly how a perfectly happy seven-year-old should be.



I wondered if Katie's dad was watching us, how he would have felt if he were still here with us.

"You want to fly my kite with me, mommy?" asked Katie, interrupting my thoughts.

We ran and ran, chasing the wind, guiding the kite, breathing in the fragrance of the flowers. And for once, time seemed to slow down for us, our worries finally let us be.

We lay down on the grass, and for a long time, I felt genuinely contented. I had the meadow, the endless blue sky. I had the soft grass and beautiful sunflowers. Most importantly, I had Katie. I wished time would stop, making this moment last forever.

Waaahhhh!

Startled, we stood up, trying to figure out where that noise came from. Not far away, we saw a little boy, probably one or two years younger than Katie, bawling and thrashing, throwing a tantrum. But something seemed different about the boy. He seemed wilder, more animal-like than other kids I'd seen.

"Is he okay?" I asked the lady next to the boy, whom I guessed was his mother.

"It's okay. He's special," said the woman with a tint of sadness in her eyes. "He'll be over it in a minute."

Katie approached the little boy.

"Hi, my name is Katie. What's yours?"

The little boy just grunted in return.

"Mommy, why isn't he talking to me?" asked Katie, tears welling up in her eyes. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, sweetie, he's just sad. He'll be okay in a minute," I replied. "You didn't do anything wrong. Don't worry."

Katie turned to the little boy.

"Oh, so you're unhappy," she said. "It's okay. My mommy says there's nothing in the world worth wasting your tears over." Katie handed her kite to the boy. "Don't be sad. Here is my kite."



The little boy seemed to understand Katie's gesture and took the kite. Then he smiled at Katie and ran off.

"Katie, I thought you really wanted that kite," I said, surprised. "Are you sure you want to give it to him?"

"It's okay, mommy. I have you. That's enough."

I kissed her forehead. "Mommy's so proud of you."

We sat down with the soft grass and flowers embracing us. Katie rested her head on my lap as we watched the mesmerising sunset. It was beautiful, yet elusive. Perfect, yet only a moment's beauty. A miracle, yet a tragedy.

"Am I going to see daddy soon?" whispered Katie.

"Yes, sweetie, he's going to take care of you until mommy gets to heaven," I said, stroking her cheek.

"Will you miss me, mommy?" asked Katie.

“More than you could ever imagine. Every second of every minute,” I said, holding back my tears.

She nodded, satisfied with my answer, and closed her eyes.

“I had the best day with you today mommy. I love you.”

“I love you too, Katie.”

I held her close as she smiled, one last time.

CHAN Wai Suet, Gigi
CHENG Ting Chi
POON Long Wing, Sylvana

Queen Elizabeth School

Trials and Tribulations

Chapter 4



He had been trapped underground for two days. His face was seamed with wrinkles and dust. He could not forget what had happened. The stope had suddenly collapsed trapping all the miners inside. He did not know whether the others were dead or not, but he could not hear their groans anymore. He thought that he would die very soon, hopelessly.

In his despair, he smiled. It was really dark and cramped in the stope, but the gold made the atmosphere sparkle somehow. It was just like the universe, with darkness and a little brightness. He sneered. How ridiculous to be enjoying the sight of the stope at the last moment of his life. He dusted the dirt off his hat and picked up a piece of gold. Memories flashed through his mind.



He remembered life's joys and pleasures. He had a wife called May. Their romance began in college. Later they got married. They loved each other without reservation. Everything was going so smoothly, like a fairy tale.

He smiled, but soon tears ran down his face.

"No! No! Get away from me!" May yelled.

The knitting needles fell from May's hands and the candles were blown out in the commotion. May was pregnant with their second son. She was caught by the police because it was forbidden to have two children. They had saved lots of money after their first son Ron was born. They hoped that the money could save their second son. Sadly, May was still caught, but he had no idea at the time.

He thought that May had gone out. He finally found her in the local hospital. He could never forget the atmosphere there. It was as cold as hell. It was silent, but not peaceful. His wife was lying down on her sickbed. Her eyelids would not open anymore. She had lost too much blood in an induced abortion forced by the police. She was dead. He cried loudly and hugged her, but May could no longer answer him. She was just like a wilted rose. He regretted letting May suffer so much pain. He clenched his fists and cried.

After May's death, he put all of his hope on Ron, his only son. Ron was a clever and intelligent student, always the bright star in the class. He was outstanding.

He thought that his tragedy would end, but that's not what happened. When Ron was twenty years old, he held a campaign with his schoolmates for freedom. Ron wanted to change the rotten nation with his strength. He could no longer yield to the corruption of the officials. He succeeded, but only for a while.

Ron was killed under the bullets of the revolution which was held in the capital city.
He cried uncontrollably. He could no longer forget how his family members had died. He could no longer forget how much blood May and Ron had shed. He could no longer forget how this peaceful country had destroyed his life completely.

Clatter

His hand could no longer hold on to the gold. With tears of anger and despair, he closed his eyes. He prayed for all of his companions, like him, victims of misfortune.

TSANG Po Lam
WONG Shu Ting
LAM Sze Hon
LO Ka Shun

Carmel Secondary School



The clouds have been gathering for hours, I guess it's going to rain soon enough. Perhaps it's the only thing that would mourn my death. No, I'm not some kind of prophet, just another boy seeking to end his life.

Loser. That's what they call me at school. Sometimes they call me 'anorexic loser' because of how freakishly thin I am. I've never won anything at all, not even a basketball match. I'm too short and fragile. I'm not only an 'anorexic loser', but I'm a 'brainless loser', they say. It must be true or else how on earth was I able to fail all my tests? Although I work really hard, my stupid brain doesn't cooperate with me. I'm not even sure if I have one! I just can't get the stuff inside my head no matter how hard or how long I try. Maybe I'm just not born to study. Or maybe my existence is just a hilarious mistake.

Then there is my hopeless family. I have an alcoholic father, who comes home drunk and enraged. He lives in his own fantasy world, which I can never understand. What amazes me is how bad the bruises can be after a beating. Perhaps this is why my mother left without a word. Her last visit was five years ago. The only evidence of her return was the musky smell of her perfume lingering in the living room and the still-warm breakfast on the dining table. Perhaps I, too, should never come back.



And things are not what they used to be. I am totally devastated, and I'll tell you why. My girlfriend ditched me yesterday for the captain of the basketball team. Well, I guess it's obvious enough. Even a birdbrain like me can understand. Who in their right mind would prefer a loser like me to a popular guy like him? Except, it's so excruciatingly heart-breaking! I am left with no choice.

Jumping off a building to finish myself off sounds good enough to me. There are plenty of tall buildings in this big city. I've always wanted to try the free fall ride at the amusement park, but never had a chance. Today, I will finally get a chance to experience a real free fall. Sounds like a happy ending.

So here I am, standing on the street corner, across from the building I had in mind. Soon, I will pass that point of no return. As I wait impatiently for the pedestrian light to turn green, I see a little girl dashing across the road and a colossal truck driving towards her at full speed.



Maybe it's the adrenaline or maybe it's the thought that saving her might glorify my death. Either way, I throw myself towards the little girl and push her out of the way. Now I am on all fours and before I can react …

Bam!

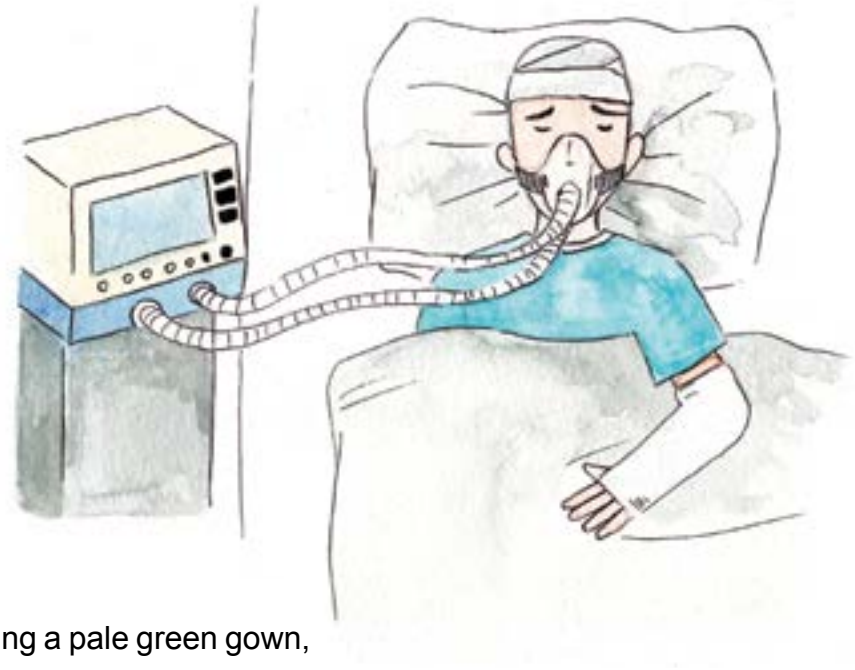
The truck lifts me sky-high and I land on a rough surface by the side of the road. The momentum is so strong that I believe I have fractured my arm. My head is dizzy and I can hear people screaming around me. I can't concentrate anymore. A flood of pain penetrates through my chest. Probably broken ribs, I imagine. I can feel the warm blood on my forehead. I realise that I am losing blood quickly, and my white shirt is now a shade of crimson.

There is only one thing on my mind. How on earth can I still be conscious? Dizzy, yes, but still alive. Why can't my destiny let me go, just let me die? People begin to congregate around me. My vision goes fuzzy, gradually. I can hardly focus anymore. All I can see now are light and fuzzy faces, light, fuzzy faces, lightness, fuzziness, and finally, darkness.

It's freezing here.

Where am I?

Am I dead?



The effort to open my eyelids drains all the energy from me. I have my eyes open now and I am in a plain, immaculate white room. I see the medical apparatus beside me and the breathing apparatus covering my nose and mouth. I am wearing a pale green gown, no more than a thin sheet of cloth. I realise I must be in a hospital.

What? I'm not dead?

Such a rude awakening. My fate never gives me what I want.

A nurse barges in. She seems pretty astounded to see me awake. She presses the button beside my bed and a bunch of doctors soon arrive. I am suddenly surrounded by a dozen people and I can catch words like 'miracle', 'amazing', 'fascinating'. They remove my breathing apparatus and ask me if I can breathe okay. I nod. It is not until this moment that I notice my arm and forehead feel normal. The pain has eased and I wonder how I was able to recover so quickly.

The doctors and nurses move out of my room and a moment later the room is filled with news reporters and cameras. They ask me questions like, “What is it like to be in a coma for three months?” and “How does it feel to be a hero?” I am speechless for a few minutes. It takes me time to process the information. So, I must have saved that little girl, and I have been in a coma for three months, well that explains a lot. It seems too dramatic to believe. I start giggling. “Thank you” is all I can say in front of the cameras.

Thanks to that other me, the heroic side of me, I regain my hope towards life. If a jerk like me can become a hero, then life is not that desperate. Becoming famous does not help me much with my studies, but it helps direct me into doing volunteer work. I also have opportunities to share my own experience on different occasions, to give people inspiration in life.

I am going to another sharing session today. As I am walking on the street, the sun is burning ferociously in the blue sky. Well, I guess it burns for me.

HO Hoi Ying
LEE Tim Lok
CHAN Ming Ho
PANG Wing Man

Pui Ching Middle School

The Most Precious Thing



In children's eyes, a loving home is the most precious thing in their lives. If only adults could always remember this!

In 15-year-old Gloria's life, this most precious thing was fast becoming a distant, unrealistic dream. Gloria's mind wandered from her studies to this thought, as the 'Boom, Boom, Boom' sound reached her ears.

The repetitive thudding sound of a shouting, threatening voice permeated the stillness of the public housing flat. It spilled out into the corridor where Gloria was huddled on the floor with her revision papers. The windows and the walls vibrated softly – in time with the trembling of Gloria's hands as she held on tightly to her papers. Even the sound of the television on full volume was muted by the one-sided quarrelling. Small silent teardrops fell from Gloria's eyes.

The sharp clarity of words suddenly broke through the thudding volume. "How dare you disobey my words, you cow. Take that! Take that!" Gloria's stepfather shouted violently to the beat of the blows from his fists.

"No, please stop it. Please!" Gloria's mother cried and begged.

Then an ominous silence fell. Outside, the rain stopped falling and the wind chime stopped swinging. Not even a whisper could be heard.

"Mother?" Gloria started questioningly. Then, "Mother!" she shouted in alarm.



Silence.

Still shaking, Gloria took soft tentative steps into the bedsit. She strained to hear anything that would answer the questions racing through her terrified

mind, struggling to hear past the fast thumping of her own heart. Cold sweat rolling down her brow stung her eyes as she gripped the door handle and peered through the slight opening of the doorway to see what was happening.

The door fell open easily. Her mother was on the floor, face bruised, and unconscious. Gloria never wondered at her stepfather's actions. She already knew it was his habit, that's all. The pattern had always been the same. Only this time, there was that dreaded silence.

"Mother, are you okay? Can you move?" Gloria asked her mother again and again in rising panic.

Gloria felt her stepfather's presence as his shadow crept over her and her mother. She heard him gasping for breath as he surveyed his wife's crumpled, battered body. He used a tissue to wipe the sweat from his face, revealing the wrinkles and deep crevices of an old and bitter face.



"Are you completely stupid?" he growled loudly, voice rising in anger, eyes red with rage. "When will you learn to mind your own business?"

Gloria turned around and covered her face just in time. For the first time ever, she faced the same blows – now raining down upon her – as her mother, sharing in her mother's misery. She cried and shouted as loud as she could, but no one came to help.

"You are nothing but a piece of trash. Crying and begging just like your stupid mother. But lucky for me, I will never see you again. See how well you can live without my support!" he shouted, certain he had terrified her with the fear of poverty.

Gloria was stunned into silence. Her stepfather was leaving? How could she be so lucky?

As he turned and stormed off, Gloria no longer felt her pain and she rose from the floor. And like a miracle, so did her mother, her battered face beaming with delight and hope.

LEUNG Sin Yee, Muriel
LEUNG Siu Ling, Rizel
WONG Man Ho, Jerry
HO Hiu Tung, Cathy

TMCC Holm Glad College



Other Stories

Chapter 5



Chris was alone, sitting on a bed in a ward. His muscular body was still recovering from the tragedy that had haunted him since that day. His smooth face and his curly black hair did not hide his sadness very well.

Staring at his injured limb, he sighed. A series of images hit him, ghosts of the past that he would rather forget, and a stream of tears rolled down from his swollen, red eyes – his dream was shattered. His right leg was broken, and so was his heart. Chris couldn't help but remember that fateful day.

*****

"Alright, let's do this!" Taking the ball that his teammate had passed to him, Chris advanced. Instinctively, he evaded the two opposing defenders that charged at him, skilfully guiding the ball towards the penalty area. Staring at the goal, he shot. The ball flew into the goal like a bullet. He was panting, but smiling. He turned to his cheering parents. That was his very first match. He was only in Primary 2, but from that moment on he knew football was going to be his lifelong passion.



"Your son has great potential. That's the kind of talent we're looking for. With proper training, he'll be a star one day," Mr Lee, the coach, told Chris's parents, with anticipation in his eyes.

"I want to play more football. It's fun!" Chris said, feeling happy after his first goal. Seeing how enthusiastic Chris was, the adults gave him approving smiles.

*****

"It seems like holding on to football isn't the best choice for you. Your talent in science is the envy of many people!" said John.

It had been six years since Chris fell in love with football. Chris and his best friend were sitting at McDonalds, talking over lots of things.



"You know I love football, John. I've spent a lot of time training myself. I truly want to be a professional someday," Chris replied, looking John right in the eyes.

"You're training for 10 hours a week! 'A lot of time' is quite an understatement," John joked. "But seriously, those pros only play for several years before they're quickly forgotten by everyone. Ronaldo was famous for five years, now no one cares about him. Of all the careers you can pick, you choose football? I'm not sure about that." John was concerned.

"It's always been my choice from the beginning. I chose this road, and I'm not giving up. I'll be the best footballer in Hong Kong!" Chris asserted staunchly.

"Always the eternal optimist. I guess no one can stop you now. Looking forward to your autograph!" John smiled. Chris had always impressed John, not just because of his

exceptional football skills, but also his ability to look on the bright side of everything.

*****

"…and Chris steals the ball, fantastic! I gotta tell you he's only 16, but he's got great potential!" the commentator shouted uncontrollably.

The crowd was cheering for the final match of the Asian Youth Football Championship. Team Hong Kong, under the leadership of Captain Chris Wong, had won several matches that they weren't initially favoured to win. Determined to win at all costs, they were now facing South Korea, last year's champion.

The ball followed an erratic pattern under the clever footwork of Chris Wong, throwing Team South Korea into confusion and the spectators into amazement.

"Alright, let's do this!" Chris was 20 yards away from the goal. His agile body danced past two South Korean defenders, taking the ball with him.



Chris was ready. He could see the spectators standing up and feel the ground trembling under their screams. “Just as usual,” he thought to himself.

I’m not sure about that.

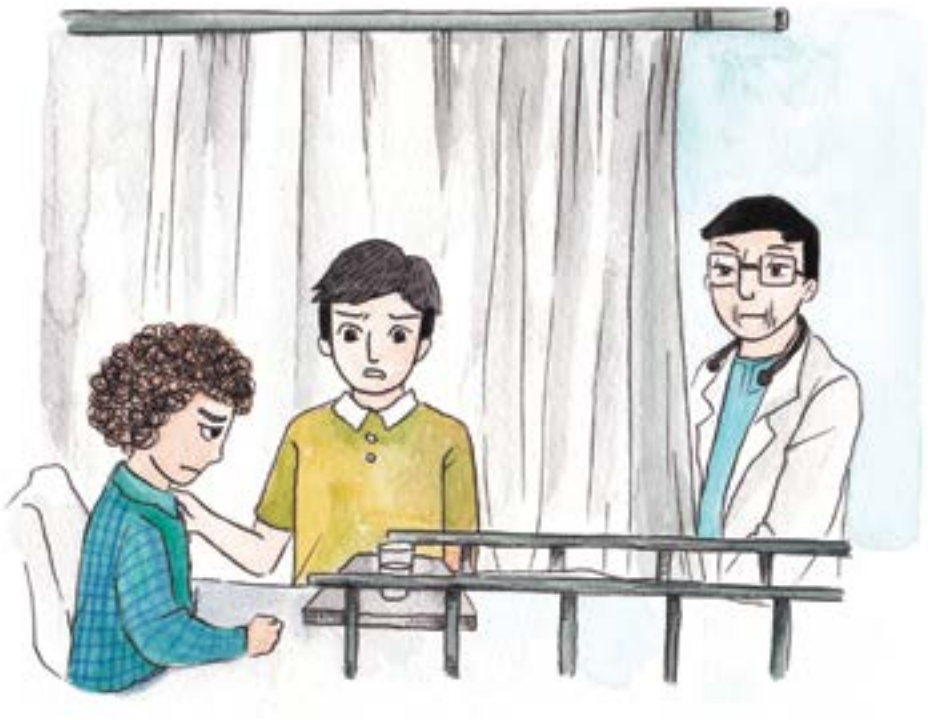
John’s words suddenly jumped into his mind, forcing his eyes off the goal. Instantly everything came into his mind – the spectators’ cheers, the gaze of his teammates, the words of John, the hopes of becoming the best player. The dam broke and random thoughts rushed into his head.

He stepped on to the ball while it was rolling ferociously towards the goal. The first thing he felt was an agonising pain, followed by a loss of balance. He fell on to the pitch and his vision slowly blurred under the gaze of the thousands of silenced spectators.

*****

“Your injuries aren’t serious. I expect a full recovery in two weeks,” the doctor informed Chris, who was lying in a hospital bed.

“Hey, John!” Chris immediately recognised his best friend as he walked in.



“Chris, I’m sorry…”

“Yeah I know, everyone’s been saying that, but thanks anyway.” Chris sounded a little annoyed.

“It’s not just that,” John continued. “Remember when I told you that professional players’ careers don’t last long?” Chris was looking at him, surprised. “You aren’t bad, but maybe now’s the time to move on.”

Chris was silent as John left saying the customary “Get well soon.”

Chris immersed himself in deep thought. “Should I quit?” he asked himself aloud.

“Maybe your friend’s right. Professional football just doesn’t work in Hong Kong,” replied the doctor.

Chris turned to one side, hiding his tears from the staff.

*****

It was ten o’ clock at night. Despite the doctor’s advice, Chris was still awake, alone, sobbing quietly in the lightless ward. His passion for football and his friend’s suggestions were tearing him apart. The door opened.

“Chris?”

It was a familiar voice. Raising his head, he saw a figure walking towards him. Turning on the lamp next to his bed, he could see that it was Mr Lee, his coach.

“What’s wrong?’ Mr Lee gently asked.

“I don’t even know what to do anymore!” Chris told Mr Lee his inner struggles in a muffled voice. His quiet sobs turned into uncontrollable crying. As Mr Lee sat next to him, Chris leaned towards his coach, seeking comfort.

“I embarrassed myself, my team and Hong Kong, I can’t forgive myself. I can’t go on!”

“Ten years of training, and it all ends because of one single mistake in a match? Your teammates understand and are eager for you to return.” Mr Lee continued with words of encouragement. “We all know you are a great player, and we all know you love football. Please, we’re not giving up on you. Don’t give up on yourself.”

“People always say that professional footballers have no future in Hong Kong, that I should focus on my studies. Football can be a hobby, but it can never be a lifelong profession. Have I reached the end of my journey in the world of football? Should I give up before it’s too late?”

"It's your life, Chris. No one else can tell you how to live. Your journey only ends when you say it does. Listen to your heart, Chris. I know it's telling you to keep going. If you have the will, then no one can stop you."

Mr Lee reached into his pocket and took out a piece of paper.

"There's going to be a tournament a month from now," Mr Lee said, with anticipation in his eyes. "We want you to lead the team."

"I…"

"Remember: no one else can tell you how to live out your life."

LO Lezhi
LUK Kin To
PANG Chun Wah
LUI Yat Wai

ELCHK Yuen Long Lutheran Secondary School



The last ray of light had long vanished from the horizon. Steve sat on the branches and watched as the street below him gradually fell into a slumber. There were a few clouds hovering in the sky tonight, with the moon shining particularly brightly. He checked his old, well-worn wrist watch. It read 11:30 pm. It was time.

He pulled his hoodie over his head and swung his grappling hook over the iron gates towering over him. He had been studying the entire layout of the mansion for months now, and so he took great care to stay inside the blind spot of the security cameras. He landed on the edge of Warrington's garden with a soft thud. He took a deep breath and smiled. The excitement of heading into enemy territory was intoxicating.

Steve gazed at the luxurious mansion before him. He realised, with a pang in his heart, that the majority of people in society could have worked their whole lives, but still would not have been able to afford one floor of this complex. It served as a painful reminder of the sheer disparity of wealth in the country. The sheer cruelty of reality fuelled his anger and strengthened his belief, deep down in his heart, that he was doing what was right.

He crouched low among the many bushes as he crept towards his destination, scanning his surroundings warily. Steve pressed himself against a tree trunk, narrowly avoiding a sudden beam of light. A guard was sweeping his torch across the area, and, satisfied, was about to resume his patrol down the garden path, when Steve swiftly leapt out from behind the tree and knocked him out with the handle of his gun before the poor fellow could utter a single sound. "Sorry, pal," Steve whispered as he rummaged through the guard's pockets and found his prize – a security clearance card.



Moments later, Steve unlocked the back door and slipped inside the mansion. If he recalled correctly, Warrington's study would be on the 4th floor. He ran up two flights of stairs and ducked into a deserted corridor to avoid, according to the patrol schedule, Guard No. 12. Steve took a moment to catch his breath, then moved down the corridor to another set of stairs. He was on constant vigilance for all potential threats, yet his eyes never wavered from the route ahead that would ultimately take him to Warrington's study.

Afterwards, it was just a matter of following the planned route before he found his destination around the corner, with a guard stationed at the door. He won't be a problem, Steve mused as he swiftly put the lone guard into a deep sleep with a poison dart to his neck. He paused before the door, his mind wandering back to his family, his neighbours, and all the poor men who were suffering, while these rich, corrupt scumbags were keeping all the cash to themselves. *Not anymore*. Steve quietly slipped inside Warrington's study and, looking around, found the safe that he was looking for.



He experienced the familiar rush of adrenaline through his entire body, a sign that he was about to fulfill his objective. He was upon the safe in a matter of seconds, all the while taking in the lavish decor and the wolf-pelt carpet he was kneeling on. The ever-vibrant lights of the city sparkled in the full-length glass panel. A computer, undoubtedly the latest and most exorbitant model, was left running on Warrington's desk, humming ever so slightly in the background. *Such luxury – the abhorrence of it all!* With hands trembling from excitement, Steve picked the lock of the safe in no time, and before he knew it, the glare of gold ingots, row upon row, met his eyes.

Steve's experience did not prepare him for this – he was expecting banknotes in their place. The thought that each ingot was equivalent to a pile of banknotes caused him to grind his teeth in frustration. Without any extra thought, he shoved the ingots into his rucksack while the cogs in his brain spun in search of the perfect exfiltration route.

The objective is achieved, Steve mused as he hefted the rucksack on to his shoulders. Just then a thought occurred to him: *The computer! God knows what incriminating documents could be found in the device!* He strode to the computer and, to his delight, found it logged in.

A sheen of sweat broke out on Steve's forehead. Rummaging around in his pockets, he fished out an auto-downloading USB, which he immediately jammed into the port to initiate the download. As file names flashed before his eyes, his heart started to pound with increasing velocity. Scientific research documents. Breakthroughs in nuclear technology. Plans for an underground weapons factory. Strategies – Steve's blood ran cold at the sight – on the methodical occupation of neighbouring countries. *I have stumbled upon a treasure trove of schemes, diabolical in nature!* He ripped out the USB, his hands shaking violently now. *If I can expose this information, the regime is going down!* He pocketed the USB, and –

"What are you doing in my study?"

Steve whirled around to meet the eyes of Warrington, which were clear of any traces of drowsiness. Warrington was an ailing old man, but his age did not warrant leniency. Steve could spot a glint of deception and cunning beneath the clouds of his eyes.



"You have nowhere else to run, son," Warrington warned, and faster than his age would have normally allowed, extracted a gun from the fallen guard at the entrance.

He started to advance on Steve. "The time it would take me to unload this gun is all it would take to end your pathetic life of thieving."

Steve's expression, which had been as cold as stone since his intrusion, broke into a half smile.

"I doubt that very much, old man. Your time in power is now in countdown. Consider that as a warning."

On that note, Steve flung his rucksack full of gold at the glass panel behind him, which shattered and splintered upon contact. In doing so, he backpedalled towards the now available exfiltration route and back-somersaulted into the night sky and on to the thickly tree-covered slope, leaving an incredulous Warrington staring at his ruined study.

But there was something to reap from the incident. Warrington was fairly certain that he had seen this person before. He called up an image feed of the news and searched for recent house break-ins.

There. On one particular news report, a grainy image of the intruder was shown, but Warrington could distinguish from the image that it was the same young man whom he had just encountered.

Steve Adler. Your life is about to go downhill.

*****

Steve was quick to recover from the concussion. He briefly dusted himself off and left for the highway. To the casual observer, he looked like one of the unemployed masses roaming about for a job, and not like a house intruder with a rucksack full of gold ingots. Steve's mind was spinning. He was in possession of documents that could spell the end of this corrupt government. The only step left to take was to turn over the files to someone who could broadcast them to the foreign media. *But I need to get home first.*

What a night! Steve thought to himself. Instead of being rich, he found himself the mastermind of a conspiracy against the government, and all in the short space of a few midnight hours. Dawn was approaching, and the clear sky was stained in the bright colour of tangerine. The ominous clouds no longer hovered above him. Cycling on the streets, holding the USB that stored the evidence of heinous and inhumane minds, Steve cracked a sardonic smile. *The pride of having the ability to overthrow this corrupt government! The satisfaction of possessing dominance!* However, all he wanted to do at this moment was to prove to his estranged wife and children that he was now the world's hero: The Robin Hood that would save millions from being slaughtered. He eventually arrived at the house, and his once-wicked smile became an incredulous frown. His casual attitude vanished, and in seconds, the bike, the USB, and his jaw, all fell to the ground. *A catastrophe!*



The door was busted, and at once he could see that nothing in his house was in order. The wardrobes and closets were all flipped over, just like the chairs and the table. The chandelier was smashed on the floor along with the sizzling television. A note was nailed to the door.

Slowly, he read the note, and slowly his eyes became red. Slowly, he clenched his fists and stared at the ceiling, then gave out a huge cry of disbelief. This was far beyond the limit and in no way acceptable! His family had just been brutally taken away. He continued reading, and his swollen eyes bulged even more: The only way to see his family again was to turn in the incriminating documents to Warrington. Demolished by agony, he finished reading the last statement: ‘Those who yearn too much for freedom must have it stripped, and must see others suffer from the consequences.’

FAN Chun Fai, Wallace
KWAN Chung Yeung, Jonathan
YU Shing Chit, Alvin

St. Joseph’s College

Creak…



The door of the Physics laboratory was pushed open quietly. Alex sneaked into the lab.

He walked on his toes to the corner of the room. He fastened the last bolts of the machine he had been working on for 10 nights and made some final adjustments. He nearly cried when the screen of the machine blinked and came to life.

"TYPHOON DESTINATION?"

His index finger quickly tapped on the keyboard, "HONG KONG".



"CONFIRM?"

He hesitated.

"YES", he typed.

There was another quick tap on the ENTER key. It's done!

*****

The next day, Alex went to school as usual.

"Why aren't you revising for the History test, Alex?" his best friend, Jacob, asked.

"I wouldn't need to," Alex replied boastfully.

Jacob looked surprisingly at Alex, the last in the class in History.

"You'll know what I mean soon enough," Alex assured Jacob.

Indeed, the public announcement system broadcast the principal's words.

"According to the Hong Kong Observatory, a typhoon is approaching Hong Kong now. All students are required to stay in the classroom until further announcement."

Alex raised his eyebrows towards Jacob.

*****

It is 8 a.m. and the No. 10 typhoon signal remains in force. Super Typhoon Bolaven is centred fifty kilometres south of Hong Kong.

A nasty grin swept across Alex's face. It was already the second day since the No. 10 signal had been hoisted.



"It should be called Super Typhoon Alex instead," he said to himself, laughing at the thought. "A holiday with no homework, no tests… Perfect! Everyone should say thanks to me."

He switched off the TV and continued to play with his PSP.

*****

Welcome to the latest news. Typhoon Bolaven has brought over 500 mm of rainfall and caused serious flooding in Sheung Wan. Also, several landslides have occurred in the New Territories and nine people have been injured.

Alex switched off his PSP and listened nervously.

Two surfing teenagers were missing in Repulse Bay. A tree in Stanley collapsed and killed a girl who was returning home.

Alex swallowed hard and listened attentively, not believing what he had done.



Super Typhoon Bolaven shows no sign of leaving Hong Kong at the moment. It might stay at least a week in Hong Kong. Since the wind speed is extremely high, it will cause huge destruction and unprecedented economic loss.

BANG! Alex's PSP slipped and hit hard on the floor.

"This is not what I wanted! I only wanted a holiday, that's all!" he screamed. "It's my entire fault. I must stop the evil machine now, before it destroys everything!"

*****

Alex rushed out of the door and dashed towards his school. Under the heavy rain and violent wind, he could hardly walk. Though soaking wet, he managed to reach school. He seized the machine and attempted to stop it.

"Oh God, where is the "On/Off" button! Come on!" Alex screamed hysterically. Discovering that the machine had no "On/Off" button, Alex cried and collapsed on the floor. After a while, he struggled to get up and approached the electric socket.

When he was trying to pull the plug out of the socket, he felt an electric current passing through his fingers, all the way up his arm.

He fell hard on the floor. At the same time, he noticed that the machine stopped blinking. "I did it! I did it!"



He passed out.

*****

The following day, he went to school as usual.

“What happened to you? There are bruises all over your face. And look at your arms!” Jacob yelled.

65 “Nothing.” Alex forced a smile. “Nothing at all.”

HO Wui Hang
LAW Yuen Sun
LEE Dustin
TOM Kin Lok, Felix

Wah Yan College, Hong Kong