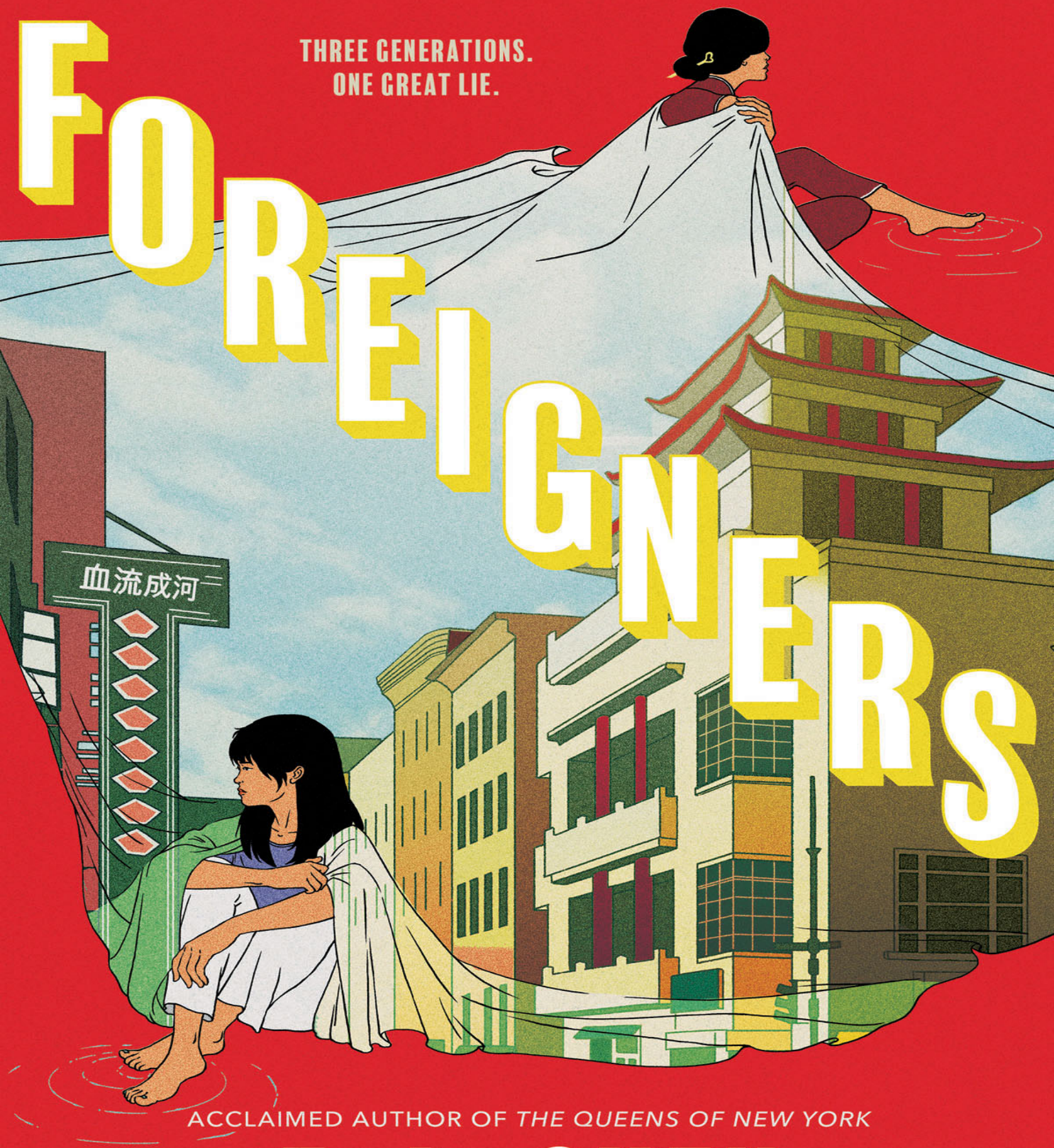
THREE GENERATIONS.
ONE GREAT LIE.

FOREIGNERS



ACCLAIMED AUTHOR OF *THE QUEENS OF NEW YORK*

E. L. SHEN

FOREIGNERS

E. L. SHEN

Quill Tree Books
An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

OceanofPDF.com

Dedication

For my grandparents

OceanofPDF.com

Epigraph

God hath given you one face, and you make yourself another.

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

OceanofPDF.com

Contents

Cover
Title Page
Dedication
Epigraph

Prologue
1: Zheng Yi
2: Zheng Yi
3: Dawn Chin
4: Zheng Yi
5: Dawn Chin
6: Duanfang
7: Zheng Yi
8: Zheng Yi
9: Zheng Yi
10: Dawn Chin
11: Dawn Chin
12: Zheng Yi
13: Zheng Yi
14: Duanfang
15: Dawn Chin
16: Audrey Zheng
17: Dawn Chin
18: Audrey Zheng
19: Dawn Chin
20: Duanfang

21: Audrey Zheng
22: Dawn Chin
23: Audrey Zheng
24: Audrey Zheng
25: Dawn Chin
26: Audrey Zheng
27: Duanfang
28: Dawn Chin
29: Audrey Zheng
30: Dawn Chin
31: Audrey Zheng
32: Duanfang
33: Audrey Zheng
34: Dawn Chin
35: Audrey Zheng
36: Audrey Zheng
37: Audrey Zheng
38: Dawn Chin
39: Audrey Zheng
40: Dawn Chin
41: Audrey Zheng
42: Duanfang
43: Audrey Zheng
44: Dawn Chin
45: Dawn Chin
46: Duanfang
47: Audrey Zheng
48: Dawn Chin
49: Audrey Zheng
50: Audrey Zheng
51
52: Dawn Chin
53: Duanfang

54: Dawn Chin
55: Duanfang
56: Dawn Chin
Epilogue
Author’s Note

Acknowledgments
About the Author
Books by E. L. Shen
Back Ad
Copyright
About the Publisher

OceanofPDF.com

Prologue

Before the parties and the wars, the new world and the blood, there lived a young man named Duanfang. Born under hazy skies in Tangshan, China, he always knew he would be great. After all, his father had been great, and so had his father, and now he, on the precipice of young adulthood, would learn to be magnificent. Standing on the balcony, flanked by pillars and sheltered by a ribbed pagoda roof, Duanfang dreamed of all the ways he would rip open the seams of China and reshape the country, thread by thread.

It was 1878, and anything was possible—though, of course, this hadn't always been the case. For centuries, the Han Chinese, with their sharp features and pompous religions and languages and traditions, had ruled China. They had pushed out the so-called barbaric Mongols to become the ethnic majority. But then something miraculous happened—the Manchus, the small, sidelined descendants of wheat and soybean farmers, took power. And thus, Duanfang's Manchu family, like stones in a game of Go, defeated their enemies and helped rule the new dynasty under their emperor's firm hand.

Yes, Duanfang would continue their legacy. What did it matter the secrets he held? What did it matter who he really was? These were things no one needed to find out. His reputation would outweigh his past.

Duanfang curled his fingers around the balcony railing. He decided then and there that he wouldn't just reshape China; he'd reshape the entire world. His children and their children and their grandchildren would

forever be changed by Duanfang's decisions. He knew this to be true. He would die with his secrets.

OceanofPDF.com

1
Zheng Yi

1965

Zheng Yi's fifth and final plane ride is bumpy. She can hardly remember each of her connecting flights, foggy memories tying together her pit stops: Taipei to bustling Tokyo and then to the hot beaches of Honolulu, where she stayed for only a night, followed by a long flight to San Francisco, where she met aunties and uncles she'd never seen before in her life, and then a thankfully uneventful, sleepy ride to Chicago. A week ago, she'd never left her home country, Taiwan, except for when she was a baby and lived in China. Now she has a collection of stamps on her passport, stuffed between the hard flaps like pineapple paste in her favorite shortbread cakes. There won't be pineapple cake at her final destination: New York City. Yi can be sure of that.

The flight attendant bravely wheels her cart down the aisle despite the rattling plane. Yi tries not to focus on her growing nausea and instead examines the flight attendant's silk scarf neatly tied around her neck, her crisp white button-down peeking out beneath a navy blazer, paired with a matching pencil skirt. Yi looks down at her own outfit rumpled underneath her seat belt: the pink-and-orange flowery qipao Mama sewed for her last spring and the scuffed kitten heels pinching her feet. The shoes are hand-me-downs from one of Mama's friends, and Yi is pretty sure they date back to at least 1950. Yi wonders what the girls in New York wear in this wide-

open year of 1965. She wonders if they will be as fashionable as the flight attendant.

"Would you like something to drink?" The flight attendant turns to Yi and flashes a red lipstick smile, and Yi appreciates that with her uniform, she resembles the colors of the American flag.

Yi nods and is proud of herself for understanding the flight attendant's English words, though she still has to translate them to Mandarin in her head and worries that she is nodding too late, like a sloth. She is rapidly realizing that all those English classes she took back home were no match for the jumbled sentences tossed back and forth at the check-in counter and in the coffee line and on the plane, when she wasn't strong enough to lift her baggage into the overhead compartment and wanted to ask the man in the window seat to help her but didn't know how to say the word *suitcase*. She had to violently point until her seatmate finally understood her pantomiming and heaved her baggage into the bin. He patted her head afterward, as if she were a scared puppy.

Yi says "Water" to the flight attendant, because it's a word she knows how to pronounce correctly. She has learned from her previous four flights that the water will be cold, not boiling hot, like she wants. It would be too complicated to explain how no one ever drinks cold water in Taiwan and that warm water (*not* tea) soothes her stomach. The flight attendant places the plastic cup on Yi's open tray, and she tepidly sips, letting the icy water slide down her throat. Depositing the cup back on her tray, she watches it shudder with the shaking plane. Yi feels another wave of nausea coming on and closes her eyes.

In the darkness, she replays the image of her brother's squishy cheeks, his eyelashes dotted with tears when she hugged him goodbye. She wanted to hold him for minutes—hours, even—but she was whisked away into other arms—Baba's crinkled sleeves and the insides of Mama's bony elbows. Yi slinks through a film roll of memories like she's trying to tuck each one away before it expires: nights in the courtyard reading folktales; her best friends, Sula and Lula, who always wear identical clothes as identical twins; Baba gesticulating over horsehead tilefish and rice cakes at Chūnjié dinner; Mama's sly eye roll at his stories, the way she kisses Yi's forehead every night before bed even though Yi is seventeen and not seven, like her brother. When she hugged Liwei goodbye, she wanted to say *I'll miss you*, but she knew she'd start crying too, and then her brother's tears

would pour, and everyone would be a disaster. It was better to be stoic, to be the responsible, composed older sister.

She doesn't feel so composed now. She will miss Sula and Lula's outfits and Mama's lectures and Baba's long-winded recollections of the war and how the instant Mao Zedong took power, they were on that first boat to Taipei with Chiang Kai-Shek himself. (Yi is not so sure about this part of the story, but she doesn't dare refute her father.)

Yi scrunches her eyes and ignores her trembling hands. *I chose this*, she reminds herself. It was Yi who applied to the American schools, half expecting them to turn her down. When she ripped open the letter and read the words *Congratulations, Ms. Zheng, you've been accepted to Beecher Preparatory High School on a full scholarship*, she had to blink multiple times and make sure she really understood the English words *congratulations* and *accepted* and *full scholarship*. Her final year of high school in Manhattan, New York City. A place that sounds like something she's read about in one of her folktales.

America is the beautiful country. America is the land of opportunity, she lectures herself, pretending she is Mama, stern and confident and unafraid. She will live with a host family—Mama and Baba's old friends from Taipei who immigrated to New York a few years ago—and nanny their young children after school in exchange for their kindness. She will better her English and meet new people and find a husband, though Yi cannot think of the word *marriage* without wanting to vomit.

Mama and Baba already have someone picked out for her: a boy who goes to Yi's American high school and whose parents Mama and Baba were close to in Shanghai, before the war. Supposedly his parents were extremely wealthy before tragically passing away a few years ago in a car accident in New York, leaving a teenage son behind. Yi thinks of this boy as a book character—a poor, raggedy orphan—even though he has a trust fund and *excellent prospects*, which is why her parents are so keen on their courtship in the first place. In her purse is a slip of paper Mama forced her to bring all the way to America with the boy's name on it. *Calvin Chin*, Yi mouths, the *cal* and the *vin* peculiar on her lips, a name with rounded corners that don't exist in Mandarin. Yi tightens her grasp on the seat belt. She will not focus on sad book character boys and will only imagine glossy skyscrapers; smooth, paved streets; and stylish, perfect suits like the flight attendant's.

Soon, she drifts off, dreaming of nothing, and when she awakens, the plane is hurtling toward the ground, its wheels spinning down the runway so quickly, Yi is convinced it will lift off and whirl her back to Taiwan. But instead, a voice coughs into the intercom and says, “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to New York City.” Yi feels nauseous again.

OceanofPDF.com

2
Zheng Yi

The moment Yi arrives in New York, she is surrounded by a flurry of boys. Three little ones, to be exact—her new babysitting charges, Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy, whose names also sound strange on her tongue. Even though they only immigrated from Taipei a few years ago, the children move like Westerners with their pounding, squeaky sneakers and their loud yelps and the lopsided bangs swept across their foreheads.

"Boys!" their mother scolds, her voice quiet yet sharp to cut through the crowded airport terminal.

Yi reminds herself that Auntie Fan is in some ways *her* mother too, though she looks nothing like Mama. Mama rolls her hair into ringlets every morning except when she plays mahjong with the neighbors—then she wears a bun to show that she means business. Mama dons knee-length silk qipaos and heels and an array of muted pink lipsticks. Auntie Fan's hair, Yi thinks, could fit many bees inside it. It is so tall, and Yi wonders how she got the crown of her head to resemble the arch of a rainbow.

The boys aren't listening, so Auntie Fan must grab them one by one, her bouffant swaying with the swish of her skirt. When she's successfully scooped up her children by the backs of their T-shirts, she motions for Yi to follow her through the terminal's double doors. Yi lumbers behind, dragging her suitcases as she tries to keep up.

In the cab, Auntie Fan chatters on about her husband, who is away on business as a legal assistant to a Manhattan lawyer. She says this proudly

even though Yi knows Uncle Wen used to be a mathematics professor in Taipei, like Baba.

"This is why we're able to afford the cab," Auntie Fan whispers, twisting her neck to the back seat to glance at Yi. "Otherwise, we would have taken the bus."

Yi nods, squished between the boys' sharp elbows. Edwin, the oldest, stabs her shoulder with a forceful pointer finger. She stiffens, trying not to flinch.

"I don't need a nanny," Edwin declares. "I'm eight. Mama says I'm a big boy."

"Okay," Yi replies. She half smiles at his pleased grin. "You can be my helper, then."

At that, he stuffs his hand under her armpit and snuggles into the crook of her shoulder. Yi feels so many things at once: relief at his sudden and easy sweetness, a pang for her marshmallow-cheeked brother, and a literal pang as they hit a pothole on the highway.

She looks out the window as the turnpike gives way to paved black streets, flowering trees, toasted red town houses, and shops with names like Liebman's and Stetson Hats and La Moderna Bakery. Soon, the shops fold into taller buildings with fire escapes zigzagging up the walls, reminding Yi of the crude mountains she and Liwei used to draw to represent Qixing's bushy tops on a clear, sunny day.

And just as she is getting used to her new view, it changes again. The cab glides onto an imposing steel bridge, wires extending from its spires and seemingly dipping down into nothingness. Beyond the bridge's walls, Yi spots a gray-blue river, and beyond that, skyscrapers lining the island like spears. They look greater than anything in her imagination. She gasps and then covers her mouth in embarrassment.

But Auntie Fan only laughs. "The Brooklyn Bridge," she asserts. She points at the skyscrapers. "And the lowest tip of Manhattan. It always impresses me too."

Yi cranes her neck toward the water as it starts to disappear behind her. Her aunt is speaking in Mandarin, but she can't say anything in response.

The car passes through smaller and windier streets until the English signs transform into Chinese characters—words on colorful hanging banners that Yi thankfully recognizes. Everyone here looks like her. Sandwiched between the familiar small olive faces are pastry carts and grocery stores

filled with duck bao and lo mai gai and roasted pigs rotating on taut strings. But still, this place is nothing like home. The buildings here are practically stacked on top of each other, squeezed together like dominoes that might fall to the ground if slightly tipped. The humid early September air blows through the open cab window, smelling of stale trash and soiled clothes instead of the fried bean curd and women's perfume Yi remembers.

In Taipei, Yi and her family lived in a two-story house with a large yard, subsidized by Baba's job at the university. She used to fall asleep to the palm trees gossiping by her window and awaken to the sight of Liwei flinging himself across the bamboo monkey bars or playing with cracker-sized scalloped cards on the front porch. On the weekends, a peddler would wheel his cart around their block and sell sugarcanes, which Yi and her brother would suck on until Mama chided them for spoiling their supper.

Now the cab stops next to a brick building where the first floor competes to be both a hardware store and a hair salon.

"We'll get out here," Auntie Fan tells the driver, handing him a ten-dollar bill. "Keep the change."

Yi tumbles out of the car with the boys, who immediately snatch their mother's purse from her hands and rummage through it, emerging with her keys. Yi tries not to be shocked at their insolence, pinching her wrist as the cabdriver unloads her suitcases from his trunk, and she and Auntie Fan make their way into the apartment building next to the first-floor shops. The inside is as dingy as the outside. A peeling, unevenly painted staircase leads to the second floor, where the boys abruptly stop, jamming the keys into each lock.

"Don't break the door," Auntie Fan chastises, and then, turning to Yi, she says, "You have your own set of keys on the kitchen counter. I'll teach you all the tips and tricks with the door later."

Yi wonders why any door would require *tips and tricks*. Still, she decides it's better not to ask.

Rolling her suitcases through the doorway, Yi arrives in a narrow foyer overflowing with scattered sneakers and pumps and saddle shoes.

Once she's inside, Edwin whines, "We have to share a *room* because of you."

He's kicked off his loafers and is pointing accusatorily at Yi, any remnants of their brief taxi snuggle seemingly forgotten.

Auntie Fan sighs, swatting her son's shoulder. "Āiyā, we talked about this."

"I'm sorry," Yi says instinctively, and then feels foolish for apologizing to an eight-year-old.

"He's just being selfish," Auntie Fan tells her. "The Bible tells us to be rich in good works. Are you being rich in good works, Edwin?"

Edwin huffs and stomps down the hall and into what Yi assumes is his and his brothers' new bedroom. Auntie Fan takes Yi's hand and leads her through the shoe maze into the room next door.

"This," she says proudly, "is all yours. I thought you deserved your own space."

The room is the size of Yi's old walk-in closet, but it fits a desk and a twin bed with a knitted pink blanket draped over its daisy-patterned sheets. Across from the bed is a dresser, jade figurines scattered across its surface that remind Yi of the ones Mama has in the parlor. A framed painting of six Chinese boys hangs above the dresser. When Yi squints, she realizes that a girl stands in the middle of the boys' circle, her fingers outstretched in a karate pose as if forced into a playground battle. It is not her bedroom in Taipei, yet Yi tries to be grateful. Auntie Fan is working hard to make her houseguest comfortable.

"Thank you," Yi says with as much heart as she can muster. "I am grateful. I am grateful for everything."

Auntie Fan simply shakes her head, her bouffant swishing from side to side. "We're happy to have you here. After everything your mother did for me when I came to Taiwan . . ." Her eyes move toward the painting. "Well, this is the least I can do."

Yi nods. She will learn to be generous and tough like her mother. Both Mama and Auntie Fan survived war and famine. It is silly to think she can't survive New York.

She walks to the window and peeks through the blinds, sunset spilling through its gaps. Auntie Fan pats the top of her bouffant.

"It's getting late," she says. "I'll go finish making dinner."

"Oh, can I help?" Yi asks. She turns to face Auntie Fan.

Her host mother shakes her head. "No, no. Everything's prepped—I only need to stir-fry the vegetables and pop a few things in the steamer. Go unpack and freshen up. I've invited a few of your new classmates over for supper—they should be here in a half hour or so."

New classmates? Yi's belly churns at the thought of more American faces, rigid English words, first impressions she is not sure how to make. She surveys her flowery qipao and wonders if she has anything more stylish in her suitcase that would convey a sense of confidence and an identity she has not yet discovered.

"Don't worry," Auntie Fan says as if she can read Yi's mind, "they all immigrated here too—some very recently. And they all speak fluent Mandarin, of course."

"Okay," Yi replies, though the longer she stands there, the more she decides she must find an alternative qipao, or at least a well-pressed skirt.

Her new Manhattan mother tucks a loose strand of hair behind Yi's ear and pats her cheek. "I'll knock on your door when dinner is ready."

With that, she leaves Yi to her bedroom. When the door closes, Yi drops to her knees and hurriedly unzips her suitcase, combing through dresses and skirts like she is flipping through an outdated fashion catalog. Why did Mama not think to buy her American clothes? Why did she not request a visit to the shops in San Francisco? Perhaps she could have bought something at the airport, though Mama says that airport stores are rackets.

After muddying her neatly folded clothes, Yi pauses, her fingers brushing against a pale blue cotton qipao with stitched navy buttons. It used to be her favorite dress. She wore it to Sula and Lula's birthday party last year, and she remembers how the blue of the qipao complemented the pink of her lips. Plucking it from the suitcase, she clasps the dress to her chest. If Sula and Lula could hear her thoughts, they'd laugh and say she's already becoming a selfish and greedy American. She must remember who she is. She must remember why she's here.

Yi slowly stands and unzips her toiletry bag, scattering her makeup across the knitted quilt. Holding up her pocket mirror, she methodically powders her forehead and applies blush on the apples of her cheeks. She refuses to think about everyone at home waking up as her day comes to a close. And she certainly can't think about the mysterious guests Auntie Fan has invited—what they will look like and whether their English will be as broken as hers. Instead, she holds nothing in her head, concentrating on an empty white cloud expanding past her ears. Eventually the sky blackens, and Yi must turn on a light to pull her pantyhose up her calves. Her hands tremble as she pushes the stockings past the slit in her qipao.

“I chose this,” she says, jabbing her body the way Edwin did in the cab, “and it will be good.”

A knock sounds at the door and Yi jumps, worried someone has heard her improvised pep talk.

“Dinner’s ready,” Auntie Fan calls, poking her head in. If she heard Yi’s speech, she doesn’t show it. “And your classmates will be arriving any minute now.”

Sure enough, a buzzer screeches—a sound that Yi finds both terrifying and futuristic. Auntie Fan rushes to the front hall as footsteps thump up the steps.

Yi wants to check her reflection in her pocket mirror again (is her lipstick smudged? Is her eyeliner even?), but she has no time, because the apartment door is swinging open and suddenly other faces swim before her.

“Nǐ hǎo, nǐ hǎo!” Auntie Fan excitedly greets her guests, kissing their cheeks as they squeeze into the foyer.

Yi presses her back against the bedroom wall, peering out at the scene as if the strangers will brandish swords. Instead, a girl with silky black hair combed into a deep side part hands Auntie Fan a bouquet of flowers and a plastic container brimming with sugar buns.

“Thank you for inviting us,” she says, slipping off her jacket. She attempts to sidestep a half inch to make room for someone behind her. “Come on, pack in.”

A girl with thick bangs that trace her eyebrows moves into the light. Her hair tickles the hem of her Peter Pan collar.

“It’s so nice of you to invite us, Auntie Fan,” she says. “We’re very grateful for your hospitality.”

Auntie Fan shakes her head, grabbing the girls’ jackets and sliding them onto hangers. “Nonsense. I’m always happy to have you here.”

The first girl puts her hands on her hips, her eyes squinting at the space between Auntie Fan’s shoulders. “Well?” she asks. “Where’s the guest of honor?”

Yi’s breath hitches. She knows she must come out. She can’t hide in the bedroom forever. She thinks about the day she submitted her application to Beecher Prep and tries to channel that girl from months ago—the one who thought she could tackle anything, even America.

Straightening her qipao, Yi unglues herself from the wall and tiptoes behind Auntie Fan.

“Hello,” she says in Mandarin, “I’m Zheng Yi.”

The first girl sighs. “I can’t see you over Auntie’s head.”

“Come, come,” Auntie Fan says, ushering the girls into the dining room, “you can see her plenty over supper.”

Yi trails behind like a well-trained duckling until she finds herself in a tiny room engulfed by a wide rectangular table and several chairs. On the tablecloth is the most delicious food she’s seen since arriving in America: crispy pan-fried noodles, scallion pancakes, steamed bok choy, string beans, and sweet chili tofu. Bowls of rice line each place mat, and beside them are ceramic chopsticks, poised for use. Yi glances at Auntie Fan and touches the lump rising in her throat. New York may not be home, but her host mother is certainly trying to make it so.

“I’m starved,” the girl with bangs groans. “This looks so delicious.”

“Please, you ate an hour ago.” Her friend laughs. “But yes, you’ve truly outdone yourself, Auntie.”

She turns to Yi, surveying the wheel of emotions spinning through the newcomer’s eyes.

“I’m Beverley,” she says. “Beverley Wong.” She juts her head at the girl beside her. “And this is Patricia Gao.”

“Call me Patty,” Patricia urges. “Everyone does.”

“Okay,” Yi replies slowly, like she’s forgotten how to speak Chinese. “It’s nice to meet you both.”

A little *oh* escapes from Patty’s lips, and she maneuvers around Beverley to pull Yi into a surprise hug. Yi tries not to flinch.

“We were new here too once,” Patty whispers, her grasp firm. “Just three years ago. We can be your guides at Beecher. And in New York, really.”

Beverley nods as Patty releases Yi from her embrace. “We’ll be your guardian angels. Like Auntie Fan is for us.”

Auntie Fan scoffs. “I simply feed you. *Occasionally.*” She surveys the dining room. “I’ve got to get the boys.”

As she scoots out into the hall, Yi counts the chairs around the table. Eight in total. She recites the names in her head like she’s taking a test: Auntie Fan, Edwin, Bobby, Teddy, Beverley, Patty, and herself. That leaves one more.

“Is someone else coming?” Yi asks.

As the words leave her mouth, the buzzer sounds again, and Beverley snorts.

“Late as usual,” she mutters, darting into the foyer to press the intercom button.

“But better than last month,” Patty muses. “Only a few minutes instead of a whole hour.”

Beverley smirks and primps the ends of her perfectly flipped-out strands. “That’s because I told him an earlier time.”

“A genius, you,” Patty marvels.

“A regular Einstein,” Beverley agrees.

Yi leans against the table, careful not to touch the string beans or the bowl of bok choy. She listens as harder footsteps traipse up the stairs. The door bursts open, and Yi instantly spots the expensive leather loafers, the neat, tailored hem of his black pants. The body attached to the pants is thin yet muscular, like he exercises regularly but doesn’t boast about it. She looks up at the boy looming before her—coiffed, gelled hair, high cheekbones, a smile that could melt stone.

Yi’s parents never showed her his picture (they don’t have an accurate one now that he’s older), but she’d recognize her apparent betrothed anywhere, the paper Mama gave her still inside her purse.

“Calvin Chin,” she says, breathless.

Calvin rolls back his shoulders, his eyes tracing hers. “And you must be Zheng Yi.”

“The one and only,” Beverley interjects as Calvin tosses his blazer over a chair. She points at his empty pockets. “You’re late. And did you even bring anything for Auntie Fan?”

“Isn’t my presence enough of a gift?” Calvin teases. He’s switched to speaking English, and Yi flinches at his near-perfect accent.

Beverley’s nose crinkles. “Where’s your filial piety? You’re such a terrible Chinese guest.”

Calvin grins again, taking a seat across from Yi. “That’s because I’m American.” He rolls a chopstick between his fingers and points it at her. “And soon, you will be too.”

Yi does not know what to say, partly because she doesn’t understand what he’s saying.

“So, it’s been . . . what?” Calvin continues. “Four hours in New York? How are you liking it so far?”

“It’s good.” The sleek metal skyscrapers from the taxi ride cloud her vision, and Yi decides that Calvin would fit right in with them.

“That’s it?” Calvin raises an eyebrow. “Well, we’ll have to give you something else to say about it later.”

“We’ll take you all around town,” Patty insists, “and we’ll give you a tour of Beecher too. Maybe we’ll be locker mates.”

“Locker mates?” Yi repeats Patty’s unusual English phrase.

Beverley flicks a piece of lint off her shift dress. “You’ll see.”

Yi opens her mouth to ask more questions, but Auntie Fan reemerges with the children, who dig their grimy fingers into the food without saying grace. Her mind twirls like a compass that’s lost its center: What will Beecher be like? Will they speak in English for the rest of dinner? What if she doesn’t understand what they’re saying? What are locker mates? How will she ever nanny these terrors? Did Auntie Fan spend too much money on this food? She’ll have to pay her back somehow, perhaps with the small allowance her parents promised to send her every month.

But even as her thoughts swirl—and Patty and Beverley prattle on about school and Manhattan and shopping and movie theaters, and Auntie Fan scoops more food onto Yi’s plate, and the boys fling food across the table—she can only seem to focus on Calvin. The cutting edge of his jawline, the soft dimples when he smiles, the way he looks at her between bites of dòufu like they share a secret.

She remembers what Mama told her about his parents’ accident and his subsequent orphanhood. He was only fifteen then, eighteen now. Perhaps behind his bright eyes, underneath the sheen of his fair skin, Calvin is the sad, raggedy boy Yi pictured on the plane. If so, she can’t find him amid the roaring laughter.

Yi sucks on a noodle, careful not to slurp. Calvin has Teddy, the youngest, on his lap, and he bounces his knee up and down like he’s a human roller coaster. Teddy shrieks with joy. *Good with children*, Yi notes. *Mama will love that.* She imagines her and Calvin’s future children: boys and girls with saucer-round eyes running around a similar dining table until they grow and grow, and she and her husband become permanent structures of New York, China and Taiwan lost in their memories like myths.

Just what her parents want. Just what she’s meant to do in America. Yi swallows her noodle, the thought consuming her.

OceanofPDF.com

3
Dawn Chin

Present Day

Dawn Chin wakes up twisted in her sheets. She's had a nightmare again, though she can't remember what it was about. Something to do with the dark and searching. She's always searching in her dreams. She tries to untangle herself from the bedding by shaking back and forth, but the bottom of the sheet gloms to her leg like an invasive vine around a tree trunk. When she starts sweating, she gives up, starfishing across her twin bed before flopping onto her side to grab her phone.

Fitz hasn't updated his stories since last night, and Dawn isn't sure whether she's disappointed or relieved. Regardless, she resorts to rewatching last night's social media tale—a carousel of loud music and pranks and beer that she's surprised didn't get confiscated by the dorm heads. Then again, Ms. Slussy wears earplugs to bed and Mr. Polsick can't hear anything beyond his own snoring.

Scrolling through Fitz's social media is like hate-watching a bad movie. Dawn can't get enough of it. She memorizes every laugh and counts the number of red plastic cups. Most importantly, she dissects all the girls in the background. There's Waverley from Dawn's English class, and she thinks that blur in the left corner of the frame is field hockey captain Elora, but she can't be sure. Which one has Fitz claimed as his new prize? Or is he rotating through a cycle of girls, trying them on like the designer polos he tosses over the back of his desk chair?

Dawn curls her knees into her chest. This past summer, she was in that rotation. And he'd kept her there for a while. Sanborn Academy hosted electives from late June through August, but most students went back home, tired of boarding school and eager to see their families. Dawn and Fitz stayed. For ten weeks, they painted pottery, pretended to understand jazz, and hid from whatever they were running from—for Dawn, her claustrophobic, uptight family, and for Fitz . . . well, she never did find out his reasons for staying. At night, she tiptoed into his dorm room and snuggled under his sheets. Dawn can still feel his calloused hands reaching across her stomach, the thrill of his lips on her neck.

There was, of course, that muggy evening in August that they didn't spend in his bedroom. Instead, they lay on the sprinkler-damp grass between the rosebushes, the thorns pricking her bare arms and legs. She remembers that, later, she stared at her reflection in the cloudy communal bathroom mirror and traced the bloody scratches running down her arms and calves. She hated Fitz then, more than she'd hated anyone else before. She hated what he'd done to her.

Dawn flips over to face the wall, her back taking the brunt of the hot morning sun. She doesn't want to think about August or Fitz. She wants to forget it all. A notification from Caroline pops up on her screen, saving her from her thoughts: *See you tomorrow!!! Can't wait to hear about your summer;)*

Tomorrow, back to school, junior year—concepts she wants to push out like breaking waves. She's already heard snippets of Caroline's vacation: her family flew to the south of France and island-hopped, snorkeling and slurping oysters with corporate billionaire CEOs her parents went to college with.

Dawn's fingers hover over the phone. It'd be deeply hilarious to tell Caroline the truth, but then, she knows, it also wouldn't. So she types back: *Eek, yay!! Summer was fantastic. Excited to hang and tell you all about it!*

There are too many exclamation points, but Dawn presses *send* anyway. Tomorrow, she'll get out of bed. She'll clean up her room, hug her best friend and suitemates, wear a thrifted dress to Sanborn Academy's annual back-to-school bash, and pretend that nothing is wrong. Junior fall. The third year of lavish boarding school life. What could she have to complain about?

Dawn fumbles with her phone, and it slips from her grasp and drops onto her forehead. She leaves it there, despite the pain. She should get up and shower, but instead, she stares up at the black screen. She'll start pretending later.

OceanofPDF.com

4
Zheng Yi

For her first day of Beecher Prep, Yi packs cold rice and fried dumplings in a lunch tin, some change for an after-school snack (*just in case*, insisted Auntie Fan), blank notebooks gifted from the church charity, and a Chinese folktale from home—the pages stained with years of thumbprints as if to remind Yi of her old self, of the child she was in Taipei.

In the early hours of the morning, Patty and Beverley meet Yi at the apartment, and together, they dive into the hot underground subway and take the 6 train from Canal Street all the way to Sixty-Eighth Street and Lexington. Beverley and Patty talk the whole way there: predicting who will emerge from summer with perms and muscles and who has gone steady or broken up at Long Beach, where all the popular kids have second homes and seasonal lifeguarding gigs.

"I bet Herb got a girlfriend at Long Beach," Patty sighs, leaning her arm against the seat's railing.

Beverley swats her friend's shoulder. "Herb is a dunce. You can do better than that."

"Herb doesn't know who I am," Patty cries.

"All the better." Beverley rummages through her backpack's front pocket and emerges with a plastic pocket mirror and a tube of pink gloss. She carefully applies it on her puckered lips before passing it to Patty, who pats it on her own lips.

Yi wants to ask why Patty is in love with a boy she's never talked to, and why his name is Herb, but she can't. She is too overwhelmed by the squeal

of the subway wheels and the hard blue seats. Men in business suits hover above her like prison guards. Yi presses her palms into her plaid uniform skirt, the backs of her knees sweating under her heavy cotton socks.

Patty turns to Yi, the lip gloss outstretched between her fingers like a cigarette. Yi hesitates before shaking her head.

"You know," Patty says, dropping the lip gloss in her lap and inspecting her skin in Beverley's pocket mirror, "you're so lucky to have Auntie Fan."

The subway lurches to a stop, and Yi clutches the railing as a tiled wall with the words *42nd St - Grand Central Station* flashes by. She watches businessmen tumble out of the subway car and hordes of fresh bodies replace their spots on the cramped train.

They must make so much money, these white businessmen in their brown suits—much more than Auntie Fan makes as a secretary or Uncle Wen as a legal assistant. Yi tastes the hot porridge and sausage from this morning's breakfast on her tongue, remembering the lunch in her tin and the welcome feast that likely cost her host family a whole week's wages.

"Yes," she agrees, "Auntie Fan is a very kind woman."

"And she will be a wonderful second mother to you," Beverley interjects. "She's basically mine and Patty's."

Patty nods vigorously. "The boardinghouse is fine, but Auntie Aihan is not nearly as generous."

Yi stares down at her Mary Janes, the speeding train ceiling reflected in their shiny black tops. She did not even think to ask Patty or Beverley where they lived or who they lived with. She just assumed they had their own host families in Chinatown with similar nannying trades. Mama would call her thoughtless—at worst, cruel—and she'd be right.

Awkwardly, Yi snatches Patty's hand from her lap and squeezes. Patty turns from the pocket mirror, her eyes wide.

"I want to hear about everything," Yi blurts, "from the moment you both arrived in New York."

Beverley laughs. "Oh, we'll tell you, don't worry. Soon you'll be tired of hearing us talk."

"Never," Yi says, and she means it. The train continues to race down the tracks and Patty beams, holding Yi's hand for the rest of the trip.

When they emerge from the subway, Yi feels like a bird ready to at last stretch its wings. The light September wind blows against her skin and whips loose strands from her chignon around her cheeks. She surveys this

new neighborhood on Sixty-Eighth and Lexington; Patty and Beverley call it the Upper East Side.

At first, through open windows and thin corner shop doors, Yi hears a muddy soup of languages she can't understand—German or Hungarian, maybe, parts of Europe that feel even more foreign to her than America. But as they make their way up the avenue, everything abruptly changes, and Yi is met with an entirely different world. A beautiful one.

Tall, gated buildings, clean and pale like they are freshly painted every night, line the streets, shadowed by numbered awnings, and guarded by doormen in brass-buttoned peacoats and gold-trimmed hats. One uniformed man opens the door for an elderly woman in a mink cape that is far too warm for early September. Yi tries not to gawk at the woman's ankles wobbling in needlepoint stilettos as she hurries to keep up with the girls.

They move uptown block by block, Patty flicking her wrist to examine her watch every few steps until Beverley snatches her arm at the traffic light to make sure her friend doesn't get hit by a car.

"We won't be late," Beverley assures her, "we're never late."

"I know, but Yi has to meet with Principal Havemeyer." She glances over her shoulder to make sure Yi is still close behind. "We should have left earlier."

Beverley just shrugs as Yi mouths the word *Havemeyer* to herself. It's a difficult word in English, but she thinks she can say it properly. She'll have to, lest she humiliate herself. Principal Havemeyer is the man who gave her the senior scholarship for international students, the chance to live and study in the beautiful country, in New York. Yi must say his name correctly. And she must be on time. Patty is right; they should have left earlier. Yi hates not understanding the train schedule or the walk to school. She despises having to rely on Patty's wristwatch, and as they half jog down the sidewalk, she resolves that she'll save enough of Mama and Baba's monthly allowance to eventually buy her own.

The girls pause in front of a building that scales the entire block, its brick facade interrupted by long black-plate windows cut into grids. A Juliet balcony encases the middle window, and above that waves a white flag with the words *Beecher Preparatory School* floating across its center in bold, punctuated scarlet. Yi tries to walk forward through the double doors, but finds that a crowd is assembling, all in twin sweater-vests and plaid skirts or

khaki pants, their backpacks and messenger bags knocking against Yi's elbows as they pour into the school.

Beverley pulls Yi through the horde, past boys with starched white collars and girls with shiny lip gloss just like her new friends'.

"Make way, new student!" Beverley calls out, and Yi immediately feels embarrassed, though no one is paying any attention to them.

In the hall are more students leaning against lockers and closed classroom doors, chattering in preestablished cliques that Yi can't yet decipher. At her high school in Taipei, everyone was Chinese or Taiwanese except for the rare white student parachuted into their school because their father was an important diplomat or businessman (and Yi never talked to them, not really). Now she is on the opposite side of her personal yīnyáng, the hallway an ocean of white faces. Other than Beverley and Patty, there are no Chinese or other international students lingering by the lockers or jostling them from behind. Yi hopes to spot Calvin's cutting jawline, his radiant smile, but he is nowhere to be found.

Patty nudges Yi as they turn a corner at the staircase near the center of the school. She points to a boy with his arm draped across the railing, his tawny blond hair combed into a side part and swept across his forehead in a flawless wave. He's talking with a group of boys who Yi estimates are wider than a tennis court when splayed side to side.

"That's Herb," Patty whispers. He adjusts his shirt collar, revealing bulging veins that weave down his neck.

Yi nods as she and the girls clamber up the stairs. She can see why Herb doesn't know that Patty exists.

At the top of the steps, the girls turn left, and Patty stops at a door with the word *Principal* engraved at the top of the hardwood.

She knocks before checking her watch again. "We're not late," she says proudly, and Beverley pats Patty's back like she's soothing a toddler.

Yi wants to feel relieved too, and she should after all her worrying, but her heart is thumping at an impossibly fast rate. The door swings open and a slim, older man in a fitted suit welcomes the girls.

"Miss Wong and Miss Gao," his voice booms, "how excellent to see you again. I trust you both had good summers?"

Beverley's hands are clasped as if she has transformed into a docile schoolgirl. "Yes, Principal Havemeyer. Our summers were relaxing, but we're happy to be back."

“I’d expect no less.” Principal Havemeyer turns toward Yi. “And you must be Miss Zheng.”

Yi bows, her pleated skirt crimping at the waist. “It is very nice to meet you,” she says to the floor in jolting, accented English. She stops short of saying *Principal Havemeyer* after *you* for fear of messing it up.

Principal Havemeyer just laughs. “Oh, you don’t have to do that,” he says, gesturing to her bowed body. “We treat each other like equals here.” He smiles at Patty. “Don’t we, Miss Gao?”

“Yes, Principal Havemeyer,” Patty replies as the blood rushes back into Yi’s head and she begins to understand her faux pas.

She can’t ruminate on her mistake for too long, though, because Principal Havemeyer is ushering her into his office. As she steps through the entryway, Beverley and Patty scamper toward the back lockers, leaving Yi alone. Now *she* is the toddler without its parents, and she must face her newest obstacle: an American principal in a suit and two leather seats sandwiched between a mahogany desk. Principal Havemeyer gestures to one of the chairs.

“Sit, sit,” he says, and Yi obeys.

“We’re so happy to have you at Beecher, Ms. Zheng,” Principal Havemeyer exclaims, spinning in his swivel chair.

Flanked by stained-glass windows, he looks a bit like Jesus. Sunlight skims the crown of his pepper-gray hair. Yi tries to find the words to translate from Mandarin to English, but Principal Havemeyer continues before she can speak.

“We adore our scholarship kids. They add the right kind of diversity and culture to the school. And they get such good grades. I mean, look at Miss Gao and Miss Wong.” He waves in the direction of the door. “Makes our median grade point average go up. And our rankings, eh?”

Principal Havemeyer laughs and Yi decides to laugh too, though she’s not sure at what.

“I’m sure you’ll contribute to Beecher in the same way. Won’t you, Miss Zheng?”

Yi nods vigorously. This sentiment she understands. She will make the principal and her parents proud. Her grades were outstanding at the Taipei City Municipal Girls’ School—likely one of the main reasons she was accepted to Beecher. Why wouldn’t she accomplish the same here?

Yi's vision hazes over the stained glass. The colors remind her of the pink and yellow flowers women used to sell next to the nightclubs on Zhongshan. She and Liwei used to hurry past the women's carts on their way to eat bao bing, Yi gripping her brother's small hand, ensuring neither of them would fall prey to lives like the flower sellers'. The pink and yellow colors swirl in her mind, transformed into symbols of success—an American university education, a life populated with gardens of choice and opportunity.

"I will do my best," Yi promises, finding her words.

Principal Havemeyer grins. "I know you will." He jerks his head toward an anterior room to the right of his desk that Yi had not noticed before. "My secretary is just in there. She'll give you your schedule and anything else you might need for the school day."

He stands and Yi does too, wincing as he takes her hand and shakes it firmly, just like Calvin Chin did a few nights ago at dinner.

"A pleasure to meet you, Miss Zheng."

"Thank you, Principal Haver-meyer," Yi replies, hoping her voice is just as smooth and polite as Beverley's and Patty's when they addressed the principal.

In the secretary's office—which is more of a storage closet—a nice woman in a wool blazer and matching skirt hands Yi her schedule, a complimentary school planner, and a hall pass since the bell has already rung and Yi is late to her first class. She stumbles down various empty hallways, color coded in ways that she does not understand, until she lands at the door of B103 and a math teacher welcomes her in.

All day, Yi must repeat a simple, militaristic introduction: *Hello, my name is Zheng Yi, and I am a new student from Taipei, Taiwan.* She writes down phrases that make little sense, especially in English and history—classes where the words are complicated and pinched together in the tattered textbooks passed back to her at the end of the row (her surname being *Zheng*, Yi finds she is always at the end of the row). She shares no classes with Beverley or Patty but is hopeful that they'll have the same lunch period. At noon, she enters the crowded cafeteria and scans the tables again and again but doesn't spot Patty's trademark bangs or Beverley's tall frame. Near the trash bins, Yi spies a small group of other Chinese students, but when she steps forward to join them, she hears the girls gossiping in perfect English and can't find the courage to interrupt.

Instead, she flees to the library, where food is forbidden, so she must keep her rice and dumplings hidden in the depths of her backpack. Her stomach growling, she tucks herself between the biography and classic literature sections. She clings to her backpack and closes her eyes. Flickering to the surface are her, Sula, and Lula, carrying their lunch trays to the courtyard before sitting down at their usual crosshatched table under the shade of a blossoming cotton tree. It is endless spring, perfect and beautiful. Here, they are safe. Here, they chatter in a language Yi never needs to translate.

She is imagining warm rice spooned between her lips, runny egg and sesame oil soaked into her teeth, when someone clears their throat. Yi's eyes fly open, worried she has broken yet another unspoken rule.

Calvin Chin stands above her in his sweater-vest and khaki pant uniform, smelling of sandalwood cologne and a hint of fresh mint. He stretches his hand to lift her from her spot on the carpet.

"Come on," he says, "let's go to lunch."

Yi reaches for him, his warm palm against hers. And for the first time all day, she smiles.

OceanofPDF.com

5
Dawn Chin

By now, Dawn Chin has gotten out of bed and returned to the world of the living. She has hugged her jolly, sunburned friends in the common room, gulped down fruit punch at Sanborn's back-to-school bash with Stephanie and Delia and Giselle, and cheered on Caroline in her first crew match of the season on Crystal Lake where Dawn and Stephanie made posters that said things like *Row, Row Your Boat!* and *Coxswain Caroline Is an Oar-ganic Machine!*

After the crew match (which Sanborn won), Dawn and Caroline grabbed a late lunch in the dining hall. Caroline had undone her tight braid, her typically straight hair kinked with waves and falling into her mashed potatoes.

"So," she said, wiggling her eyebrows, "Fitz, huh? Why didn't you tell me this sooner?"

Dawn had shrugged. She'd casually told Caroline about him the day before because she knew her best friend would drag what she could out of her. She hoped her performative, blasé attitude would put the whole topic to bed. It didn't work. Now she struggled to find the words and resorted to staring off at the Gothic windows behind Caroline's head. Through the glass, she spotted Giselle heading to the dorms with her ballet friends.

"It wasn't a big deal," she said as flippantly as she could. She watched Giselle run across the grass. "It was just a summer fling, you know?"

"But I *love* summer flings," Caroline replied, sighing as if she'd have rather spent her summer on campus than in France. "They're so romantic!"

She waved her fork at Dawn, causing potato droplets to fly into the air and dot Dawn's shirt.

"Hey!" Dawn protested. She snatched a napkin and wiped at her top like she really cared about it, even though it was one of her annoying cousin's hand-me-downs.

"Oops." Caroline grimaced. "Sorry."

In reality, Dawn was grateful for the distraction. After the potato flinging incident, they moved on to a story about Caroline's mother, who'd spilled red wine all over her new dress at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Corsica. Dawn only had to nod, gasp, and laugh at the right moments. She'd told Caroline just enough information about Fitz—a summer montage of what he could have been rather than what he was. A fling at a near-empty boarding school. Caroline was right: it sounded like the plot to a juicy romance. Maybe Dawn could pretend that was true if she tried hard enough. Maybe what happened that August night didn't happen at all.

Presently, Dawn pushes all these thoughts away and focuses on her reflection. It's the Tuesday after Labor Day, and she is standing in front of her full-length mirror, combing her hair. It's too thick—unfortunate genetics inherited from her parents, who have their own version of their daughter's summer: educational and résumé-worthy so that she might get into colleges like Amherst or Columbia or Berkeley, which would be especially great since it's relatively close to home.

As Dawn carefully picks out a pair of light-wash jeans and one of her many basic, boxy T-shirts, she wonders if her parents are robots. She wishes they would flinch. Like two years ago, when Dawn told them she was bisexual and Bettina and David Chin said placid, thoughtful remarks like *We love you for who you are* and *We are here to support you* but never mentioned her sexuality again, as if it were a secret or, worse yet, a part of their only daughter that they'd like to forget. Then again, she reasons, there are some things she'd like to forget too. Fitz, for example, and this summer. Maybe she'd benefit from a master class by her parents.

"Hey, you ready?" Caroline's peppy voice shakes Dawn back to reality.

"Yeah!" Dawn calls out. Slinging her backpack over her shoulder and stuffing her feet into Birkenstock clogs, she opens the door to greet her suitemate.

The walk through campus is filled with eager freshmen and stressed seniors. Dawn's friends are neither of those things. In the courtyard that

connects the dorms to the classrooms, Caroline and Stephanie talk about school with a reverence that Dawn used to find bizarre but has since accepted as normal Sanborn Academy behavior.

"And just wait for Ms. Adebayo's class," Stephanie gushes. "I heard she's the best."

"Better than all the other *best* teachers?" Dawn jokes.

Stephanie ignores her. "Ms. Adebayo's college recommendation would be killer but, like, everyone wants one from her because she's so good. I gotta stand out."

"You'll definitely stand out," Caroline says. "You're you." She pinches her fingers together and kisses them. "Parfait!"

Stephanie stops walking so she can mock bow. "Why, thank you. I *am* awesome. What about you, Dawn? Got any good teachers?"

Dawn bites her bottom lip. With all her moping, she'd forgotten to check the class portal.

"I haven't really looked at my schedule yet," she admits. Her clogs knead into the gaps in the cobblestone.

"You *haven't really looked at your schedule yet*?" Caroline repeats. "Like, where are you going, then?"

Dawn shrugs. "I'm just following you guys. Thought I'd figure it out after."

To be honest, it's what she's done for the past two years—aimlessly followed her friends around campus, nodding as they rambled about their countless academic and extracurricular achievements. Dawn's never said it out loud, but she's not exactly sure why her friends are friends with *her*. She dreads the day when they'll leave Sanborn—and Dawn—behind.

Caroline reaches under Dawn's arm and pulls her phone out from her front pocket. After holding it up to her face to unlock her screen, Caroline squints at a series of apps, scrolling through them feverishly.

"What are you doing?" Dawn groans.

"Shh."

The girls hover over her screen as if it holds Pandora's box. And then Dawn realizes—they have her *phone*. What if in their quest to find her schedule, they end up finding her old messages with Fitz? She should have deleted them like any reasonable person would, but she couldn't. She can't. Her pulse starts to quicken as she maps out the possibilities. They'll know the truth, or at least part of it. And then what will she say?

Caroline shoots up and triumphantly sticks Dawn's phone in her face.

"You have AP US History first. That's where you're going." She points to Hamilton Hall, a brick, ivy-strewn humanities building set between the mathematics wing and the school track.

Dawn forcefully laughs, before grabbing her phone and returning it to her pocket. "See?" she says. "Following you guys. It's a good method."

Caroline snorts, but they both know she likes being Dawn's little leader, her self-assigned campus mom. She and Stephanie wave goodbye and head off to their college-level calculus class. Dawn is safe, for now.

She drifts toward Hamilton Hall and can't help but search for that gray-eyed boy in his signature grass-stained polo and baggy shorts. It's a useless task because he's a senior, and all Sanborn seniors are required to do off-campus fall internships on Tuesdays and Fridays. Fitz's is in data science and software development. If they were still talking, she would remind him that her mom's job is also in data science and software development. Bettina Chin could give him advice or a summer job shadowing her in California. Dawn pictures Fitz transplanted to her Santa Barbara hometown, the two of them swimming through salty ocean waves, sand encrusted in every crevice of their bodies. She swings open the lobby door of Hamilton Hall and it crashes against the back wall. Fitz is never meeting her mom or coming to Santa Barbara. And he can get a job here, or in New York. *Besides,* she reminds herself, *I'm supposed to hate him. I* do *hate him.*

Thanks to Caroline's handiwork, Dawn finds the room number for her US History class on her phone. The space is covered in flags and cliché posters of American presidents with a smattering of civil rights icons, as if to say *See, we're diverse!* even though Sanborn Academy's student body is 94 percent white, 4 percent Asian, and 2 percent whatever ethnicities the school needs to put on the campus website. Dawn sits in the back corner and watches the trees' dark green leaves fold over the empty track.

Her teacher, Ms. Codderton, is a slight woman with enormous plastic-rimmed glasses that make her eyes look like a bug's, though Dawn figures she is going for more of a high-fashion editorial look. She's new; she came from a charter school in Manchester. Dawn has seen her over the summer preparing for classes. While Dawn and Fitz were giggling behind pillars and cuddling under willow trees, Ms. Codderton was running back and forth between the classrooms and the faculty offices with her laptop and various ready-made sandwiches. Though Dawn didn't know her future US History

teacher, she felt sorry that this woman was spending her summer making lesson plans for privileged, bored teenagers.

Ms. Codderton's plans seem to be ambitious because she plants a syllabus the size of *The Odyssey* on each student's desk. Dawn flips through it and sees that it only lists homework and readings through January, despite this being a yearlong course. She's not sure why there's a syllabus to begin with, since everyone in the class (and the eleventh grade) is taking the AP US History exam at the end of the year and there's a clear, dictated curriculum for that.

Ms. Codderton claps her hands as the bell rings in a feeble attempt to get her students to stop talking.

"Welcome to AP US History!" she says brightly.

She's written the words *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. —George Santayana* on the whiteboard.

"I'm Ms. Codderton, and I'm very excited to get to know you all this year."

Dawn looks around, recognizing the same twenty kids she's known since ninth grade. As the morning sun begins to drift behind the late summer clouds, Ms. Codderton drones on about the importance of history, her background as an educator, and her goals for the school year.

"Of course, my main objective is to prepare you all for the AP US History exam," she says, "but in addition, we'll be doing something special. Something interesting and *personal*."

She pushes her glasses up the bridge of her nose and points to Xavier Green's syllabus, which is somehow already crumpled and stained with Cheeto-dust fingerprints.

"If you turn to page twenty-three, you'll see the yearlong project I've planned for you all. It only outlines the first part. I'll have more to share after winter break."

Ms. Codderton waltzes through the aisles, her pencil skirt skimming Dawn's desk. As Dawn and her teacher lock eyes, she quickly flips to page twenty-three and reads the words **HISTORY IS PERSONAL** typed in a fat, bold font.

"Often, people think of history as just facts. It's objective. But history is *never* objective. In fact, it's quite subjective no matter how much we think we're telling singular truths. So I want you to lean into the idea of what history means to you. And to your families." Ms. Codderton taps her chin.

“You all have parents, guardians. Grandparents, perhaps. I’d love for you to choose someone in your family to interview, or someone close to you who’s older. *Much* older.” She laughs. “And pick a part of American history that is meaningful to them. Maybe the 2008 recession, for example. Or 9/11, or the Vietnam War, or the Iraq War. Make sure that it’s a topic that they have opinions on, that they really were entrenched in, because you’ll be writing a paper about it, and then doing a forty-minute presentation after the AP exam in May.”

Ms. Codderton returns to the front of the room, her arms folded over her sweater. “We’ll be working on it piece by piece. In addition to your regular homework, a general idea for your project is due in two weeks. And as a bonus, your families will get to hear from you throughout the year. You’ll have to call them or video chat or whatever.” She smiles. “Isn’t that great?”

Dawn tugs on her belt loop. *So great*, she thinks. She just loves talking to her parents.

In the evening, when Caroline is at crew practice and Stephanie and Giselle are preparing their dance routine for the fall talent show, Dawn flops onto her bed and dials her dad’s cell phone number. He picks up after four rings.

“Dawn?” He sounds surprised, like he doesn’t expect to hear from his only child while she’s at school.

“What were you doing during the 2008 economic recession?” Dawn blurts.

“What?”

“What. Were. You. Doing. During the 2008 economic recession? You know, the financial crisis?”

Dawn drags her fingers through her tangled hair. Why are her parents always so slow to catch on? She can hear the crackle of the cell connection, the TV volume lowering in the background. David Chin is likely watching a tech documentary, like he does every night after dinner.

“Um, I don’t know,” he replies. “I was in grad school making no money. My friends didn’t have a lot of money either, so we just hung out in the dorms. Hoped the economy would get better once we finished school.” He chuckles. “Why do you ask?”

Dawn turns to her side, curling her feet into her knees, her phone crushed against her ear. There’s no way she can write a paper and do a forty-minute

presentation on *that*.

"It's for my APUSH class. We have to talk about how history is personal or something. I need to interview a family member for the entire year. What about Mom?"

"What was she doing during the recession?" Dawn's father asks.

"Yeah, sure. Or in general. In relation to, like, big historical moments."

Bettina Chin's measured voice cuts through the speakerphone. "I was working and studying. Through all of it." Dishes clatter in the receiver and Dawn recognizes her parents' typical division of household labor: her father cooks and her mother cleans.

"Perfect," Dawn says sarcastically. "Day one and I'm already flunking history."

At this, the rush of the sink faucet grows silent, the low droning documentary suddenly muted. Dawn has always been an expert at twisting the knife, at making her parents quietly panic.

"Okay, hmm," her dad says, sucking his teeth like he does when he's really considering something. Dawn hates hearing that noise so loudly in her ear. "Well, I can't really think of any historical moment that truly impacted my life. But does it have to be about us? Can you interview a grandparent?"

"A grandparent?" Dawn echoes.

All her grandparents are dead except Nai Nai—her dad's mother—and Dawn only sees her on Christmas. When she was a kid, they used to go on cruises together, and Nai Nai would play cards on the sky deck or read by the pool. She wouldn't go on excursions and sometimes she wouldn't even leave the ship. For reasons Dawn didn't try to understand, Nai Nai was never interested in her granddaughter, like children were foreign to her despite birthing and raising one for decades.

"Your nai nai," David Chin confirms. "She came to America in 1965. It was a big year—the Civil Rights Movement and the brink of the Cultural Revolution and all that."

"That's a great idea, David," Dawn's mother exclaims. "I bet she has a lot to say."

Does she? If so, she's never mentioned her US immigration to Dawn. Or her life at all beyond being a librarian, a job she still has even though she's seventysomething.

“You know, she lives in New Hampshire and you’ve never visited her once,” Dawn’s mother continues. “Her house is only an hour or so from school. You could easily take the bus and interview her in person.”

Dawn tumbles onto her back, clenching her phone. Leave it to her mother to make this into a lecture. Of course she should have been visiting her grandmother who has wanted nothing to do with her for the past two years.

“Okay,” Dawn says, not wanting to argue. “I’ll call her later this week.”

“Tomorrow,” her dad urges. “She doesn’t work on Wednesdays.”

And she works every other day of the week? Dawn’s nai nai must be sprightlier than she thought. She hopes her grandmother will at least be interesting. Maybe she’ll help Dawn get her first Sanborn A. Probably not. Dawn holds her cell phone to her mouth.

“Fine,” she agrees, her finger hovering over the red *hang up* button, “I’ll call her tomorrow.”

OceanofPDF.com

6
Duanfang

Did you think you'd seen the last of Duanfang? For he still has stories to tell.

At twenty-two, barely a man, Duanfang was about to be married to one of the Manchu's greatest beauties: Lady Tongjia. She was a woman with rich dark hair, an array of long silk dresses, and hands capable of both shooting a bow and arrow and cooking exquisite meals. The daughter of a prominent viceroy, she was the pride of the Qing dynasty as it hurtled toward a new millennium. Strategically, she was everything Duanfang needed. She would help him begin his ascent as a Manchu politician so that he would become more valued and more important than all the generations of men before him. She would make him great.

After their wedding, when they were cloaked inside their marital chambers, Duanfang watched as Lady Tongjia removed her hair frame strip by strip. He stilled as she moved closer to him, so close he could see the three earrings piercing each of her lobes. Her feet brushed against his, unbound as a Manchurian woman, unlike the mutilated feet of the Han Chinese. Duanfang hated the Han Chinese—their entitlement, their preening. He was happy the Manchus had defeated them so many centuries ago and was proud to be part of a powerful Manchurian ruling class.

As he embraced his new wife, Duanfang decided that he would utilize her family's political privileges, her wealth, and even her beauty. But he would also work to love her fully. He would try to know her. He would be a good

husband, and together, they would raise many, many brilliant children. Tonight began their legacy.

OceanofPDF.com

7
Zheng Yi

The breezy mid-September air comes rushing in, and with it the first few weeks of Zheng Yi's new life in America. Her coursework is a tidal wave of muddled English words and messy take-home quizzes, and Yi worries that without proper help, she will drown under its weight. While her English is marginally better, she barely understands what's going on in class and must rely on Beverley and Patty to translate some of her scribbled notes on the subway rides home. And in the halls, the white girls stare and giggle at her formal, styled chignons and broken *good morning*s. After school, she takes the boys to a corner shop on the Lower East Side, just six blocks from their apartment, and the cashier similarly frowns when she enters, like she reeks of stale milk.

Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy don't notice the shopkeeper following them around the store, hovering to ensure they don't steal anything. They are too busy scooping up their chocolate bars and sliding their change across the sticky linoleum counter. When the boys run home, they get chocolate stains all over their clothes because they keep thwacking each other with their wrappers, and Yi has to jog after them yelling, *Don't do that!* They don't ever listen. Yi isn't irritated by their insolence. She is too busy wishing she were eight again too, innocent and unburdened.

Her only reprieve is lunch. After Calvin saved her in the library, he encouraged her to spend every lunch with him. Monday through Friday, he and Yi squat on the ribbed metal bleachers circling Beecher's basketball court and eat their rice, content to be away from the cafeteria crowds.

Calvin asks Yi questions about her classes, often in English so she can practice, though she always responds in Mandarin. He likes telling stories about Beverley's former paramours (apparently, she gets a new boyfriend every spring and ditches them by August), as well as the lavish weekend parties he throws at his Central Park–facing apartment on the Upper West Side.

"Just across Central Park," he tells her, pointing at the basketball court as if the pavement has transformed into grassy fields. "On nice days, I can walk to school."

"Very good exercise," Yi says politely, and Calvin laughs, his abdomen bouncing up and down underneath his gauzy uniform shirt.

Yi wonders if he will invite her to his parties, but she doesn't dare ask. She wonders a lot of things about Calvin: why he's only a teenager, barely eighteen, but never visits his aunt and uncle in Westchester, why he always comes to school late and doesn't seem to care about his grades, and most important, why he chooses to spend lunch talking to *her*. There are prettier girls to talk to, ones who know what to wear and how to flirt in both English and Mandarin. Yi can't even do her hair right.

On the third Sunday of September, Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen—who returned home a little over a week ago in time for Mid-Autumn Festival and homemade mooncakes—take Yi and the children to church. First Chinese Fellowship is located in the basement of a synagogue on Bowery that shares its space with a Presbyterian church. As the pastor bellows in Mandarin from a makeshift pulpit, Yi watches the ceiling shake with footsteps and hears the low hum of stringy voices singing English hymns. In Taiwan, Mama and Baba took Yi and Liwei to church not because they particularly loved God but because President Chiang Kai-Shek was Christian, and so they were too. Their cathedral had tall stained-glass windows like Beecher's and brick turrets with brass bells that rang every hour. First Chinese Fellowship's front wall is covered in royal-blue drapes as if to resemble a clear afternoon sky since the basement has no windows.

Today, Auntie Fan's bouffant is bigger than ever. She sits with her back straight against the folding chair and listens intently to Pastor Kang, the family hymnal closed in her lap. Yi looks around the room and spots Beverley and Patty crammed beside a pinched-faced lady that Yi assumes is Auntie Aihan. She waves, and the girls wave back before Auntie Aihan takes Patty's hand and pushes it under her seat.

Pastor Kang's sermon is on proselytization, and he reminds the congregation that their faithfulness has brought enormous riches and will continue to do so should they spread God's message. Yi finds herself like Auntie Fan—hanging on to every word, mostly because she is relieved to understand everything he is saying. No one looks at her oddly in the church basement. If she squints at the curtains, she can almost imagine she's back home in her Taipei cathedral.

When the pastor is finished, his wife starts playing soft music on the keyboard while men walk down the aisle with collection plates. Yi recognizes the smell of Calvin's cologne the moment he leans forward, handing her the plate with an imperceptible wink.

"Hi," he whispers.

"Hi," she whispers back, unable to say anything else, the plate motionless in her hands.

Edwin kicks her shins. "C'mon, pass it."

Uncle Wen scolds him and Auntie Fan manages to drop a few dollars in, and soon, the plate and Calvin are moving on to the next row. Yi fights the redness blooming across her cheeks.

After the service, the aunties lay out orange slices and butter cookies on a table the Presbyterians let them borrow from upstairs. Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy dash for the cookies while Uncle Wen and Auntie Fan section off into male and female cliques, headed by Pastor Kang and his wife. Yi marvels at how church, in this way, is like high school.

Lingering near the aunties, she searches for Calvin and finds him leaning against a stack of folding chairs by the pulpit (First Chinese Fellowship must clean up before noon—that's the deal they've made with the synagogue). He's nursing a cup of water and talking to Beverley and Patty. When Patty makes some remark Yi can't hear, he laughs and touches her sleeve. Yi's teeth subconsciously clench, despite Patty's kindness, despite her loud adoration for Herb. She is already being a terrible friend. Sula and Lula would admonish her.

"Yi!" Beverley calls, waving her over from across the room.

Yi tries to relax her jaw as she weaves her way through the aunties. She arrives at the pulpit and Calvin drapes his free arm over her shoulder. At once, she is shocked by the casualness of this gesture and embarrassed by the assumptions she made seconds before. *He's friendly to everyone,* she rationalizes. *This is just how he shows it.*

“So, how’d our newcomer like her first church service? So boring, right?” he asks.

Yi nods. In reality, she actually enjoyed Pastor Kang’s sermon and the six-person choir singing Chinese hymns. But all she can focus on is the weight of Calvin’s arm on the back of her neck, his hand hanging over her collarbone like a fishhook. She wonders if Auntie Fan is watching. But then Calvin removes his arm altogether, stuffing his hand in his trouser pocket like it never happened.

“I’m surprised Auntie Fan didn’t bring you here sooner,” Patty muses, nibbling on a butter cookie. “Then again, she probably wanted to wait until Uncle Wen was back. Everyone loves him here. He’s such a nice man.”

“He is,” Yi agrees, though she hasn’t talked to him for more than a few minutes since he’s returned home. She scratches her dress collar, warm from Calvin’s touch.

“Well, you know what *won’t* be boring?” Beverley says. “Calvin’s party next weekend.”

Yi blinks at the mention of a *real* scheduled party at Calvin’s infamous apartment, her mind tearing back to their conversations on the bleachers. This is her opening. She is already picturing his palatial drawing room, a crystal chandelier hanging from the tin coffered ceiling, the sprawling park view he wakes up to every morning. Does an arm around her shoulder mean an invitation? What about their lunches together for the past nine days?

“Oh, right!” Patty squeals, clasping her hands together. “You have to come, Yi. It’s the social event of the fall.”

Beverley snorts. “We have one almost every month, so hardly. But they’re always great.” She fiddles with her earring. “Calvin knows how to *entertain*, shall we say.”

“Not in church, Bev! Don’t want me to get in trouble, now do you?” The smirk spreading across Calvin’s face says otherwise.

Yi’s never been to a party, notwithstanding Mama and Baba’s children-filled gatherings following her piano recitals or Liwei’s birthdays. And there, she’d always been roped into wrangling her cousins, bribing them with sweet buns so they wouldn’t pull on the tablecloth or smear cake frosting on Wàipo’s stockings. Calvin’s parties seem like magic shows, and she wants desperately to know what he will pull out of the hat next.

Finally, he says, “Yes, you should absolutely come, Yi. It’ll be grand.” He looks directly into her eyes, and Yi feels like no one in the room exists but

the two of them.

"Okay," she agrees, trying to swallow her breathlessness, "but I'll have to ask Auntie Fan first."

"Don't worry about her," Patty interjects. "Just tell her you're spending the evening with me and Beverley, and she'll let you go anywhere. She trusts us."

"But should she?" Beverley asks, and the pair snicker.

"We'll have the *best* time," Patty gushes. "Everyone'll be there. Kimberley and Marcia and Jeanie . . . and of course, *the boys*." She says this last part in a whisper.

Beverley wiggles her eyebrows as Yi glances at Calvin, but he is sipping water from his paper cup and staring blankly into space. Maybe the invitation wasn't so personal then, so important. It's just another party full of everyone they know.

"Okay," Yi replies.

"Oh! And we must go shopping beforehand. I need a new dress for the party, and I'm sure you do too, Yi," Patty says, before quickly adding, "Not that your clothes aren't perfect."

Yi crushes the cotton hem of her qipao in her palm, this one gray with small black buttons running up her neck, and she immediately realizes she looks like she's attending a funeral rather than Sunday service. Her new friends must have noticed her outdated, handsewn dresses the instant they met her at supper weeks ago.

"Shopping," she repeats, "of course." Mama and Baba gave her thirty dollars before she left for her first plane ride. Isn't this what allowances are for?

"What are you doing the rest of the afternoon? We could go after dim sum," Beverley proposes.

Yi chews on her bottom lip. Could she leave with them that easily? She's not nannying today, as both Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen are home, and if Patty is correct, then as long as she says she'll be with the girls, she should be allowed to go. Her homework can wait until the evening. It won't make any more sense to her at night than in the afternoon.

"Nothing. I'm not doing anything," Yi says, this time a little more confidently. "And I *do* need a new dress."

"Fabulous," Patty exclaims. "I'll go ask Auntie Fan for you right now."

She dashes off to the aunties just as Calvin finishes off his water and groans, “Girls. Always buying frivolous things,” and Beverley subsequently whacks his arm.

Yi isn’t listening. She can’t wait to rip off her gray qipao and start afresh.

OceanofPDF.com

8
Zheng Yi

The following Saturday night, Yi arrives at Calvin's brownstone in her new dress, her elbows linked with Beverley's and Patty's. It all happened exactly as they promised: after dim sum, Auntie Fan eagerly pushed them out the door, and the girls took the train to the stadium-sized Macy's in Herald Square. Yi had never seen so many women on one street, rushing through the department store's revolving doors in pea-green coats and belted A-line dresses. Billboards covered Macy's corner facades; block-letter words printed across that read: *It's smart to be thrifty.* And *This is Macy's, the world's largest store.*

Inside, Beverley and Patty led Yi up three separate escalators until they arrived at the Junior Misses section. Yi struggled to take in everything at once—the striped bangles and hairclips on the carousel by the cash register, the neon shift dresses by the elevator, the rows and rows of scintillating slingback pumps and colorful suede jackets lining every wall. She wanted to buy the whole store.

Patty dove straight for the dresses, throwing every style into Yi's arms (and her own), while Beverley eyed a silk mock turtleneck and a black miniskirt that showed off her thighs.

"Don't worry, I'll wear pantyhose," she announced to no one in particular as she marched into the dressing room.

Patty picked out a few more dresses for Yi before they too joined Beverley.

Every time the girls tried on something new, they flung back the curtains and strutted down the room's narrow hallway to show off their outfits in the full-length trifold mirrors. Unlike Yi, Beverley and Patty didn't notice the white mothers' and daughters' wrinkled noses and pursed lips when they sauntered by. They were happy to make the Junior Misses changing room their personal runway. Yi tried to follow suit, but everything looked lumpy and awkward on her. She thought she resembled a traffic light in the neon shift dress Patty urged her to try on.

"You just have to find the right one," Patty encouraged, looking positively dazzling in a navy wool jersey dress with lime-green accents lining the pockets.

"Here, try on this one," Beverley said. She was holding up a sleeveless cream empire-waist dress with a round portrait collar. Patty informed her that the seams running from the bust down to the hem were called princess lines. Yi wondered what Mama would think of that.

Obediently, she took the dress from Beverley, pulling it over her legs and carefully zipping up the back. When she yanked open the dressing room curtain, Patty gasped.

"Oh my goodness, you look divine!" she shrieked just as another strawberry blond Yi swore went to Beecher glanced their way.

"You have to buy it," Beverley agreed. She flipped over the tag. "Only $10.90 too. A bargain."

Yi stared at her reflection in the trifold mirror, her shoulders bare from every angle. She touched the dress's lacy top, which somehow gave her breasts a shape she had not noticed before. Would she wear this dress in Taiwan? No, but it didn't matter. She was in New York. She left Macy's with the dress and a pair of pale pink patent leather heels.

On the subway ride back to Chinatown, the girls' shopping bags jangled against their ankles. Beverley and Patty talked about what colleges they were going to apply to, and Yi remembered that applications were due in January—only a few short months away. Mama and Baba had reminded her to pick which universities she wanted to request applications for in their most recent letter; Mama had neatly written down every big-name school she had heard of in a list on the back of the page. They were all colleges Yi knew she could not get into—not with her poor English. She would have to ask Auntie Fan or Beverley and Patty for backups. The train paused at Washington Square Park and Yi gripped the handles of her shopping bag.

She would try harder and study all evening when she got home. Her life in America depended on this.

Now, teetering in her not-yet-broken-in heels on Calvin's front steps, Yi begins to sweat. She has studied for school, but she has not studied for her first party.

Beverley rings the buzzer, and someone from the second floor—not Calvin—sticks their head out the window and throws down a key.

"Thanks, Robert!" Beverley yells, twisting the key into the lock and dragging the girls through the door. "Robert moved to New York two years ago," Beverley explains to Yi as they march up the stairs. "He's dating Marcia."

"Okay," Yi replies, as if that explains everything.

They reach the landing and Beverley strides ahead of Yi and Patty, walking assertively toward a door with loud music and a chorus of voices. As they squish behind her, Yi realizes that she is standing in Patty's position when the girls went to Auntie Fan's dinner a few weeks ago. She's officially a part of their trio, just like Patty said she would be. She opens her mouth to say something—though she's not sure what—when Beverley hauls them into the foyer and Calvin shouts, "My angels, you're here!"

He is kissing their cheeks, smelling of whiskey and tobacco and heat. Yi doesn't know what to take in first: the swirling disco lights that dot the room, the boys drinking beer next to Calvin's open wood-framed windows, someone's taffeta skirt swishing past her leg, a baritone singer crooning on the record player, or Calvin's shirt, unbuttoned just enough so she can see the smooth ridge of his chest. She settles on his chest.

"You look great," Calvin whispers as Beverley and Patty toss their purses onto a velvet ottoman.

"Oh," Yi replies. She tries to unglue her eyes from his chest. "It's, um, the dress. It's new."

Calvin flicks a stray piece of lint off her hem, his fingertips brushing against her thigh. "I know. I was there when Bev and Patty made you go shopping."

"Yes. Right."

Once again, she tries to find more words, different words, but Calvin is already walking away, his feet moving toward the bar cart, its glossy surface shimmering under the silver disco lights. He returns with two drinks.

“One for you,” he says, handing a hot-pink drink to Patty, “and one for you.”

“Thank you,” Beverley replies, taking the hazy brown liquid and bringing it to her lips. “Perfection. You’re a regular bartender, Calvin.”

“My backup if the money ever runs out,” Calvin jokes. He turns to Yi. “And what would the lady enjoy?”

Yi blinks. She’s never had alcohol before, as she’s underage in both Taiwan and America. Drinking was not part of her education back home, though she wishes it was, so she could at least name something that remotely resembles a cocktail. All she wants is to appear as relaxed and experienced as Beverley with her swaying, spiderlike legs and humid crystal glass poised between her fingers.

“She’ll try some of mine first,” Patty interjects, “and then figure out what she wants. Right, Yi?”

Yi nods, grateful for her friend’s kindness. Calvin shrugs, disappearing back into the crowd since he’s completed his host duties. As she watches him go, she wonders—for the first time—if he has a girlfriend somewhere in the room, someone who already has three favorite rotating cocktails, a party dress, and a fashionable hairstyle. Perhaps he’s told her about his school lunches with Yi, detailing her childishness as his sophisticated, generous girlfriend strokes his back and venerates his charity. Yi takes the glass from Patty’s outstretched hands, gulping down the liquid without asking what it is.

“Wow,” she says afterward, “this is delicious. What is it?”

Patty laughs. “A Cape Codder. Just vodka and cranberry juice. You can have it. I’ll get another one later.” She grabs Yi’s wrist and clinks her glass against Beverley’s. “Cheers!”

With that, Patty and Beverley move to the mantel, where a group is starting to dance, their bodies enmeshing into one tangled web. They call Yi over but she shakes her head, choosing instead to hover on the dance circle’s border, sipping her cocktail. She runs her hand down the crown molding lining Calvin’s walls, which extends all the way to the windows where the boys are drinking beers. With the chandelier and the old-world paintings in their heavy gold frames, his parlor seems like a place fit for royals or aristocrats instead of drunk Chinese teenagers. Does President Chiang Kai-Shek’s parlor look like this? Or is it too Westernized for the Taiwanese ruler?

Disco lights flutter over the boys' gelled hair, and after a few minutes, Yi spots Calvin among them, lighting a cigarette. He doesn't *seem* interested in other girls and he doesn't notice when one brushes past his shoulder, her sheer sleeve grazing his arm. Maybe he isn't dating anyone after all.

Satisfied, Yi reaches for the bar cart and pours more vodka and cranberry juice into her cup (she hopes that's all there is to the Cape Codder), marveling at the way the drink softens into a rich, girly pink. She decides then and there to consider this party a fact-finding mission—an opportunity to glean information about Calvin that he hasn't already shared at lunch.

In the corridor separating the parlor and a second room, she notes a series of photographs and paintings on the wall, but they're mostly Renaissance art prints and none are of people—not Calvin's late parents or his aunt and uncle from Westchester. In fact, as she looks around, she notices that the apartment seems stripped of anything personal beyond the party decorations and the drink-filled bar cart. She reasons that when you are eighteen like Calvin, you must move beyond the adolescent movie posters and faded dolls resting in their ten-year-old cribs. You become someone who's interested in French art and velvet ottomans, faded rainbow cocktails and cigarettes.

Pressing forward, Yi steps into the archway of the second room and is abruptly sheathed in darkness. She feels around the side wall for a switch and, finding one, flicks on the lights.

"Oh!" Yi yelps, tripping backward.

She catches herself just as a man unfurls his body from the shadows, his face long and chiseled like Calvin's but hidden behind a mop of messy hair. When he comes into the light, Yi sees that he's not really a man—more a boy, likely seventeen or eighteen, someone from her high school or church who she hasn't met yet.

"Sorry," he says, "I didn't mean to scare you."

"You didn't," she replies, though her glass is mashed against her chest. She rests it on the kitchen counter beside her and smooths out the nonexistent wrinkles in her dress.

Yi studies the boy: his gray turtleneck and loose trousers, the way she'd like to run a comb through his bushy, tangled hair like Mama does with Liwei when she wakes him up for school every morning.

The boy offers his hand and Yi knows that this time, she should shake it, her clammy palm meeting his.

“I’m Samuel,” he tells her.

“I’m Yi. Zheng Yi.”

Samuel purses his lips and drags his finger across the counter’s rippled edge. “You’re the new girl from Taipei.”

Yi nods. “Yes. Do you go to Beecher?” He could be one of people from the Chinese cafeteria clique she’s too afraid to meet, or maybe he’s a grade below her.

“No,” Samuel replies.

Yi pauses, waiting for him to elaborate. When he doesn’t, she reaches for her glass. The vodka burns the back of her throat, and she coughs, trying not to choke.

“How do you know Calvin, then?”

Samuel shrugs. “From church.”

“Oh, First Chinese Fellowship?” Yi asks, perking up. “I go there too. Well, I went last week with my host family. I must have missed you.”

“No, you didn’t,” he says. “I don’t go there anymore.”

“Why not?”

Samuel squints at her like she is a grainy specimen under his microscope. “I just don’t.”

Yi drinks her cocktail, careful to take tiny sips this time. She understands now: this Samuel knows exactly who she is—Zheng Yi, the new girl—but he won’t tell her a single thing about himself. She decides he’s mocking her, a cruel hazing ritual for the girl who is not truly American, not yet. No wonder he’s lurking in the kitchen, away from the rest of Calvin’s friends, nursing a—she glances at his hands and the countertop to see if he’s brought a drink. He hasn’t. Such an odd boy, a person Yi certainly doesn’t want to befriend. She turns on her heel, the room starting to sway, just as a voice punches through the kitchen fog.

“There you are!”

Patty is wrapping her arms around Yi’s stomach and kissing her cheeks, her breath reeking of cheap vodka. Then again, Yi thinks that *she* might smell like that too. Close behind are Beverley and a gaggle of girls huddled under the beer boys’ shoulders and armpits. Everyone crams into the kitchen.

“I see you’ve met Samuel,” Beverley pipes up, the curled-out ends of her hair especially silky under the fluorescent kitchen lights.

“Poor man’s Calvin!” a boy by the archway shouts, and Yi recognizes him as Robert, the key thrower and Marcia’s apparent boyfriend.

“That’s just mean,” chastises Patty, releasing her grip on Yi and resting her head against the floating kitchen cabinets.

Yi has no idea what Robert or Patty are talking about, but she knows it’s not positive. She glances at Samuel, but if he’s offended, he doesn’t show it, his face permanently flattened into an inquisitive stare, like a mask he’s decided to wear.

“Samuel looks a little like Calvin,” Beverley whisper-explains, “except Calvin’s, of course . . .”

“Rich,” Yi finishes.

“Yes, rich.” Beverley smiles. “So, thus, poor man’s Calvin.” She clucks her tongue and places her hands on her hips like an indignant schoolteacher. “Though that nickname is extremely juvenile and overplayed. Don’t you think, Robert?”

Robert scoffs, though his cheeks redden. “Whatever, Beverley.”

The group is quick to move on to new topics: Beecher’s football season, where the players are forced to train uptown since the high school doesn’t have a large enough field, the new curmudgeonly math teacher, and the largest piece of gossip so far—Bradley kissing Louise at the end of summer and then ignoring her as soon as classes started. Yi wants to participate but the room is spinning more and more, and she worries if she opens her mouth, she’ll topple over the counter onto Samuel’s haughty shoulder or turtlenecked chest and humiliate herself. It’s better to say nothing.

Yi finishes her drink as the record player crackles in the distance and an upbeat melody wafts into the kitchen.

“Ugh, I love this one,” one of the girls next to Beverley says. “The Four Tops are my favorite.”

“The Four Tops?” Yi hears herself ask, the room still twirling as fast as the record on its turntable.

“A Motown group. I *adore* them. Calvin, turn it up!” The girl sticks her head out of the archway so her voice will reach across the hall.

Yi listens intently to the song’s steady hook and the singers’ buttery voices. She hasn’t heard Motown before, but she thinks she likes it too.

Samuel pushes his elbows up on the counter and gestures toward the girl who just gushed about the Four Tops. “You know, Kimberley,” he says, “it’s

funny you love Motown, a genre that's entirely made up of African American singers, when last year you were pro-segregation."

Kimberley stiffens. "I was not *pro*-segregation. I just had concerns."

Samuel raises an eyebrow, like he's ensnared her in his bear trap. "And what were your concerns?"

Kimberley opens her mouth to reply but nothing comes out. She shifts in her slingback pumps as the music washes over the group with its sugary declarations of love.

"Oh, never mind," squeaks Patty, yanking on Samuel's sleeve. "Come on, let's get you a drink. What would you like? A beer? Or perhaps a whiskey sour? I'm sure I can figure out how to make one. Or if I can't, Calvin can."

Samuel shakes his head. "No, no, I'm fine. I don't want anything."

Of course he doesn't, Yi thinks, finding her balance as she grips Patty's arm. This mysterious *Samuel* is proving himself to be exactly who she thought he was: dour and rude, sulking in the kitchen and talking about things like segregation—which Yi only vaguely understands—when he could be telling Yi all kinds of information about himself, or at the very least, acting congenial toward Kimberley and the others.

Yi adjusts the collar of her new dress. "Let's go back to the parlor," she declares to Beverley and Patty. "I want to dance."

OceanofPDF.com

9
Zheng Yi

Yi and her friends are the last to leave Calvin's party, the late evening's inky-black tentacles weaving through the apartment's cup-and-crumb-strewn floor. Beverley and Patty stumble out onto the street to try to hail a cab, but each one ignores them, as if they don't see the tipsy Chinese girls frantically waving their arms.

"I've got it," Calvin says, taking Yi's hand and pulling her beside Beverley and Patty. He rolls up his sleeves and assertively whistles, and sure enough, a yellow taxi slows down beside them.

"How did you do that?" Yi asks.

Calvin grins. "Magic."

The girls shovel their purses and bodies inside the cab and squeeze in, Yi in the middle since she's the shortest. They're about to take off when Calvin impulsively jumps into the front passenger seat, yanking on the hem of his blazer so it doesn't get caught in the car door.

"Calvin!" Patty shrieks. "What are you doing?"

"Going back with you to Chinatown, of course." Calvin pulls down the vanity mirror and inspects his skin in the warped plastic glass. "What, did you think I was going to let you go home by yourselves? It's dangerous at night—in this neighborhood too. Every block changes."

Yi wants to say that they're in a car, so it won't matter if every block changes, but then she imagines there might be things she doesn't know about that can happen at night in New York, bad things even in cabs. Calvin

is such a gentleman, just like Mama and Baba said he would be. His parents must have taught him well before they died.

Beverley rolls down the window so the breeze can rush across her face. “It’s just because he doesn’t like being alone in an empty apartment,” she mutters so only Yi can hear, “especially after a party.”

Yi tries to understand what she’s saying, but the alcohol and dancing have lulled into her a gentle slumber. She nods halfheartedly, letting the rumbly taxi carry her home.

When she awakens, Beverley and Patty are rustling beside her. The cab has stopped in front of their boardinghouse, a simple four-story brick building connected to Mr. Ying’s plant and flower shop. Patty taps Yi’s shoulder and she stretches, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

“Goodbye, Yi,” Patty says. “I hope you had a wonderful evening.”

“The very best,” Yi answers sincerely. She side-hugs Beverley and watches as the pair dart across the sidewalk and into the apartment.

Calvin’s fingers dance across the console. “You last,” he announces, catching Yi’s eye in the rearview mirror. Yi suddenly feels wide awake.

The taxi comes to a full stop in front of Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen’s apartment, the traffic lights outside ticking in silence. Calvin unrolls a few bills and hands them to the driver.

“This is for the trip here,” he says, tipping a make-believe hat. “Wait and I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Yi slides out of the car. She’s no longer swaying like earlier, but the night feels out of focus, like she might wake up tomorrow and discover this was all a strange dream. Calvin walks her to the doorstep, and she resolves to say a pleasant good night and thank him for the evening and the thoughtful escort home. But there’s so much more she would like to say beyond that: how much she cherishes their bleacher lunches, how she worries that they’ll stop meeting once the weather gets cold and they’re forced inside, how sad she feels because his parents are gone, and how desperately she wishes he’d tell her if he has a girlfriend, or a crush, or someone to pay attention to beyond silly little Yi.

Instead, she blurts, “I’m very lucky to have met you.” The second the words come flying out of her mouth, she regrets them.

But Calvin merely smiles, running a hand through the loose strands of hair falling across his forehead. “Come on, Yi, you’re an American woman now. Say it in English for me.”

“What?”

He inches closer, so near she can feel his whiskey-stained breath on her hot cheeks.

“In English for me. Please.”

Yi chews on the inside of her cheek, the English translation pinging before her eyes like Morse code.

“I’m. Very.” She cannot look at Calvin’s face. “Er, lucky. To have met you.”

He steps back toward the street, the space between them as wide as the bridge Yi spotted on her first cab ride through New York—its curved wires hanging between them.

And then, softly, he replies, “I’m very lucky to have met you too, Yi.”

Yi doesn’t know if he’s speaking in English or Mandarin anymore. She says nothing, the words floating through her and carrying her inside. Only when she closes the door, her back pressed against its frame, does she process his lips moving in the wet evening heat. *He is lucky to have met me too,* she thinks, grinning so widely she must cover her mouth with her hands. She wants to kick off her heels and jump up and down, but she worries she’ll wake the building.

Maybe she’s drunk. Or maybe Mama and Baba are right. Maybe she really *will* have Calvin Chin’s babies one day.

OceanofPDF.com

10
Dawn Chin

All that lies between Dawn Chin and her grandmother is a long stretch of highway. On Wednesday, Dawn dutifully called Nai Nai and explained her AP US History project. She'd forgotten the way her grandma fills the space with silence—waiting so long to respond after Dawn asked *So can you be the historical relative for my yearlong school project?* that she felt compelled to follow up with *Hello?* just to make sure that Nai Nai was still on the phone. She was. And she gave her permission, though Dawn could sense the reluctance in her voice.

Through the phone speaker, she agreed to Dawn coming over to interview her next week (she hates lengthy calls, so an in-person interview is necessary), but she didn't offer to pay a measly portion of the fifty-dollar round-trip Greyhound bus fee to and from Concord, New Hampshire. Instead, Dawn had to use the savings she stocked up from her summers as a camp counselor in Santa Barbara. What a waste of money, time, and energy on a person who probably had nothing interesting happen to her in 1965 and likely finds her granddaughter equally as useless.

Dawn rests her head against the bus's ridged windowpane. Outside, the autumn foliage is reaching its peak—a theatrical spread of deep reds and burnt oranges that nature photographers clamor to document every year. She's used to it by now, but still, it stuns her: the way New England wraps its wool, cinnamon gloves around her body and makes her think that—for a moment—everything might be all right. Beyond the elite academic

experience and Ivy League college success rate, the weather was one of the main draws for her parents when considering Sanborn.

"The seasons!" her father had proclaimed. "It's important you experience them."

"Sure," Dawn had replied, digging through her cup noodles to avoid looking her father directly in the eye.

He didn't get excited about most things, so his sudden animation unnerved her. She was used to her rational, scripted parents.

It wasn't until the end of freshman year that she realized her mom and dad are forking over three hundred thousand dollars for a really distinct change in seasons. Dawn knows her family has money—her parents both work in tech—but not the kind of money that Caroline or Stephanie or Delia or Giselle have. Or Fitz. They don't go on lavish European vacations every break or give her a credit card to go online shopping whenever she is bored or sick or tired. Dawn is the first to admit she doesn't know anything about money, but she can't understand how her parents are affording Sanborn. Or why. She's not going to get into an Ivy League or do anything consequential with her boarding school education.

Dawn blinks at each passing, blurred leaf. She reasons that each one probably costs a dollar. She better keep her eyes open.

The bus bumps down the highway, and the middle-aged man in the seat next to her tilts into her shoulder. He's holding an open bag of ruffled potato chips and crumbs fall from his fingers and bag, scattering across her shirt like dandruff.

"The damn potholes," he says. "Sorry."

Dawn grimaces, flicking off a particularly large chip crumb that leaves a light grease stain on her sleeve. The stain abruptly makes her think of Fitz—over the summer, she teased him because every single designer shirt he wore had some gigantic grass or food stain or nickel-sized hole.

"I am worried," she had joked one afternoon in the courtyard, lying on a towel they were using as a picnic blanket, "that you don't know how to do laundry. True or false?"

"One thousand percent false," Fitz had protested. He swung his leg over hers, so their thighs and ankles were braided together. "I just don't care that much. That's my parents' job." He smiled then, and Dawn remembers his finger tracing her jaw and running across her bottom lip. "And they're not here, right?"

“No,” Dawn had whispered, at once serious, “they’re not.”

That was their last August afternoon together—the day before the rosebushes and the blood dripping down her arms. She remembers thinking the word *betrayal* as she tried not to cry.

Now, though, on the bus to Nai Nai’s, she touches her face to find tears rolling down her cheeks. Her throat tightens and clogs like a sewer pump threatening to overflow. She buries her head in the corner space between her seat and the window, but the man next to her notices.

“Are you okay?” he asks, another potato chip poised between his fingers.

Dawn nods as quiet sobs heave from her body. Snot is dripping from her nose, and she rubs it on the back of her already dirty sleeve. The passengers around her are pretending not to stare but they obviously are. She can hear the woman diagonal from her whisper *poor girl*.

As soon as the bus careens to a stop, Dawn grabs her backpack and jumps to her feet, practically vaulting over the sympathetic chips man to exit the vehicle. She hurries past the concrete outdoor terminal and the dinky waiting area until she finds herself on a side street with rows of suburban houses encircled by wraparound front porches, making the entire city seem like a utopian retirement village. Puffy and disgusted, she sniffs and pulls up Google Maps. She should act more like her parents—practical, stoic, putting aside the things that hurt them most.

Gazing at the sidewalk ahead, Dawn resolves not to think about Fitz or the rosebushes or the three-hundred-thousand-dollar boarding school waiting for her across the border. It’s time to see her grandmother.

OceanofPDF.com

11
Dawn Chin

Nai Nai's house looks like it was ripped out of one of those stock photo calendars that old people buy every year and stick to their kitchen walls. It's small and unassuming, with blue-shuttered windows and a white facade. A well-kept yard spotted with zinnia and marigold bushes lines the brick steps that lead to the front door.

Dawn rings the doorbell, pinching her cheeks so her face appears flushed and healthy instead of puffy. She hopes the shadows will shield her red eyes. Slippers patter across the carpet, and Dawn bites her bottom lip as the knob turns and the door creaks open.

Her nai nai stands in the opening, short and thin, with square shoulders and Dawn and her father's shared sturdy nose. Sunspots darken her cheeks, her face bare of makeup and her hair flat and gray.

"Um, hi, Nai Nai," Dawn says. For a moment, she's worried her grandmother has forgotten their meeting time, but Nai Nai beckons her inside.

"Come on in."

The inside of the house is as simple as the outside—clean, with wall-to-wall tan carpet and a wooden shoe rack neatly stacked with pairs of slippers Dawn assumes are for guests. She slides off her sneakers and grabs a one-size-fits-all purple set before following her grandmother into the kitchen.

For as long as she can remember, Nai Nai has lived in this house, yet Dawn and her parents rarely visit. Despite Nai Nai's old age, she always travels to California for Christmas, where she stays in their guest room for a

week. The only exception was when Dawn's father dragged her to Sanborn's freshman orientation two years ago because he thought it was important for the whole family to see Dawn's new school, her new life. He took them to a fancy steak house for dinner, and Dawn recalls her grandma picking at the sixty-dollar filet mignon like it was a live cow. She didn't come back to Vermont after that. In fact, the last time she saw her grandmother was nine months ago for her annual Christmas visit. Even in their compact California house, Dawn and Nai Nai managed to live separate lives: Dawn in her bedroom, playing *The Sims* and avoiding her parents, and her grandmother downstairs, watching Chinese-dubbed K-dramas for hours on end.

Dawn sits at the kitchen table and drops her backpack at her feet.

"Thanks for letting me interview you," she says.

Nai Nai is standing over the sink, filling up the kettle with water. "Sure. Do you want Chinese or American tea?"

She turns to her granddaughter, holding up a bag of oolong and a tin of plain Lipton.

"Chinese, please," Dawn replies.

She hopes her choice will please her grandmother, but if it has, Nai Nai doesn't show it.

As the water boils, Dawn unzips her backpack and takes out the gargantuan syllabus Ms. Codderton printed out for the class. Helpfully, on page twenty-three, after the brief description of the research project, she's listed several opening questions to ask the assigned relative. Pages twenty-four and twenty-five are dedicated to blank lined pages with the header *Notes*, like Dawn is in first grade and hasn't learned how to type yet. Ms. Codderton clearly does not believe in the modern-day existence of laptops.

"So, um, as you know, I'm supposed to interview someone for my history project and talk about a part of their life as it relates to, well, history." Dawn pauses. "I have to write a paper on it and then do a full-class presentation at the end of the year." Nai Nai places a mug in front of her with the words *University of California, Berkeley* stretched across it. It's Dawn's father's alma mater and the school her parents are most eager for her to attend. Dawn tries to subtly turn the mug, so its plain backside faces her.

Nai Nai dumps the oolong leaves straight into the bottom of the cup. "Okay," she replies.

Dawn chews on her lip. Should she continue blathering while her grandmother shuffles around the kitchen, putting away the tea and reaching across the top cabinet for her own cup and looking anywhere but at her granddaughter? Dawn thinks of the three hundred thousand dollars again. She can't fail this class. And she can't stand the awkward silence. So she decides to push onward.

"Um, right, so," Dawn begins, "the first question is: *What historical time period feels the most meaningful to you?* Dad said that you immigrated here in 1965. Was that, uh, a meaningful year for you?"

Nai Nai shrugs. "It was a big year for America and the world. But for me, I didn't really experience any of that."

"So you weren't a secret hippie or whatever?" Dawn jokes.

Dawn's grandmother blinks in the afternoon sun. "No."

The water boils and she pours it into her and Dawn's cups before taking a seat, her chair directly across from her granddaughter's as if they are two players reluctantly playing a game of verbal chess.

"I was learning English. And trying to make friends and get into university. Much like you." Nai Nai blows on her tea, the steam misting across her face.

Oh great, Dawn thinks. Maybe she too is destined for a dull life as a New Hampshire librarian with grandchildren she hardly speaks to. It wouldn't be a surprise given the way Dawn and her parents talk. Or don't talk.

"All right," Dawn says, flipping to the lined page but unsure what to write down. She turns back to Ms. Codderton's introductory questions. "Regardless of the outside political climate, then, tell me about your life in 1965." She glances up at her grandma, riffing off her history teacher's suggestions. "What was your immigration here like? Was it scary?"

Nai Nai's eyes move to the window. It overlooks the fenced backyard, similarly filled with bright zinnia and marigold bushes, the yellows and pinks bursting from the deep jade leaves. "Yes. I had to take a lot of plane rides. Five in total. I had never been on a plane before. And when I got here, though I'd learned English in Taipei, I wasn't as fluent as I thought. So I had to work very hard to get good grades."

"Wow," Dawn murmurs.

She remembers when she flew across the country from California to Vermont. Her parents had insisted on coming with her. Dawn whined that they shouldn't, but once she was strapped into her seat, she felt grateful for

their company. She can hardly imagine what school in New Hampshire must have been like—likely no Asian students, no one to speak her language.

"You went to high school in New Hampshire?" Dawn confirms.

"Yes."

"So how did you make friends? I bet no one spoke Mandarin. Or Hokkien."

Dawn's nai nai is still staring out the window. "There are kind people wherever you go."

Her voice turns wistful, and Dawn instantly feels guilty. It's not the kind of guilt that she can easily figure out: it sits low in her stomach, dull and aching. She's felt it before—when her annoying cousin Rachel came for Christmas and gushed about how lucky Dawn was to attend Sanborn, when she watched her mom win some kind of data science award from her dorm room, when she looked at her smudged reflection in the mirror after her last night with Fitz.

Dawn flinches. She's breaking all her promises to herself; she's acting childish again. She needs to focus. She opens her mouth to ask more of Ms. Codderton's questions, but her grandmother stands and moves to check on the rice cooker. Dawn didn't realize it was on, but now it bubbles and stirs, and Dawn salivates. She hasn't eaten anything all day, mostly because she hates breakfast and because she usually doesn't make it to the dining hall before it closes. She's missed good, sticky rice, the authentic kind she can't get at Sanborn.

"I haven't had lunch yet," Nai Nai announces. "Would you like some too? I made bok choy to go with the rice."

"Yes, please," Dawn replies, trying not to sound too eager. She doesn't want her grandmother to report back to her parents that she's not eating well at boarding school.

"Good. I need a few minutes, then."

Nai Nai pulls the bok choy from the fridge and rinses it under the cool tap water. As she tosses it into a skillet, Dawn realizes that her grandmother is not going to answer any more questions while she's cooking. And she really can't stand the stagnant silence that envelops the kitchen.

"I have to go to the bathroom," Dawn blurts. "Where is it?"

Nai Nai points without looking up. "Down the hall. First door next to the storage closet."

“Thanks.”

Dawn follows her grandmother’s instructions and steps into the bathroom, shutting the door behind her. She lets out a lungful of air, like she can breathe for the first time since she’s entered the house. It’s not that Nai Nai is being mean or rude. After all, she’s making Dawn lunch. It’s just that talking to her is hard—even worse than talking to her parents. It’s always been like this. Why would Dawn think that would change?

Crouched on the closed toilet seat, Dawn examines the room. It’s predictably bare bones: a clear plastic shower curtain skimming the edge of a ratty pink bath mat, an old pedestal sink. The only interesting object is the bathroom caddy across from the toilet. The top rack is scattered with lotion bottles, face towels, and half-empty Vaseline containers. But the bottom rack exclusively holds a large, tattered Bible. Dawn can’t help but think of her grandmother pooping while God calls her to find eternal glory in Christ.

She reaches for the Bible and thumbs through its waxy pages. It’s not a particularly familiar book to her; David and Bettina Chin are what people call “Christmas and Easter Christians” because they only attend church on those two holidays. She wonders if her father tells Nai Nai they go more often than they do.

Dawn is flicking through Ephesians when a piece of paper falls from the Bible. It’s the size of a Post-it note, but when she picks it up, she realizes it’s a newspaper clipping folded in half. Ink-stained and slightly crumpled, the clipping has clearly been looked at and touched countless times. Dawn unfolds the page.

A black-and-white picture of four girls unfurls between her fingers. They’re wearing uniforms—blazers and plaid skirts with button-downs underneath, the photo cutting off at their knees. Behind them is a brick wall and scattered, leafy branches. Each girl is holding a stuffed animal to the camera. The caption reads: *Students at Beecher Preparatory High School in Manhattan collect donations for local orphanages as part of the nineteenth annual New York City Youth Day of Giving.*

Dawn scans the clipping. Based on the age of the photo and the girls’ beehive hairstyles and blunt bangs, this has to be from the 1960s or ’70s. And then Dawn’s gaze pauses at the third girl’s tidy bun, her tentative smile and sturdy nose—just like Dawn’s father’s, just like hers. Dawn would recognize that face anywhere, even sixty years later. It’s a photo of her grandmother.

Dawn reads the caption again, breaking it down into sections. *Beecher Preparatory High School. Manhattan. New York City Youth Day of Giving.* From the description and the uniforms, the girls are clearly students. The girls are students in *New York City*. Dawn's eyebrows crease. Didn't her grandmother tell her only minutes ago that she attended high school in New Hampshire? Why was she in Manhattan? It certainly doesn't seem like she was visiting for the day. She squints at the photo. It's *definitely* her grandmother.

Outside, a dish clatters as it hits the countertop. Dawn pats her shirt and jeans but comes up empty—she's left her cell phone on the kitchen table and can't snap a photo of the clipping. And besides, she should mind her business. That's what her parents would tell her to do. So carefully, she closes the Bible and places it back on the bottom shelf, positioning it right where it was before she walked into the bathroom.

She opens the door and returns to a set table and Nai Nai plopping garlic bok choy into the rice bowls.

"It smells delicious," Dawn says as she sits down.

"It's very simple to make," her grandmother replies.

"Still. Thank you."

Nai Nai puts the bowls in front of them and starts to eat, so Dawn picks up her chopsticks. She can ask more of Ms. Codderton's questions later.

They don't talk while eating, and Dawn is so hungry, she doesn't mind the silence. At the end of their meal, her grandmother gets up to boil more water, and Dawn looks down at the remnants of the bok choy she devoured. Slowly, she moves her hand under the table to ostensibly wipe it on the napkin Nai Nai gave her.

Instead, she palms her jeans' front pocket and pats the newspaper clipping tucked inside.

OceanofPDF.com

12
Zheng Yi

On the first Monday of October 1965, Zheng Yi flips over her English test and sees the letter *F* circled at the top of the page in scarlet-red ink. In fact, there's red everywhere—streaked across the page like blood—slashes across her answers, question marks in the margins, a *this does not make sense* scrawled on the side. That sentence, Yi *does* understand.

Calvin's tender, perfect voice that evening outside Auntie Fan's apartment is rapidly disappearing despite the many times Yi's repeated his *I'm glad to have met you too* in her head. Every night, tucked under her blankets, she's replayed their lunches together, the way he smirks as she dashes out of chemistry—her final period of the day—so he can walk her to the subway entrance on Sixty-Eighth. Beverley and Patty tease her about him frequently, and Yi loves giggling as they prod, insisting he could never be interested in a girl like her. Now she thinks she should have paid more attention to her studies than to boys. She is becoming too American for her own good.

Yi slides the test into her backpack so she doesn't have to look at the F anymore. Her reality is as dreadful as it is funny: The more she acclimates to her new life, the quicker she will have to leave it behind. If she fails her classes, she won't get into an American university. She'll be shipped back to Taipei, back to the gossiping palm trees, and the flower-selling woman, and the childhood bedroom that is as familiar to her as it is stale. She'll be a disappointment to her family and to herself.

In the hallway, Yi tries to not slump her shoulders, but her knapsack involuntarily drags her back to the floor like a bulldozer crushing a field of grass. She enters her locker combination slowly, her mind a Rolodex of test scores and college names.

"Gee, what happened to you?"

Beverley is leaning against the locker next to Yi's, her paper lunch bag swinging across her thighs. Beverley has lunch next so she doesn't have to get to class right away. As a result, she's taken to walking Yi to math every day.

Yi shakes her head. In Taiwan, her parents warned her not to talk too openly about her failures. The shame runs too deep.

Beverley pokes Yi's arm with her free hand. "Oh, out with it," she says. "Moping isn't attractive."

"*Failing* isn't attractive," Yi mutters before she can stop herself. She stuffs her math textbook into her already full knapsack.

"Failing?" Beverley raises an eyebrow. "What was it, Mr. Abernathy's exam on Charles Dickens?"

Yi nods, half miserable and half in awe that Beverley and Patty both seem to know exactly what irks Yi at any given moment. They might know her better than Sula and Lula.

Beverley shrugs like failing a major test on a great icon of literature isn't so big a deal. "That happened to me too. Freshman year." She stares up at the ceiling in thoughtful reminiscence as she and Yi weave their way through the hallway crowd. "*Robinson Crusoe*. I wasn't sure if that was a person or a bird, honestly. You could have told me the book was about a talking animal named Robin, and I would have believed you. That's how much I understood."

Yi lets out a laugh and Beverley's eyes twinkle. "But I got better. And by the end of the year, I had a B-plus in English. Not too shabby, right?"

"Not at all," Yi agrees, impressed. "How did you do it?"

She expects Beverley to offer some platitude on time and effort, things Yi knows well but hasn't put into practice as much as she'd like. In Taipei, she used to study under the glow of her bedroom lamp until she fell asleep on her homework. She'd wake up with her cheek covered in black ink and scrub it off in time for her morning classes—unfettered by boys or crushes, or beautiful dresses.

But Beverley doesn't talk about time or effort or cite President Chiang Kai-Shek's various rambling speeches about ambition and work ethic, the way her parents would at the start of every school year.

Instead, she says, "Samuel's tutoring was what did the trick. You should ask him for help."

Yi's forehead scrunches. "Samuel?"

Beverley nods as the pair narrowly avoid a football player's messenger bag hitting them in the chest.

"You met him at Calvin's party? In the kitchen, remember?"

Yes, she is beginning to remember. Mysterious, surly Samuel, the one who let her awkwardly question him while providing little information in response, who embarrassed Kimberley, and sulked in the kitchen for the entire party until he slipped out, too pompous to say goodbye.

"Samuel *tutors*?" Yi's words drip with disdain.

Beverley chuckles. "Yes. He's actually really great at English. And he loves literature. He tutored me for an entire year after I failed that *Robinson Crusoe* exam, and he charged almost nothing. He helped Patty too when she needed it. I think he just likes the humanities. He's good at all of them."

Yi can't imagine this boy willingly helping Beverley or Patty, much less getting their grades up.

"But he doesn't even go to this school," Yi protests. "How is he so good at English?"

Beverley waves a hand in the air. "He attends some school in Chinatown, I think. And it doesn't matter. He's just good. Really, you should reach out to him. I can give you his telephone number if you want."

Beverley doesn't wait for Yi to respond, instead snatching her notebook and scribbling down some numbers on an empty page.

"He lives with other boys, so when you call him, don't be shocked," she warns.

He lives with other *boys*, not in a boardinghouse or with a host family, like Yi? And he's somehow miraculously excellent at English literature and perhaps all the humanities? The puzzle pieces of eccentric loner Samuel don't fit inside Yi's head, no matter how she tries to mash them together. Still, if receiving tutoring is as worthwhile as Beverley says, she'd be foolish not to ask.

Yi folds down the corner of the page with Samuel's number so she won't lose it. "Okay. Thank you. I'll reach out."

Beverley grins, pinching Yi's cheek like she is her favorite pet project. "Fantastic. You'll be a regular Shakespeare in no time."

As the day drags on, the first autumn leaves drifting across Beecher's windowpanes, Yi starts to feel better about the F sitting in the bottom of her backpack. She has a plan now, a decent one, and if Beverley and Patty can handle Samuel's tutoring, why can't she? She receives a monthly allowance from her parents alongside their long, handwritten letters, so she likely has enough to pay him, especially since Beverley said he charges so little. Her American university dreams have not spun down the drain quite yet.

By the time the bell rings in chemistry, Yi is thinking about Calvin again. She didn't see him today during lunch, which is not unusual, as he sometimes skips an entire morning or afternoon of classes (Yi never understands why or how he gets away with this). But in just seconds, she knows he'll be there standing outside the classroom door, his hands in his trouser pockets, his head cocked to the side, like he's casually picking her up for a date at the coffee shop on Madison, or better yet, a horse-drawn carriage ride in Central Park that all the tourists like to go on.

Yi hurriedly leaves the classroom and spots him by the adjacent doorway, his slicked-back hair glistening under the hallway's fluorescent lights. The sharp angle of his cheeks softens as he smiles at her.

"Hello, stranger," Calvin says. "Make any headlines at school? Shall we alert the press?"

Yi rolls her eyes at his joke, too engrossed with their matching uniform sleeves brushing up against each other to think of anything witty to say back.

"No," she replies, "no press today. What about you? You weren't at lunch."

Calvin stretches, his hand suspended over the back of her neck. "Sorry about that. Had some things to do."

"Like what?"

"Planning our next party, of course." Calvin's arms flop to his sides. "Halloween is around the corner. And we should wear matching costumes, don't you think?"

Yi hadn't heard of Halloween until Beverley and Patty explained it to her, and now she relishes the idea of pretending to be someone else, especially

with Calvin. But then she remembers her duties.

"That sounds wonderful," Yi says, "but I promised Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy I'd take them trick-or-treating. They told me all the shops throughout Chinatown and the Lower East Side pass out candy."

She initially thought their parents would take them out for Halloween—especially since it falls on a Sunday—but Auntie Fan said she had to cook dinner, and Uncle Wen will be on another business trip. Besides, though the boys tussle in the street, and don't listen to her, she's grown fond of Edwin's sporadic cuddles on the couch, Bobby's obsession with spotting street rats, and Teddy's frequent requests for piggyback rides through Seward Park. The three of them almost fill the hole in her heart where Liwei is missing.

"We'll have it that Saturday, then. The thirtieth," Calvin declares, "so the whole weekend is a celebration. Besides, we can't have a party without *you*, can we?"

He clucks his tongue and Yi fights every bone in her body that wants to instantly fold into his arms. Calvin is sweet, but that doesn't mean he's fallen for her. Yi must remind herself of that.

"October thirtieth is perfect." Yi nods.

She works to regain her composure as they stop by her locker so she can pick up more textbooks and papers for her homework tonight. Hastily, she plops her English notebook on top of her chemistry folder; she's opened it to the earmarked page with Beverley's writing so she won't forget to call Samuel after school.

"Let me carry that for you," Calvin says, grabbing the textbooks and the folder and notebook from her hands. He glances down at the open page with Samuel's number. "What's this? You got a secret admirer?"

Yi laughs nervously, shaking her head as she shuts her locker door. "No, it's a tutor's telephone number. I . . ."

She didn't want to tell anyone else beyond Beverley about her failing grade—in fact, she hadn't wanted to tell Beverley at all—but now she feels she has to.

"I failed my English test," she confesses. "And Beverley suggested someone tutor me so I can get my grades up. You know Samuel, from your party? He said you met at church?"

"Yes, of course I know Samuel," Calvin snaps. His words singe the corners of her books.

Yi bows her head and watches her feet move down the hallway and toward the stairs. She's made the wrong choice by telling him. He must think she's a complete imbecile. He won't want to be seen with her anymore, not at school, and certainly not in a matching costume at his upcoming Halloween party.

"I think I can get better," Yi says, switching from Mandarin to English to prove her point. "I only need a few lessons. In Taiwan, I was at the top of my—"

"I'll help you," Calvin interrupts. "You don't need Samuel."

Yi pauses at the edge of the stairs. "What?"

"I'll help you," Calvin repeats. "Samuel is bad news. You don't want him as a tutor."

Yi chokes on his words like they are rocks. "But he comes to your parties. Why do you—"

"He knows everyone at the parties, he's been coming for ages. I'm a nice guy, I'm not going to not let him come." Calvin rolls his eyes. "If people want to spend their weekends listening to his stupid political rants, by all means, they can go ahead."

Yi nods. She thinks she understands. The missing puzzle piece is finally clicking into place: her first impression of Samuel matches Calvin's opinion of him. This boy—who is kind to her, who cares about her, who surprisingly does not seem to be embarrassed by her failing grade—says that Samuel is *bad news*, that one-on-one tutoring would be a terrible idea. Yi wants to ask more but Calvin is now rushing down the steps, so quickly she has to race behind him, trying not to stumble. At the bottom of the stairs, caught in the throng of students swarming the main entrance, Calvin turns to Yi.

"This weekend, are you free?"

"Yes," Yi immediately replies.

She isn't sure if she's actually free, but Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen usually ferry the boys to the museum or the park on weekends and she can always pretend she's going somewhere with Patty and Beverley again.

"Good." He pushes through the crowd until they're at the double doors. "I'm going to take you to every American film that's playing."

Yi clutches her knapsack straps. She doesn't understand. *American movies?* How will that help her write papers on Charles Dickens?

“All you need is to get better at English,” Calvin explains before she can ask, “and American films are perfect for that. You watch a bunch with me, you’re golden. The words will flow through you like osmosis.”

“Osmosis?”

Calvin chuckles. “You’ll learn that too.”

He pulls open the door, and they step into the crisp October air. Yi inhales. It smells cold and bright, like the weather is changing and her with it. She’s going to spend the weekend with Calvin Chin, watching movies. Afterward, she’ll know exactly what to write for her papers and exams. Her teacher won’t have to ask what she means again.

“Okay,” she agrees, “pick me up Saturday at noon?”

Abruptly, Calvin tears out the page with Samuel’s telephone number and crumples it, tossing the bunched-up paper into a nearby trash can. Yi watches as it sails into the basket. Calvin hands her back her books, the page on top now blank.

“You can count on it.”

OceanofPDF.com

13
Zheng Yi

The glittering marquees stretching across Seventh Avenue are like nothing Zheng Yi has ever seen. Bright lights flash from every direction, Times Square a patchwork of opposing ideas: lavish, old-world theaters and flashy billboards sponsored by Atlantic City and Coca-Cola and Milani, a French salad dressing company. Yi doesn't know where to look.

This morning, she told Auntie Fan that she, Beverley, and Patty had a school charity event, which isn't *technically* false; they did sign up for New York's annual Youth Day of Giving at Beecher's strong encouragement. They'll be collecting old teddy bears and toys for orphan children, but that isn't until mid-November. She expected to feel guilty for lying right to her host mother's face but instead found it easy to shove down the black tar of her deceit, letting it calcify at the bottom of her gut. She was too focused on Calvin.

Calvin, who picked her up from the Canal Street subway station and sat beside her as the train rumbled from Chinatown to Forty-Second Street. The whole way there, he jabbered about their schedule: which films they would watch, and which might not be worth it, as he's seen everything that's currently playing. Yi marveled at how prepared he was. She pictured him alone in his living room on Friday evening—thumbing through the newspaper, circling movie times with a ballpoint pen—and glistened at the thought.

Now Calvin takes her hand, and they dive into a theater on Forty-First. Their first showing is *The Sound of Music*, a musical film about a

headstrong nun who falls in love with a steely naval captain after nannying his seven children. Yi likes the songs and the light, colorful costumes, the swish of their skirts as Maria and the children dance through the mountains of Salzburg, Austria. Occasionally, Calvin leans sideways and whispers things in her ear like, “Do you know what the Anschluss is?” (she doesn’t) and “*Fraulein* is the German word for a young woman.” Yi loves his soft breath on her neck, but she can’t help but think that while she’s working on her English, she’s forced to learn German too.

At intermission, Calvin buys her a large buttery popcorn and a fizzy soda and Yi glows when he casually pulls out his credit card and slides it across the cash register. While Mama and Baba would be scandalized at the thought of their only daughter alone with a boy, at least it is Calvin, the boy they like. She even wrote about him in her last letter home, though she was careful to be conservative in her descriptions lest her parents start planning their lavish Taipei wedding. A *wedding*. The thought tickles the hair on her forearms, and she presses her elbows into the seat rests. Maria and the Captain are finally getting married; Maria is in a flowing silk gown that makes her look like a princess. Yi’s toes curl in her Mary Janes. If Yi and Calvin *do* get married one day, maybe their wedding will be in Europe—posh and extravagant, just like her future husband. She is getting carried away, she knows. But what a perfect wedding they would have.

By the time she and Calvin emerge from the theater, the blue sky is dappled with late-afternoon clouds, and the streets are packed with people.

“What do you want to see next?” Calvin asks. He has been talking to her in English all day and making her respond in kind. “We probably have time for one or two more.”

They’re standing on the sidewalk next to a Nathan’s hot dog stand, the smoke from the grilled meat melding with the stench of New York sewage.

“I don’t know,” Yi answers. She hasn’t seen anything, and she wants to see everything. To understand everything.

“All right, thriller or romantic comedy?”

Yi chews on her lip. “What is a thrill-er?”

Calvin sighs like a disappointed schoolteacher and Yi feels a flush of embarrassment. Has she learned nothing from the three-hour film they just watched?

“Never mind,” she quickly replies, “let’s watch the, um . . . romantic comedy.”

Romantic is a word she knows. She watches with relief as Calvin's face contorts back into its regular happy mask.

"Excellent," he says. "You're in for a treat."

Yi doesn't know what *you're in for a treat* means either, but this time, she doesn't ask.

After walking a few blocks north, they stop in front of another theater. Faded movie posters are glued to its facade, creased against the wall like someone manually peels back the glue and replaces the poster with a new one every night. To the left side of the entrance is a cartoon illustration of two men in newsboy caps seemingly falling down the side of a building. The one in front holds a magnifying glass to his eye as the one behind grasps the back of his sweater to keep him from falling further.

"This is an arthouse cinema," Calvin explains, "so they show both old films and new ones. That one's from the forties," he says, pointing to the cartoon men.

Yi nods. Her gaze moves to the poster to right of the entranceway: a glamorous woman adorned in a sleek black dress, gloves, and gleaming diamonds, her bouffant and bangs impossibly perfect, her eyes twisted to the side like she knows a secret.

"What film is that?" Yi asks, transfixed.

Calvin smirks. "The one we're seeing. C'mon, we'll miss it."

They dash into the theater, Yi's belly bloated with salt and soda. Slipping into the back row, they find a pair of empty seats just as the film's opening sequence begins to play. The woman from the poster saunters down a street that reminds Yi of Beecher and the Upper East Side. And then Yi realizes that this woman *is* in New York City. She's never seen a movie set in a place that she lives in. It almost feels like she, too, is part of the film's rich taffeta world, like if she just focuses hard enough, she can be beautiful Holly Golightly, hardheaded and confident and set on forging her own path. Yi loves her quips, her style, her sense of self that Yi has never had. Holly refuses to be stuck in a cage, so she won't marry for love—that is, of course, until a handsome man works tirelessly to sweep her off her feet.

By the time the film finishes, Yi is in a trance. She doesn't understand every word and there are parts that don't make sense to her, like the buffoonish Japanese landlord coated in greasy yellow makeup and the cat peculiarly named *Cat*. But she grasps its essence. She understands Holly.

And when she walks out of the theater, she holds out her arms and imagines black gloves reaching up past her elbows.

"That was wonderful," Yi exclaims as she and Calvin stumble into the fresh air. The sun is beginning to set, and its fuzzy orange glow only adds to Yi's transformation. She can almost feel the heavy jewels clasped around her neck, the short, wispy bangs dusting her forehead.

"I thought you would like that one."

"The main actress was so good," she gushes. She wants to say more than *so good* but she can't remember any more English adjectives.

"That's Audrey Hepburn. She's very famous here." Calvin strolls past the double doors and pulls out a cigarette from his blazer pocket. He lights it, blowing smoke into the car-lined street.

"Audrey Hepburn," she echoes.

It's a magnificent name for an actress, even classier and more glamorous than Holly Golightly.

"Aud-rey *Hep*-burn," she enunciates, this time with more force, wanting to say her name perfectly in English.

Calvin kicks the edge of the sidewalk, the heel of his loafer making a right angle with a car parked parallel to the movie theater. Yi stares at her warped reflection in its shiny surface. If she lasts long enough in New York, she could be like Audrey Hepburn one day. She's never really wanted to be an actress, but that could change.

Goose bumps crawl up her arms, and she steps back, realizing it's gotten colder now that the sun has set. She pulls her sweater across her rib cage and turns toward Calvin, who is stamping out the last of his cigarette.

"I should go home. It's late," Yi tells him. She expects him to protest, to convince her to watch one last movie, but Calvin just nods.

"Okay," he says.

I've bored him, she thinks, suddenly horrified, *too obsessed with a silly movie and a silly actress to pay him enough attention.* If they watch more movies tomorrow (she doesn't know if she can lie a second time to Auntie Fan), she promises to be better.

"C'mon, let's go back." Calvin pivots and starts marching toward the subway, and Yi has to jog to keep up with him as they return to the 6 train.

On the subway, Yi and Calvin don't speak. Instead, Yi fiddles with her sweater's pearl buttons—it's a prewar hand-me-down from Mama. As the

train gets closer to Canal Street, she sits taller, trying to be a puppet on a taut string, just like Mama always instructed.

"Thank you for everything, Calvin," Yi says, loud enough that other passengers start glancing in her direction. She forges on. "Thank you for showing me all these films. And for being kind to me. For caring about my bad grades. You are a good person and a good friend."

The train screeches to a halt and the doors burst open. Calvin stands up and holds out his hand to lift her from the seat.

"I think that's the most you've said in English since you came to New York."

"Well," she replies, smiling, "I have a good teacher."

Calvin smiles back. His steps are much springier as they weave through the Saturday night crowds and make their way to Auntie Fan's. At the corner of Mulberry, Yi pauses.

"Wait," she says. "Drop me off here."

"Why? Got a secret mission?"

Yi laughs. "No. But I don't want Auntie Fan or the boys seeing us when I said I was with Beverley and Patty. Teddy is always peeking out the front window."

Calvin theatrically wags his finger. "That Teddy, what a terrible boy. How dare he peek out the window."

Yi laughs harder. "*He's* the spy on the secret—er—mission. That's how you say it, yes?"

Calvin nods, pulling out the lighter from his breast pocket. The flame flickers in the darkness. "I think," he muses, "you are becoming more and more American every day. Buying new dresses and lying to your host family . . . liking *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I told you it would happen, and ta-da." He releases the clicker and the fire dissolves. "But you know what you need to be truly American?"

Yi blinks. "No, what?"

"You need to change your name."

Yi trips on a divot in the concrete and almost tumbles back into the trash pile. She digs her shoe into the ground to steady herself. "What do you mean?"

"Pick an American name." Calvin shrugs. "I did it when I came here."

Right. All her friends have American names: Beverley and Patty and Calvin. People she barely knows, like Kimberley and Samuel. It's odd to

think that they had different names before, different lives in China and Taiwan, but she only knows them as their American selves. Who were they before New York made them steely and cosmopolitan? And who will she become?

She swallows. “What was your name back home?”

“This is my home,” Calvin asserts, “but in China, I was Chin Daiwei.”

“That’s a nice name.” She mouths the syllables, soft against her teeth.

“I like Calvin better.” He slides the lighter back into his breast pocket. “So, what have you decided?”

Yi fiddles with her sweater’s pearl buttons again. “Will I have to do anything with the . . . with the law to change it?”

“You mean legally change your name with the government?” Calvin shakes his head. “No, you can just call yourself whatever you want. And then, from that day forward, everyone has to call you that too.”

“Okay.”

Pacing down Mulberry, she looks up at the tilted paper lanterns strung between the roofs of the fish and vegetable markets. She’s gotten used to the vegetables’ pale sheen here, the fish small and pungent, unlike the fat ones Mama used to buy at fish markets in Taipei. She should spend her last few coins on bok choy for Auntie Fan to boil for supper. She could pull it out of the gauzy plastic bag, unveil its stalks with her new name and say, *From now on, call me . . .*

“Audrey,” she says, and the image of beautiful Audrey Hepburn parades across her eyes like she’s watching the film all over again. “My new name is Audrey.”

She turns her head from the lanterns and faces Calvin, focused entirely on him as he holds out his hand. Firmly, she shakes it.

“Welcome to New York, Audrey Zheng,” he says.

OceanofPDF.com

14
Duanfang

With Lady Tongjia by his side, Duanfang began his takeover of the Manchu dynasty, and thereby, the Chinese political world. He wanted reform in every sense of the word—national, cultural, political, educational. He would unshackle China's iron gates and usher in cutting-edge science and liberal arts; maybe even women would go to school, and foreigners who could teach him interesting languages like Farsi and Hindi. Duanfang imagined himself presiding over a sprawling university filled with great thinkers who would revolutionize China. It would all be due to him. But then the reform failed. It was too quick, too ambitious, and the empress immediately put an end to it. Duanfang, the prodigious politician, was now in danger of losing his head.

At night, he imagined what his legacy would be then: an ambitious politician, dying with his secrets. His Manchu line would continue to flourish (his wife had given birth to two healthy sons, and most recently a daughter) and none would be the wiser. It was almost a daydream rather than a nightmare, for he was confident he would emerge unscathed.

And indeed, he did. He had good friends—powerful friends—and through their schemes and strategic support, they protected him. In fact, he was more than protected. As the empress publicly executed those who had supported the reform, she rewarded Duanfang with an official cap of the third rank. She practically made him Manchu royalty.

The blood of his allies seeped into the dirt, skulls buried under the villagers' feet, yet Duanfang was reaching the peak of success. All thoughts

of his death—past and future—were forgotten.

OceanofPDF.com

15
Dawn Chin

When the internet fails her, Dawn heads to the library. She hasn't been there since freshman year, when the upperclassmen took them on a mandatory tour of the grounds. She doesn't even remember what the library looks like and has to pull up the campus map on her phone to figure out where it's located. Barreling through the leaf-strewn courtyard in sweatpants and a crewneck, Dawn circles the back of the mathematics wing and the humanities hall until she finds a two-story town house jutting out from the art gallery. Sanborn has a habit of making academic buildings resemble homes. According to Caroline, it's a New England thing.

The inside of the library is covered in wall-to-wall gray carpet, the paint-flaked walls lined with books Dawn is sure nobody reads. At the front of the room is a circulation desk where a girl is doing her homework. Dawn swerves around her, beelining for the history section at the back of the library.

Hovering between *The Roaring Twenties* and *The Great Depression*, Dawn examines the books' bent spines. Why is she here, anyway? What is she hoping to find? When she'd pocketed her grandmother's newspaper clipping—the one wedged between the Bible's reedy pages—it had felt like another version of her was taking it, someone bolder and more rebellious, though she supposes that most people wouldn't define *rebellion* as stealing their grandmother's things.

Dawn squats on the floor, her muscles tense as she struggles to find balance. *This is a good distraction*, she tells herself, *from everything. No*

more moping, no more outbursts.

She squints at the books. There must be a paragraph or a sentence somewhere in these pages that will reveal more about this charity and this school Dawn's grandmother seemingly attended in New York. Isn't that what library books are for? Google has already failed her. The only mention of Beecher Preparatory High School is a Wikipedia list that said it closed during the 2008 recession. It doesn't exist anymore, and neither does Nai Nai's supposed life in it.

Dawn leans forward to examine the 1960s section. It's filled with predictable titles about the Civil Rights Movement, John F. Kennedy, and other important historical events and people that would probably also be helpful for her to learn about. Instead of picking them up, she pinches the inky corner of the newspaper clipping she slipped into her pocket before coming here.

If Dawn had a typical family like Caroline's or Stephanie's—one that told each other things, *real* things over coffee or tea on their wraparound back porches and New York terraces—she'd go back to her grandmother's house and show Nai Nai what she found. She'd ask her outright: *Did you ever go to school in New York? And if so, why did you never mention it?* But of course, she can't. Even trying to imagine herself saying those words makes her brain short-circuit. She can't envision how Nai Nai would respond, picturing only her blank face staring back at Dawn. Truth and vulnerability, she decides, are not concepts the Chin family is capable of grasping. Sometimes, she reasons, it's better to pretend.

"Hey, can I help you?"

The girl from the circulation desk is looming over Dawn. Immediately, Dawn removes her hands from her sweatpants pocket, as if she's been caught red-handed.

"Uh, no, I'm okay," Dawn says. She stands, her legs stiff from squatting, and surveys the girl.

She looks familiar—probably another junior Dawn's seen around campus but never formally met. Her nose is pierced, and short black curls stick out of her fishtail braid. Dawn's eyes follow the girl's braid all the way down to her cropped shirt and bare brown stomach. She didn't know librarians could be hot.

"Well," Dawn says, clearing her throat, "actually—"

“No one comes here just to hang out,” the girl interrupts. “What are you looking for?”

“Um.” Dawn hesitates. How much should she tell the hot librarian? “It’s kind of hard to explain. I need to find . . . more information about a school. From the 1960s? It closed a while ago, but that’s all I know. It’s for my history project and I can’t find anything on the internet.”

She knows she is rambling. The girl smirks.

“Ah, so you’re desperate. That’s why you’ve gone old-school.”

“Pretty much,” Dawn admits.

“Come on,” the girl says, “we can look up the school at the circulation desk.”

Dawn obediently leaves the stacks and follows the girl across the library, trying not to stare at the bottom of her T-shirt as it rides up the small of her back. There are words on the shirt, and when Dawn squints, she realizes that the header is the name of a band, followed by concert dates.

“The Agoraphobes,” she says aloud, “are they indie or something?”

Fitz loves indie bands. She wonders if he listens to the Agoraphobes and then bites the inside of her cheek as punishment for thinking about him.

“Oh yes, very indie and very obscure,” the girl says without looking back at Dawn. “They don’t even have albums yet, just EPs.”

“Wow,” Dawn replies, “you must be *so* cool.”

She doesn’t mean to sound that snarky, but the girl laughs.

“Shh,” she stage-whispers as they reach the circulation desk, “I’m trying to keep it on the down-low.”

With the half-moon desk now between them, Dawn’s unease starts to peel away like cellophane. She remembers doing this dance before—with her childhood crush in fifth grade, with some Instagram girl she used to message in middle school, with Fitz, when they first met in their summer jazz elective. It sends a thrill up her spine: the entertainment, the fizzy excitement of remembering each step. When you’re dancing, you don’t have to think. It’s a performance.

“Got it,” Dawn says. “Your secret’s safe with me.”

She drapes her arms over the desk and leans forward. She’s doing great work, though it might not be worth it. This hot librarian is probably just another straight girl who absentmindedly flirts with other girls. Dawn doubts she’s queer. It doesn’t matter, though; it’s all just a game.

The hot librarian rolls her eyes. “Oh, phew,” she says, dragging her hand across her forehead like she’s wiping away invisible sweat. Her gaze moves to the gargantuan library computer and its accompanying keyboard. “So, what’s the name of the school you’re trying to find?”

Dawn thumbs the newspaper clipping in her pocket again. “Beecher Preparatory High School.”

The girl starts typing and then scrunches her nose. “Hmm. No dice. I’ll just try ‘Beecher Preparatory,’ though, and ‘Beecher.’” She shakes her head. “Does this school even exist or are you, like, pranking me?”

Dawn raises her eyebrows. “Pranking you at a library no one goes to? That would be deeply pathetic.”

“I’ve seen worse.” The girl snorts. “All right, let’s dig a little deeper. What do you need to know about this Beecher school? Just, like, its general history? Or something else?”

Dawn flicks the newspaper’s sharp edge. She could give up now, end her little flirtation waltz and let her grandmother orate her New Hampshire history—even if it’s all a lie. But leaving seems so disappointing, so boring. Truthfully, Dawn hasn’t felt this good since the end of June, when she and Fitz volleyed teasing insults across a near-empty Sanborn classroom.

“Well, it’s a long story,” Dawn begins. “Basically, I want to see if a person attended Beecher Preparatory in the 1960s. My grandmother, to be exact.” Dawn looks off at the library door. “I’m interviewing her for this yearlong history project we have to do, and she sort of insinuated that she immigrated to New Hampshire and never left. But . . . I found evidence that says otherwise.”

“Ooh,” the hot librarian says, “evidence? Lies? Juicy.” She drums her fingers on the counter. “Where exactly do you think she went? If not New Hampshire?”

“New York,” Dawn answers, “Manhattan, specifically.”

“Hmm. Okay, what’s her maiden name? Maybe we can look that up?”

Dawn chews on the inside of her cheek. She has no idea. “I don’t know, but I guess I can ask her the next time I see her.”

“Wow,” the girl replies, still typing on the computer, “for someone trying to do, like, a whole investigation on your grandma, you’re pretty bad at this.”

“It’s not a *whole investigation*,” Dawn quips. “I just want to be factually accurate for my history presentation.” And the more she knows about her

grandmother's past, the more information she can put into her project, and the higher the chance she can get an A.

"Fine, fine," the girl relents. "Here." She presses the space bar on the computer and then rummages through the shelf behind her, pulling out a book that looks to be at least fifteen pounds. "This is an anthology on some 1960s feminist icons. Maybe your grandma is one of them?"

The girl slides the book across the counter and Dawn runs her fingers down its many pages. "Holy hell," she says. "I'm supposed to lug this home?"

"A good investigator would," the girl argues.

Dawn snorts. "You're a very pushy librarian, you know."

"I'm not a librarian." The girl unfolds a crease in her Agoraphobes T-shirt to reveal a rectangular metal name tag. Dawn leans in and reads: *Penelope Chanda Patel, Librarian Assistant*. "You have to get a degree for that. I'm just trying to make some extra money."

"Penelope," Dawn says. "You sound like a storybook character."

"Yeah, you can blame that on my parents." She flips over the giant book and scans the barcode. "Anyway, I go by Pen. Your ID?"

Dawn pulls her school ID from her backpack's front packet and tosses it over to Pen. "Here."

"Dawn Chin," Pen says, enunciating each consonant. She stares thoughtfully into the distance. "Wait, I know you, I think."

"Oh yeah? Are you my stalker?" Dawn teases.

Pen wags her finger at Dawn like a schoolteacher. "No, no, you're Fitz's ex! I knew I recognized you from somewhere."

"What?" Dawn's fingers crimp the edge of the desk. This is not where she thought this conversation was going. How does this girl know Fitz? And how does she know that Dawn and Fitz were together?

Pen holds her pointer finger to the air and draws an imaginary line from left to right. "I was before you. January to March. Then there was Ophelia. Then there was you. I used to hang out with Fitz's friends sometimes, even after we broke up, so they mentioned you over the summer."

Dawn's head is spinning. The hot librarian dated Fitz? And Fitz mentioned Dawn to his friends? The thought coils in her stomach. She grips the desk.

"Okay," Dawn says, "well, like the ride says, it's a small world after all. Right?" It's a terrible joke, but it's the best she can do in the moment. Dawn

contorts her face into something she hopes looks like casual nonchalance.

Pen nods, seemingly unfazed. “It really is.” She slides the book over the counter’s edge and it drops into Dawn’s hands. It’s even heavier than she imagined, and she stumbles backward.

“God,” Dawn says, tripping over her feet, “thanks for the paperweight.”

Pen waves from behind the desk. “Any time, shared ex. Nice to meet you.”

Dawn makes a noncommittal sound and staggers toward the exit. Propping the book’s spine on the inside of her elbow, she uses her other arm to fling open the library door. *Shared ex.* She needs to get the hell out of here.

OceanofPDF.com

16
Audrey Zheng

Audrey Zheng feels like a new present. Her wrapping is shinier, her hair bouncier, her old clothes infused with fresh life as she twirls through her tiny Chinatown bedroom. Gone is Zheng Yi, the girl from Taiwan, except for when she writes letters to Mama and Baba, regaling them with stories about Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy's antics or commenting on Liwei's adorable school pictures they sent with their last note. She says little about Calvin except that he's kind to her. Enough to please them but not enough to marry her off.

There isn't a mirror in her bedroom, so tonight, she tiptoes out into the hall to examine herself in the apartment's only bathroom. It's usually occupied with the boys splashing in the tub or Auntie Fan pinning her hair into a bouffant that seems to grow taller and taller every week. But the children are long asleep, and Auntie Fan is in the kitchen, sipping barley tea and whispering to one of her church friends on the telephone. Audrey closes the door behind her and flicks on the lights, her reflection emerging in the sink mirror. A smile spreads across her cheeks. Her lipstick is just right; her bangs—confidently trimmed by Beverley after school yesterday—sweep across her forehead like any wealthy Upper East Side girl's would. She touches the costume pearls on her neck and runs her fingers down the hem of her slim black dress. All that's left are the gloves.

"Oh, you look fabulous," Auntie Fan exclaims, hanging up the phone as Audrey enters the kitchen.

“Are you sure?” Audrey touches the back of her chignon. Maybe with the pearls, it’s too much.

“Absolutely.” Auntie Fan points to the black elbow-length gloves on the edge of the counter. “I hope these work for you. I haven’t worn them for decades so I’m glad they’re getting good use.”

Audrey takes the gloves and slides them over her hands, grateful for the final piece of her costume, and for the realization that she won’t have to lie to her host mother tonight. At last, she knows and approves of where she’s going.

“They’re perfect. Thank you.”

Audrey wants to hug her Auntie Fan, but worries she’ll look overly sentimental. After all, it’s just a Halloween party at Calvin’s—it’s not like she’s going to a gala or a film premiere. The buzzer sounds and Auntie Fan rushes to the hall to let Beverley and Patty in. Audrey listens for the front door’s predictable creak, the click of the girls’ heels as they clamber up the steps.

“Have a wonderful time,” her host mother says. “You deserve it.”

She does, doesn’t she? After all, following Calvin’s film education, she’s received steady Cs on her literature essays and history quizzes. Her English certainly isn’t perfect, but it’s getting better, and she’s sure that in a month or two, she’ll be back up to her Taiwan A standard. And at the very least, she can feel better about applying to universities. Last Wednesday, she attended the college fair Beecher held during the junior class lunch periods and loved collecting the brochures like jewelry she might try on for size. Which will she choose for her future? The possibilities seem endless.

Beverley and Patty prance into the apartment, Beverley dressed as a cat in a velvet jumper with a large pink dot on her nose and whiskers spread across her cheekbones, and Patty in a matching brown mouse costume, round ears poking out from the headband atop her thick crown of hair.

“I love your costumes,” gushes Audrey as she slips on patent leather pumps and follows them into the foyer.

“Thanks,” Patty says, “I made the ears myself with my sewing machine.”

“That’s very impressive.”

“But who could compete with you?” Beverley wonders aloud, pinching the bare skin between Audrey’s sleeve and the start of her glove. “*Audrey*, our very own movie star.” She draws out her new name like a taut rubber

band and Audrey can't tell if she likes it or if she prefers Zheng Yi, the simple girl from Taiwan. Maybe Audrey is too grand.

Audrey turns the doorknob and marches down the stairs. It's already done, and she can't—won't—go back.

On the 6 train, Patty announces that she's going to find a new boy to crush on at the party tonight. Beverley was right; Herb *is* a dunce, and she's ready to move on to bigger and better things—or in this case, boys.

"Thank goodness," groans Beverley as the train shudders down its familiar track and the girls shake with it. "Took you long enough."

Privately, Audrey wonders if it's Herb's new girlfriend, Kathy Anne, who prompted Patty's decision. No one could ignore her floaty giggles in the hallway as she gushed about her postgame milkshake date with Herb last week, nor could they avoid the letterman jacket slung over her shoulders with Herb's football number stitched on the back—a trophy that Patty will never win.

"Who's the lucky man this time around?" Audrey asks.

Patty taps her chin. "Don't know. We'll have to wait and see."

And soon enough, they will. When they arrive, Calvin's brownstone apartment looks exactly like it did in September with its sparkling chandelier and windows that could fill galaxies. Except now he's strung up orange crepe paper across the old French paintings and stuck a blow-up skeleton between the couch and the floor lamp so that if you blinked quickly, you'd think it was another party guest swaying under the disco lights. Audrey steps across the threshold, her arms once again linked with Patty's and Beverley's, and Calvin immediately turns, gazing at her like Paul does at the end of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, his face alight with realization.

"Why, Holly Golightly, you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

Audrey thinks she might melt as Beverley rolls her eyes.

"Well, Patty," she whispers, "I can tell you which boy is *already* taken."

"Indeed." Patty giggles.

Audrey is trying not to listen to either of them. Instead, she glides over to her very own Paul Varjak in his signature preppy wool cardigan and skinny tie.

“You actually did it.” She marvels. He told her he’d wear a matching costume, but she wasn’t sure he’d follow through—especially with what it would declare about him, about *them*.

Calvin downs his whiskey and touches the side of her neck, pulling her closer. Goose bumps crawl up Audrey’s gloved arms.

“Of course I did,” he says. “Couldn’t disappoint our starlet, could I?”

Audrey smiles as Calvin releases her, shaking the ice in his glass with his free hand.

“No,” she replies, “you couldn’t.”

He saunters off then to mingle with his other party guests—people they’ve seen dozens of times at school but who seem older and more important under the dim yellow lights. At the bar cart, Audrey makes a Cape Codder like last time and cozies up on Calvin’s Persian rug with Patty and Beverley. They’re talking with Marcia about which colleges they’re going to apply to; Patty wants to go somewhere prestigious like Radcliffe or Wellesley, colleges she could actually get into because she has excellent grades and a passion for the liberal arts. Beverley is thinking purely in terms of weather: ocean tides and palm trees that remind her of home, the ability to run away to a beach whenever she doesn’t feel like studying. Marcia starts talking about the incredible recommendation letter she’s already received from her chemistry teacher, and Audrey’s face droops into her crystal glass, her earlier optimism about her improved grades sinking with the vodka to the pit of her stomach. Who could she ask for a recommendation letter? And what would they say about her? It’s not like she’s close to any of her teachers. She’s just beginning to understand what they’re saying in class.

“What do you want to go to college for, Audrey?” Marcia asks, interrupting her thoughts.

Audrey swallows and the alcohol burns the back of her throat. *I’m not sure* seems like such an immature and ridiculous answer, so she blurts out “Librarian studies,” though she doesn’t think that’s a real major. Audrey does love reading despite struggling with the English novels she’s assigned in class. Sometimes, when she’s homesick, she returns to her Chinese folktales.

Marcia purses her lips and toys with the rim of her black witch hat. “Huh,” she says.

Audrey knows that there are a dozen other unspoken thoughts behind that *huh*, ones she cannot bear to decipher. So instead, she stands up, her Holly Golightly dress suddenly feeling too tight.

"Excuse me. I've got to go and . . ." She glances at her full drink. ". . . use the bathroom. I'll be back."

Darting out into the hallway, the vodka and cranberry juice sloshing in her cup, Audrey turns left into a dark hallway, searching for a corner to hide in. Perhaps this is where Calvin's bedroom is, and at once, she imagines his rumpled cotton sheets, the indent of his head on a goose-feathered pillow, his comb on the dresser, smelling like him.

Instead, she bumps into a boy who always seems to be lurking in the shadows: Samuel.

"Oh," she says, jumping backward, her heels teetering on the hardwood.

Samuel is leaning next to a closed door in a plain turtleneck and trousers that look exactly like the outfit he wore a few weeks ago. *Of course he's not wearing a costume*, Audrey thinks, collecting herself and brushing her brand-new bangs to the side of her forehead.

"Hi," Samuel says, smiling. "Yi, right?"

"No, not anymore. It's Audrey now."

"Is it?" He raises an eyebrow. "Well, okay. Then hello . . . *Audrey*." He draws out the name like Beverley did in Auntie Fan's foyer and Audrey can't help but bristle. He doesn't know the first thing about her—and she's sure he knows nothing about *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

That day at school—the day when she failed her English exam and Beverley suggested Samuel tutor her—comes flooding back, the shame and confusion, Calvin's terse warning that *Samuel is bad news* hitting her like a tidal wave. Audrey crosses her gloved arms. There must be a reason Calvin doesn't like Samuel, one beyond her initial impression of him, and she's not sure she wants to find out what it is. Under his shaggy hair and cool demeanor, he could be someone else entirely.

"Yes," she snaps, "do you have a problem with my new name?"

Samuel's face twists into surprise, his lips parting into a small circle. "Of course not. I was just . . . I'm sorry if I offended you."

"You didn't."

"Er, okay."

The door next to Samuel opens and Kimberley comes flitting out in a lace gown and a tiara, the toilet flushing behind her.

“Samuel! My favorite person!” She tugs on his earlobe like she’s forgotten about the way he embarrassed her last month. “Ooh, are you a princess too?” she asks, turning to Audrey.

“No. I’m Holly Golightly.”

Kimberley wrinkles her nose. “Hmm, never heard of her. Oh—Louis, there you are!”

Waving to someone in the living room, she scoots past them, the lace scratching Audrey’s shoulders. Now it’s just her and Samuel again, crammed together in Calvin’s narrow corridor. Samuel gestures toward the bathroom door.

“It’s all yours. If you were waiting.”

She wasn’t, not really, but she nods anyway and steps inside, closing the door behind her. Staring at herself once again in the bathroom mirror—this one much larger and more ornate than Auntie Fan’s—she wonders if Samuel is standing on the other side, inches from her face.

After counting to fifty and vigorously flushing the toilet, Audrey opens the door to find that Samuel is no longer there. Relieved, she returns to the party in the living room. The boys are in their usual spot smoking by the windows, though this time Patty is with them, jammed between their cigars. Beverley is dancing to the record player with some girls from church, and Calvin is sloshed over the coat-stacked ottoman, drunk and half asleep. She wishes he’d waited to get drunk with her, to fall asleep in her lap instead of on his own furniture. It’s silly to be jealous of furniture. But she is all the same.

The night deepens into heady nothing-hours, and after her third cocktail, Audrey is tired of hoping Calvin will wake up. She ambles into the hall connected to the kitchen and hears a familiar voice droning on about politics. Samuel, of course, seemingly incapable of talking about anything else.

“We’re all Chinese or Taiwanese, yes? We’re all immigrants,” she can hear him lecturing, “and we are all struggling in our own ways, just like the African American folks, and the Hispanic ones too. The whites, they say we should be enemies with our fellow immigrants, but that’s because they want us to tear each other apart. I think we’re weaker fighting against each other than we are fighting for a common goal.”

“What do you mean?” someone asks, and Audrey is surprised to hear that their question sounds genuine, like they’re very much interested in

Samuel's long-winded tirade.

Stretching her neck into the archway, she finds Samuel's head bobbing between the floating kitchen cabinets. A handful of people surround him, boys and girls Audrey has seen at church or at school but never talked to.

"You know, the fight for civil rights and all that—the voting bill that got passed in August—that's all well and good, but we have more work to do. And we might think that it doesn't apply to us, but it *does*. After all, don't you experience discrimination too? People looking at you funny or saying something not nice? The whites don't think we're good enough either; they just don't say it as loudly as they do for other people."

Audrey wants to roll her eyes like Beverley would. But then she remembers that Beverley *likes* Samuel. She thinks he's a good tutor, and a generous one too. Audrey squints at Samuel's gesticulating hands, his animated eyes beneath his mop of hair, and tries to break apart what he's saying piece by piece.

She's heard about segregation between blacks and whites from eavesdropping on Mama and Baba's afternoon tea with their professor friends, but there were other problems in Taiwan that mattered more to them, horrors in China they couldn't shake off. Baba thought that since the civil rights and the voting laws passed, everyone was equal in America—yet another reason for Audrey to flee to New York and its promise of utopian freedom. As for Samuel's question—*don't you experience discrimination too?*—sure, the cashiers at the candy store sneer at her accent and her face, though less overtly these days since she pays a quarter of their salaries with the amount of chocolate the boys eat every week. And the white girls at Beecher don't speak to her unless they're protesting her existence; last Thursday, Abigail Duncan cried that she could not be lab partners with Audrey because *the girl barely speaks English and she smells like dirty laundry*, but Mr. Hoyt ignored her and made them pair up for the rest of class. Audrey can't decide: Are those things truly so horrible? Aren't they simply part of adjusting to a new life in America? If Audrey keeps her head down and focuses on her new friends and her studies, she will continue to survive.

On the topic of working toward a common goal, Audrey doesn't know any African Americans to work with. And maybe they don't want her help. Perhaps they, too, would ask her: *Who are you and why are you in our city, in our country?*

“Injustice affects us all,” Samuel concludes, interrupting her thoughts, “and we should try to remember that. We are greater together than apart.”

People murmur and nod at this remark, like Samuel is a preacher at Sunday service instead of a boy giving an impromptu speech at a Halloween party. Audrey toys with the fake pearls hanging from her neck. She may not fully agree with Samuel’s remarks (or understand why he feels the need to share them so often), but she does think he’s genuine. His belief in *greater together than apart* must be why he’s willing to tutor everyone for so little pay.

She shakes her head, turning from the archway and back into the hall filled with Calvin’s Renaissance art prints. It’s no use peeling back the layers of a boy who is ultimately inconsequential to her life. She has another boy to care about.

OceanofPDF.com

17
Dawn Chin

By the time Dawn picks up the phone to call her grandmother, Nai Nai is en route to Madison, Wisconsin, for a two-week librarian conference rolled in with a cheese festival.

"If you needed to see her again, why didn't you reach out earlier?" Dawn's mother asks, and Dawn immediately realizes how idiotic it was to call her parents and tell them anything about her life in the first place.

"I dunno," Dawn says.

Her mother sighs before pivoting to her grades. "You're doing well in school, right? You'll get your paper in by the deadline even if you don't see your grandmother until later?"

"Yeah, don't worry. It's only an outline, not a paper, and it isn't due till Thanksgiving break."

"All right, good."

Maybe there is a God, or maybe the Santa Barbara heat is getting to her mother, because thankfully, she doesn't pry further. If she did, Dawn might be forced to tell her that *doing well in school* is subjective and that her current Bs and Cs are tanking her GPA. Her looming history project is a last-ditch salve, but it won't be enough for Berkeley.

With her phone folded into the crook of her shoulder, Dawn maneuvers her left arm into the sleeve of Delia's copper suede jacket. Delia is constantly buying new clothes because she's obsessed with fashion; as a result, she lets all the girls raid her closet for last year's designer gems. Dawn brushes her free hand against the suede. It's nice, expensive. It's

nothing like what Dawn usually wears. She looks like a doll pretending to be a woman.

"I have to go," Dawn says, struggling to fit her right arm into Delia's other sleeve, "I'm meeting Caroline in the study center."

"Oh, how is she doing?"

"Fine. Great. Her team won their crew match yesterday."

"That's wonderful. Congratulate her for me, okay?"

"Uh-huh."

Dawn won't admit it, but she hates the way her mother perks up when she talks about Caroline. Caroline would be a great alternative daughter for her parents. She actually gets good grades, isn't queer, and doesn't lie. Then again, the Chin family are masters at evading the truth. So maybe Caroline wouldn't fit in after all.

Bending down to grab her backpack, Dawn remembers the second reason she called her parents.

"By the way," she says, "can you ask Dad what Nai Nai's maiden name is?"

"Her maiden name? Why do you need it?"

"For my project," Dawn answers vaguely.

"I see. Why don't you ask Nai Nai when she's back?"

"I want to start working on my outline as soon as possible," Dawn explains exasperatedly, "so it's good and I can do well. Don't you want me to do well?"

"Yes, of course." Her mother sounds tense, and Dawn knows she's forced her hand just enough. Her mom hates bothering her father when he's "working," which in this case means pulling the weeds growing between the deck's cobblestones, since it's the weekend. She listens as her mother jerks open the screen door and patters out into the backyard. As her parents talk, Dawn trudges into the empty common room. It smells like Lysol and lavender air freshener. Caroline must have cleaned again. She makes a mental note to pick up the slack next week.

"It's Liu," her mother says at last. "L-I-U."

"Thanks. I'm gonna go study now."

"Have a nice time."

"'Kay," Dawn says, and feeling slightly guilty about her earlier irritability, she adds, "I love—"

Her mother's hung up before she can finish her sentence. *Typical*, Dawn thinks, and she shuts the door behind her.

Dawn should walk faster to the study center. After all, it's Saturday afternoon, peak work hours for a studious Sanborn kid, and Caroline can only hold her seat at one of the nice tables by the window for so long. But she gets sidetracked by the drama troupe's gender-bent performance of *Macbeth* on the courtyard lawn and has to weave through them and the maze of twigs on the ground; unlike on the West Coast, fall lasts only a moment here. As she drifts past the mathematics building and the track, her mind subconsciously wanders to Fitz. She wonders what he's doing on this dreary November day. Probably waking up after a late night with friends (or, more likely, a girl), grabbing a wrinkled Ralph Lauren polo off his dorm room floor and tossing it over his head before rummaging for food in one of the vending machines or coffee shops on campus since the dining hall is closed until dinner.

At the Gothic corridor connecting the study center and the observatory, Dawn uses her shoe to snap a twig in half, pretending it's Fitz.

"Dawn?"

Dawn looks up from her shoes and the snapped twig. Lo and behold, hot not-librarian girl—also known as Pen—is waving to her from across the corridor, her curly black hair flipped to one side and draped over her satchel. She's surprised that Pen remembers her name—remembers her at all—but then she recalls that they share the same ex (if she can even call him that) and her stomach cinches like a corset. Crunching the twig with her heel, Dawn tugs on Delia's designer jacket and puts on an easy smile, the kind she's used to wearing with Caroline and the girls.

"Oh, hey," she says as Pen gets closer. Hot librarian girl's nose is tinged pink from the autumn cold. "How's it going?"

Pen shrugs and adjusts the satchel strap hanging from her shoulder. "Same old, same old." She nudges her head at the observatory. "I'm massively behind on my astronomy homework, so I'm trying to get some work done."

Inwardly, Dawn cringes. Everyone at Sanborn is always *massively behind* or *studying for hours* or *half awake and running on coffee* (Delia and Giselle's favorite phrases). They like to act like their workload is horrible,

but really, what they're trying to say is *I'm so smart, I study so hard, look at me.* It's the ultimate Sanborn rivalry: your work ethic versus everyone else's. Dawn doesn't try to compete.

Out loud, she replies, "Astronomy? Isn't that science for people who are bad at science?" She uses the same snarky tone from the library.

"Oh, no," Pen says, shaking her head, "it's science for people who are *very* special and *very* unique and are going to bullshit their college essays with some facts about the stars and how they deeply represent their meager personal lives."

At this, Dawn genuinely laughs. Maybe Pen isn't as much of a try-hard as she thought.

"Okay," she relents, stepping out of the way, "go enjoy your bullshit stars and your astronomy homework."

But Pen doesn't move. She just rubs at her stupidly cute, pink nose. "First," she says, "you have to tell me—did you learn anything about your grandma in that book I gave you? Is she, like, Gloria Steinem's right-hand woman?"

Dawn shakes her head. "Sadly, no. Unless she's Betty Friedan's unnamed hairdresser, but I'm pretty sure that's an Italian woman from Brooklyn."

"Well," Pen says, leaning forward, "you know, your grandma could have put on a wig. And an accent."

"She does suspiciously love pasta," Dawn muses. "I'll make a note."

"Good," Pen replies, grinning.

Dawn looks off at the Gothic corridor awning, the trestle that separates her and Pen from the study center. Caroline is probably headbutting freshmen to save her a seat, but Dawn remains planted.

"I did find one thing, though," Dawn says. "My grandma's maiden name."

"Oh? Some good investigative work at last?"

Dawn rolls her eyes. "It's Liu. L-I-U."

Pen pulls out her phone and shoves it at Dawn. "Text it to me," she demands, "so I won't forget. I'll look it up at my next shift."

"You will?" Dawn asks, her voice betraying her surprise. Maybe Pen is queer after all, or she's just the most eager straight girl Dawn's ever met.

"Sure," Pen says. "Seems like you need an investigative partner. I'll be the Sherlock to your Watson."

"You mean the Watson to my Sherlock."

Pen waves a hand in the air. “Semantics,” she says, and then, pointing at the screen, she adds, “Type.”

Dawn does as she’s told, her number now cemented in Pen’s phone. She wonders if Fitz’s number is in Pen’s phone too, but then she crushes that thought like the snapped twig disintegrating under her sneaker.

“All right,” Pen says, shoving her cell back in her pocket, “well, I really gotta go study.”

“Good luck,” Dawn replies, “with your bullshit stars.”

Pen laughs. “Oh, I need it.”

They head off in opposite directions. When Dawn reaches the end of the corridor, she turns to look back at Pen like a lovestruck Orpheus. She likes her quips, her unusual investment in Dawn’s dead-end history project, the way her hair swings across the back of her parka. Then that horrible night in August with the thorns and the blood replays in Dawn’s head, and she snaps forward, forging ahead to the study center.

This is a simple flirtation—a dance, an amusing way to pass the time. It doesn’t matter if Penelope Patel likes girls or not. Dawn won’t make the same mistakes again.

OceanofPDF.com

18
Audrey Zheng

The mid-November colors in Central Park far outdo Taipei's tropical autumns. Orange and red burst through pockets of still-summer green, and the clear pond water ripples underneath the wooden canoes. Audrey peers closer at a couple rowing toward the bridge—the man's suit jacket is draped over the woman's shoulders, his knees brushing hers as their paddles dip into the water. Audrey thinks they look beautiful.

"I'd thought park services would stop the canoeing by now," Calvin grumbles. "It's too cold to be shivering out there." He kicks at the dirt and pulls out a cigarette from his breast pocket.

Audrey rubs the inside of her palm, her fingernails pinching the calloused skin. She's not sure what she did to upset Calvin. It was his idea to come here; when he rang last night, Audrey wasn't sure Uncle Wen would allow them to stroll through the park alone. But her host father was in a good mood—Auntie Fan says it's because his boss gave him a bonus for all his traveling these past several months—and he dropped Audrey off at Central Park West before hustling the rest of his family to the American Museum of Natural History for the morning. Audrey suspects they chose that particular museum because it's close to the park, but she is grateful nonetheless.

And she *should* be grateful: Isn't this time together—approved, unsupervised—what she and Calvin have been hoping for? Or at least what she's been hoping for? Audrey examines Calvin's clenched jaw as he lights his cigarette and sharply inhales. Maybe he's soured on their budding relationship. If Audrey can even call it that.

They walk up the short hill to the bridge in silence, and Audrey wonders what will happen when Calvin admits he's grown tired of her. Will she no longer talk to Beverley and Patty, no longer be invited to parties? Perhaps she'll be relegated to school pariah, and return to spending lunch on the library floor, hidden between the historical and contemporary fiction shelves.

The trees' folding leaves feel like they are closing in on her. They bite her sleeves and the back of her wrists, and she swats them away like gnats. Calvin's cigarette smoke simmers in her lungs.

"I'm sorry," Audrey blurts when they approach the start of the bridge. There are hordes of children and tourists, but she stops anyway.

Calvin doesn't look at her, the cigarette cinched between his fingers. "What are you sorry for?"

Audrey toys with her grown-out bangs as a child in overalls circles her legs. "I don't know," she confesses, "but I . . . I know I've done something wrong. I'm sorry, really." *I've bored you* is what she really wants to say. *I've lost my importance, the beauty you somehow saw in me. I'll get it back, though, I promise.*

They move to the side of the bridge. The guardrails are made up of ornate, intertwined circles and Audrey stares at them, hypnotized, picturing her body slipping through their cracks so she won't have to hear Calvin's response.

But then, miraculously, he places his hand on her waist. His fingers wrap around her wool coat.

"You've done nothing wrong, Audrey," Calvin whispers. "I've just been impatient."

Audrey swallows. *Impatience* is an English word she learned a few weeks ago, but now she is forgetting its meaning. *You've done nothing wrong.* How lovely that sentence is—how thankful she is that it seems to absolve her of all her sins, known and unknown. She keeps her gaze focused on the bridge's pattern, not daring to move.

"Why are you impatient?"

"Because," he says, "well, don't you know?"

What does she know? She knows she likes Calvin, she knows she's grateful for him, she knows the sun beats on their backs despite the cold late-autumn weather, and that she hopes that it—and they—will stay here forever.

He pulls her sideways, touching the tip of her chin and arcing her face toward his.

"Calvin," she begins, "I—"

His lips are on hers, chapped and tinged with the smell of smoke. She doesn't mind. He is perfect. Everything is perfect. They release and Audrey brushes her fingers against her lips as if to remember that they're real. As Calvin pulls her in again, the little boy with overalls tugs on Audrey's coat.

"Tag, you're it!" he shrieks, just as his mother yanks his collar and ushers him back to his family.

Heat rises in Audrey's cheeks, but Calvin only laughs.

"C'mon," he says, and together, they race to the other side of the bridge.

They reach a clearing, the sky cloudy and gray above them. Calvin doubles over from all the running, and as he does, a tendril of hair curls across his sweaty forehead. Audrey decides he's the most handsome boy she's ever seen—a real-life film star. So she enacts a move fit for a leading man's love interest: she steps forward, and, copying Calvin's movements moments ago, she lifts his face to hers, wrapping her arms around his neck. Staring up at him with wide, childlike eyes, she thinks, *This is love, the kind like in* Breakfast at Tiffany's.

Calvin smiles before kissing her again.

OceanofPDF.com

19
Dawn Chin

Dawn's second bus ride to Concord, New Hampshire, is thankfully much less eventful than the first. There are no tears, no man chomping on potato chips in her ear, no running off the bus and collapsing in a dinky suburban neighborhood trying to find her nai nai's cookie-cutter house amid the other cookie-cutter houses in a dystopian version of *Where's Waldo?* She's thankful for that.

When the bus driver pulls into the lot and opens the doors, her seatmate—a man wearing a classic dad polo and khaki pants—stands up and stretches. His arms flop in the air and his mouth opens in a saliva-puddled yawn. The way his chin rolls into his neck reminds her of Fitz's rugby shirts, folded into themselves on his bedroom floor. She picks up her backpack and rips away the mental image.

Dawn is more prepared today. She has her grandmother's full maiden name, though she hasn't found anything remotely useful about it. (Nor has Pen—as promised, she texted Dawn a few days later after checking the library database. Then they flirt-texted for an hour, but Dawn told herself it was mostly so she could procrastinate on doing her English homework.) Instead, Dawn's found fifty corporate LinkedIn profiles for twentysomething *Audrey Liu*s—a mirror into her future if her parents have their way. She's written down some questions about the Civil Rights Movement and the end of the Cultural Revolution. And the newspaper clipping sits in her backpack pocket; she brought it with her, though she knows she won't ever pull it out, won't ever confront her grandmother.

The walk to Nai Nai's is chilly but sunny. Dawn puts her earbuds in and hums along to a song by the Agoraphobes. She started listening to them after Pen wore yet another Agoraphobes concert tee on Dawn's second visit to the library.

"All right, you have to tell me," Dawn said. "Are you, like, one of their groupies? Do you have a secret fan page and a YouTube channel, and one day they're going to get a restraining order against you?"

"Please," Pen scoffed as she scanned Dawn's feminist tome and returned it to the stacks, "what I actually have is a debit card, a measly paying job, and access to a bus system that takes me to Gilford."

"What's in Gilford?"

"A sad little concert hall where up-and-coming artists play. The Agoraphobes are the only ones I've liked so far." Pen sipped her iced tea. "Go listen to their album. Just once. I swear, they're the next big thing."

"Okay," Dawn said, watching the water droplets slide down Pen's plastic cup, "and if I do listen to them, and hate them, then what?"

"Then I'll buy you a cookie. What's your favorite?"

"Chocolate chip, obviously."

"I'll buy you the biggest chocolate chip cookie money can buy. And if you do like their music," Pen said, "then you have to buy me an iced green tea. And a bran muffin." She shook the muffin in the brown paper bag next to her tea.

"What are you, a health nut?"

"I'm health *conscious*."

Dawn snorted. "Fine. An iced green tea and a bran muffin it is."

Now, she thinks, she might actually have to buy Pen her weird healthy snacks. She's not a fan of all their songs, but on the whole, the Agoraphobes EP is really good. She likes the synthesizers and the guitars and echoey, airy singing about helicopters and boys and loneliness. Dawn's never been in a helicopter, but she gets the other parts. She knows what it's like to feel lonely—especially with Fitz, especially that night. Not that she would share those thoughts with Pen or anyone.

Dawn approaches her grandmother's blue-shuttered house and rings the doorbell. The door swings open. Nai Nai looks the same, unchanged from her previous visit with her bare face, knitted sweater-vest, and flat gray hair.

"Come in, come in," she says, "otherwise you'll catch a cold."

"All right."

Dawn obediently hangs her jacket on the hook by the door and kicks off her sneakers, replacing them with the guest slippers. In the kitchen, Nai Nai is already boiling tea. The sight of two mugs on the kitchen table, enfolded by an assortment of Chinese and American tea bags, strangely makes Dawn emotional. It must be the Agoraphobes getting to her. She sits down and rests her backpack against one of the table's legs.

"How was your conference?"

"Fine. Lots of books. And cheese."

Dawn laughs even though she doesn't think her grandmother is trying to be funny. Nai Nai switches off the stove and pours the hot water into the mugs.

"How is school?" she asks.

"Boring," Dawn says truthfully before she can take it back. She quickly adds, "Don't tell Mom and Dad."

Her grandmother smiles slyly. "I would never."

Dawn actually believes her.

They sip their teas, Dawn's chosen chamomile and her grandmother's dragon well green, the steam rising and meeting to form a smoke screen between them.

Dawn takes out her question packet from her backpack and sets it on the table. "Is it okay if we start?"

"Of course," Nai Nai replies, like she's asking the silliest question in the world. Which she may be, but only because conversations in the Chin family feel like banging on a glass wall, hoping that it'll shatter, yet also terrified that it will.

Dawn tries to ease into it. "Last month, we talked about your immigration here and how you weren't really involved in any of the political movements. I just wanted to check—um, is that still accurate? Was there anything you wanted to add?" She's rehearsed these questions on the bus, but now they sound pushy and embarrassing.

Nai Nai taps her fingers against the side of the porcelain mug. "No. I wasn't in any political movements back then."

"Oh, okay." She waits for her grandmother to say anything else, and when she doesn't, she starts rambling. "So, er, from what I understand, your parents escaped China during a pretty horrible time. Then you went to America and entered an era of civil rights, and there were a lot of riots and protests and discrimination. That must have been a whirlwind, right?"

Nai Nai cocks her head and stares into space, seemingly thinking. Dawn takes that as a good sign. She leans in.

"I went to a lot of parties in the sixties," her grandmother finally says. This is not what Dawn was expecting. "*Those* were a whirlwind. And sometimes at these parties, my friends talked about civil rights and what was happening in China and Taiwan there."

Dawn blinks. She should focus on the part about civil rights, but instead, she asks, "You went to parties? What kind of parties?"

"You know." Nai Nai waves a hand in the air. "Parties with boys and girls, often at people's houses. There'd be dancing and alcohol. The legal drinking age was eighteen at the time, though I was seventeen when I came to America."

"You danced? And drank *alcohol*?"

She can't believe it. Dawn has only ever thought of her grandmother as a librarian in a rotating series of prim wool sweaters. And no one in her family—not her parents or aunts and uncles, or even her older cousins in college—has ever talked about parties or underage drinking. She assumes her annoying cousin, Rachel, must drink at Harvard. But assuming and knowing are different things: talking about anything remotely illegal literally feels illegal in their household. They talk about grades, and dinner, and work, and that television show everyone is watching these days.

Maybe Nai Nai doesn't mind sharing since it was so long ago. Dawn tries to conjure the image of her grandmother with pin curls, downing tequila in a paisley fit and flare dress, her arm hooked around some man's. It's like picturing a character in a movie, and this woman before her is the older version of the main starlet. Their noses and bone structure are different, but you're supposed to believe they're the same.

"Yes," Nai Nai confirms, "it wasn't a big deal. I'm sure you do the same thing at Sanborn."

At this, Dawn almost chokes on her tea. It's ironic—the way her grandmother expects her to share when she lies about where she once lived and went to school. Not that Dawn has anything to confess; she's never been to a real party at Sanborn, or otherwise.

"Anyway," Dawn says, trying to get back on track, "the parties. You talked about politics with your friends there. How did you feel when you were talking with them?"

“Annoyed at first,” Nai Nai replies. “I didn’t want to engage. I had school to focus on. I barely spoke English.”

“Right. And then?”

“And then what?”

“You said you were annoyed at *first*. That changed?”

“Well,” Nai Nai says, “everyone deserves rights. Everyone deserves a life.”

Her grandmother turns her head to the window, to the flower garden now beginning to wither in the near-winter weather. Dawn doesn’t know what to think: her grandmother partied, her grandmother drank, her grandmother changed her mind, her grandmother assumes *Dawn* is drinking and partying too. What is it to know someone? Someone who has existed long before you, who has known *you* your entire life, but you don’t know in the least? The photo of her grandmother, of the apparent Audrey Liu in her New York City school uniform, splashes across her vision, materializing in her yellow tea.

Dawn shouldn’t ask, but for a fleeting moment, she loses track of the facade, her plans. “These parties and discussions,” Dawn says, “these all happened in New Hampshire?”

Nai Nai doesn’t hesitate. “Yes,” she replies.

“You, er, never went anywhere else for school? New York maybe?”

Her grandmother snaps her head from the window to Dawn. “Why would I go to New York?”

“I . . . I don’t know.” Dawn’s knee is shaking, and she decides she’s made a huge mistake. Why is she doing this? What has gotten into her?

“I’ve only ever lived in New Hampshire,” her grandmother answers firmly, “although I did go to New York once.”

“You did?”

“Yes, when you were a toddler. You probably don’t remember. Your father dragged us to the Christmas tree lighting in Rockefeller Center.”

Dawn digests her words, her half-truths, one by one. “Oh.”

“It was very crowded,” Nai Nai complains. “I don’t know what your dad was thinking.”

“I don’t know either,” Dawn echoes.

She looks at her grandmother again—at the thin wrinkles lining her eyes and lips, at her static expression. Nai Nai rises from her seat and moves to the kettle.

“More tea?” she asks, and Dawn nods, though her mug is nearly full.

Her knee has stopped shaking and she is relieved at the change in subject, at the return to safety. Tea, school-approved questions, homework—these are the things she can talk about with her grandmother. These are the things that maintain the fragile glass between them. Still, as Dawn watches Nai Nai lift the kettle into the sink, she recognizes that in some ways—perhaps in every way—she and her family are strangers, her grandmother most of all.

OceanofPDF.com

20
Duanfang

If you knew Duanfang as a child—innocent, privileged, unburdened—you wouldn't recognize him now. As the recently appointed Manchu governor of Hunan, Duanfang was beloved. A forward thinker, he encouraged local students to study in America and Europe and Japan and come back to teach him what they knew. And in the meantime? Duanfang had his own specialties, his own exotic interests. He became obsessed with ancient bronze. Not to wear or flaunt, but to amass from dynasties built long before the Manchus and share with his fellow compatriots. (And the Europeans adored his bronze collection; wasn't that a happy coincidence?)

He'd never admit it outright, but Duanfang was intent on owning every Chinese bronze artifact that ever existed, from drinking cups to decorative urns. And as governor, everything that the villagers owned was naturally his—from their bronze to their lives.

Yes, Duanfang was quite innovative and quite beloved. He was proud of these attributes. But he was most proud of the way that with something so simple as bronze, he could scrape it—and its owner—to its core, leaving it bare and worthless. It was a power he so adored.

OceanofPDF.com

21
Audrey Zheng

The city is strung up with glittering lights ahead of the Christmas season, casting a glow on the porcelain dolls in the glass displays, and on Audrey too. As December rears its glorious head, Audrey and Calvin's relationship bursts onto the New York scene. Everyone from Chinatown to Beecher knows: They coo when Calvin rings Audrey's doorbell with a bouquet of red roses and giggle at their intertwined fingers in the hallways—isn't it funny how Calvin's school attendance has suddenly improved? Isn't it adorable how Audrey's face shines at the mere sight of his signature smirk?

Audrey has even told her parents (and Auntie Fan), promising them that their courtship is as sincere as it is pure. And with that sealed kiss in Central Park, Audrey can now fall deeper into the tunnel of Calvin's love. She spends all her waking moments with him—or thinking about him. On Saturdays, they go shopping (Calvin bought her the most beautiful necklace at Saks) or watch films at the movie theater (Audrey is picking up the English slang). On Sundays, after Audrey helps dress the boys and shuttles them to church, she, Calvin, Beverley, and Patty have multi-hour dim sum lunches, gossiping and cackling over chicken feet and shrimp cháng fěn.

Her life has never been more perfect. Except three days before Christmas, when Audrey still hasn't found the right gift for Calvin.

"What do you get the boy who has everything?" she groans to Patty, roaming through the Park and Madison storefronts with her measly allowance. The doors are decorated with giant velvet bows that look more luxurious than the ones in Herald Square.

“Get him a sweater,” Patty suggests, “or a nice shirt.”

“I can’t afford either of those things,” says Audrey, wrapped in her knitted scarf from Patty and borrowed wool coat from Beverley. She gestures to the doorman-lined street. “At least not here.”

“Then go to Macy’s, find a sensible sweater, tell him it’s cashmere, and rip off the label,” Patty instructs. “He’s a boy. He won’t know the difference.”

Ever since the Halloween party when Patty did not successfully snag a new crush, she’s been dour about men. Audrey ignores her. She spends all her money on a singular silk tie—dark blue with gray pinstripes.

Calvin spends Christmas morning at their apartment (though not Christmas Eve—Audrey wonders if he spent the holiday with his aunt and uncle in Westchester) and opens Audrey’s gift—wrapped in *The Chinatown News*—in front of the whole family.

“I love it,” he says, and he puts it on and wears it the rest of the night.

As for Audrey, she receives a matching diamond bracelet to go with her Saks necklace. Altogether, she thinks they might cost more than Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen’s monthly rent.

Rain falls in the foggy week between Christmas and New Year’s Day, dewdrops cleansing the city and offering New York its own fresh start. Audrey wishes she could spend the whole vacation with Calvin, but she has responsibilities—her duties to her host family have not magically disappeared with her name and her relationship status. The year turns, Auntie Fan buys a new wall calendar, and Audrey tastes the numbers 1966 on her tongue. It will be the first year she won’t see Mama, Baba, or Liwei at all, and the thought makes her sick. She writes four letters home in a week, trying to find different details to include so Liwei can close his eyes and imagine he’s right beside her like he used to be. She knows it isn’t the same.

School starts again and the spectacular December snow turns gray and dirty until it congeals into a slowly melting January slush. Pinning back her awkward, too-long bangs, Audrey sloshes through puddles on her daily walk to Beecher, her nose buried in a novel Calvin bought for her last week at a used bookstore in the West Village. It’s called *The Awakening*, and Audrey loves touching its tattered corners and folded pages, illustrating its cycles of use, the way so many people before her have treasured this book. And she especially loves that she’s one of them—reading this story

alongside her fellow New Yorkers, a regular bookworm. She can't understand every word in Kate Chopin's novel, but her comprehension is light-years better than it was a few months ago. She owes it all to Calvin, who continues to speak to her exclusively in English. She owes a lot to him—not just this.

Beverley seizes Audrey's wrist at the crosswalk, jerking her back as a city bus zooms past them.

"One of these days, you're going to get flattened like a pancake," she scolds.

Audrey laughs. Nothing—not God or fate—can destroy her newfound joy.

After school, with *The Awakening* shoved under her armpit, Audrey bolts out of chemistry to find Calvin in his usual spot by the lockers across from the classroom. Only today, he's holding a camel-colored Pierre Cardin shopping bag. It dangles between his trousers.

"Hello, my dear," he says, holding out the bag to Audrey. "For you."

"What's this?" Audrey asks, beaming as she takes it from his hands. She peers into its tissue-papered depths.

"A little something I picked up between classes."

"When did you have time?" The space between her eyebrows creases into tiny airplanes. "We had lunch together. Then you had history and gym."

"What, you know my schedule by heart?"

"Maybe."

She moves to take out the tissue paper, but Calvin places his hand on hers. "No, open it later. And wear it on Saturday."

They're going to the movies on Saturday—an activity they do every weekend—but perhaps Calvin has something special planned for after the film. Audrey clutches the leather bag handles.

"All right," she agrees, desperate to hurry home and unwrap her gift.

On Saturday, Audrey flounces out of her room in her new outfit: an aquamarine belted Pierre Cardin shift dress with knife pleats running down the back. The tag says *Made in Paris*, and Audrey can't help but repeat the label to herself all day. She's never been to Paris (or Europe, for that matter) but she feels one step closer, the raw silk clinging to her thighs, the thin fabric belt hugging her waist.

“Be back by five,” Uncle Wen says when Audrey waltzes into the dining room. He won’t look up from the newspaper. “You need to help your auntie with dinner.”

“Oh, I can make dinner just fine without her help,” Auntie Fan protests, swatting the back of her husband’s head with a dishrag. She pinches Audrey’s cheeks like she’s a baby. “Have fun.”

Audrey smiles. It seems like she never had to worry about the potential repercussions of going out with a boy in the first place. “Thanks, Auntie.”

She can hear the boys tumbling out of bed and into the kitchen, stuffing their bowls with the usual congee and sliced sausage. They bounce into the dining room and Edwin nearly trips over Bobby’s feet as he examines Audrey’s morning getup.

“Wow, you’re fancy now,” he says, licking congee from his lips.

“I’m not fancy.” Audrey laughs. “Just dressed up. I’m going to meet—”

“Calvin, we know,” Bobby interjects. “Calvin, Calvin, blah, blah, blah.”

“Be nice to your sister, boys,” scolds Auntie Fan, but Audrey notices Uncle Wen chuckling out of the corner of her eye. She likes how they don’t flinch when their mother says *sister*. She supposes she is part of their family, and the thought blossoms in her chest.

“I’ll be back by five,” Audrey promises, “don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried,” Edwin insists as Teddy plops his bowl on the table and runs to his apparent sister, wrapping his arms around her waist.

She kisses the top of Teddy’s head, smoothing out the back of his hair. “See you soon.”

Audrey meets Calvin at the corner (he didn’t want to come up in fear of Auntie Fan coercing him to sit down and eat breakfast with the family, a presumption she fully understands), her wool coat from Beverley flapping against her dress. She’s wearing nylon stockings underneath, but her legs are still freezing in the icy January weather. American women’s fashion, she decides, is beautiful but impractical. Sula and Lula would laugh their heads off if they saw her now.

“How’d the dress fit?” Calvin asks, taking her in—her ruddy nose and chapped lips, hands jammed into her coat pockets.

“Perfect,” she says, “and it’ll look great when we’re inside.”

“To the subway we go, then,” declares Calvin, lifting her hand from her pocket and wrapping it in his.

A better way to keep warm, she thinks, flushed from his touch.

They end up at their usual theater in Times Square. Calvin buys Audrey licorice before they walk into a matinee showing of *Doctor Zhivago*. The screening room is almost empty at this hour—there's a smattering of people in the middle row, and a few to the sides, mostly elderly women and couples.

Audrey beelines for the best seats in the house—sixth row, dead center—but Calvin pulls her arm to stop her from walking forward.

"Let's sit in the back," he says.

"The back? Why?"

"Just to try something different. We have the theater at our disposal." He gestures to the empty rows.

Calvin is right: the back is usually monopolized by the rowdy fourteen-year-old boys who have snuck in beer bottles and are throwing M&M'S at people's heads. At this hour, the boys are probably not awake yet.

Audrey nods. "Okay, sure."

They settle in their seats, Audrey's wool coat draped over the adjoining empty chair, her head knocking against the theater's rear wall. She dips forward to gnaw on her black licorice as the lights dim. The film's Russian winter setting leaves her feeling snug and content, despite the sadness and the guns, the mink coats and the chill in the characters' tense, war-strewn conversations. She watches intently as Yuri and Lara circle around each other, caught up in their own dramas and marriages before their inevitable romance begins.

They're at the start of World War I when Calvin puts his hand on Audrey's thigh. She's pulled out another roll of licorice from the plastic sleeve and it dangles in her hand, unmoving. At first, she's not sure what to think. Calvin has never touched anything below her waist before. She can feel the pressure of his coarse palm pushing the dress's silk fabric into her skin. She turns to look at him, but he's not looking back; instead, he's staring at the film, his profile bathed in the screen's blue light. Maybe he doesn't notice, then. Maybe it was purely an accident. A quiet, subconscious act of affection.

When he releases his hand from her thigh, she's immediately relieved. And as soon as that feeling washes over her, guilt comes marching down her spine, its own guns drawn. Shouldn't she *want* her boyfriend's hand on her leg? Isn't that the natural next step? He's held her hand, he's touched her neck—how is this any different? She wishes Beverley were here to

reassure her, to tell her she's being ridiculous. Beverley's gone through seasons of boyfriends while Audrey is seemingly trapped inside her prepubescent body—the one that uses movies and magazines to teach her how to kiss.

And then, just as Audrey is about to give herself a second emotional beating, Calvin's hand travels up her leg again. Only this time, it crawls from the bottom of her pantyhosed calf to the inside of her thigh, a breath away from her underwear. Though Audrey isn't looking at him, she knows he has to bend down to reach under her dress. This part is not an accident.

Her throat constricts, and she fixates on the screen's moving faces. They blur together until they're one large mass, like a distorted talking puppet. *Move!* she wants to scream, but she's not sure if it's directed at Calvin or herself. A thousand thoughts run through her head: *I should want this, I should, I can't—I should—what do I—why am I—why.*

The talking puppet on the screen says, "You look at me as if you knew me. Do you?"

Audrey isn't sure how many minutes pass after that. In fact, it could be hours. Calvin's hand never moves from the inside of her Pierre Cardin silk dress, the one he bought her and told her to wear today, right now, in the back row of a Times Square theater. Audrey closes her eyes and listens to the muffled voices.

At last, intermission comes, and she instinctively jolts from her seat, the rolls of licorice flying off her lap and onto the theater floor.

"Oh," she gasps, crouching down to scoop them up. She squishes them in her fists, sticky and covered in the carpet's grime. "I better throw these out."

"And wash your hands," Calvin quips, flicking a piece of lint off his turtleneck.

"Yes." She examines his face for any hint of his thoughts, but he is stretching, his back arched against the curve of the seat.

The bathroom is predictably empty. Audrey dumps the black licorice in the trash can and pumps soap into her hands, counting to five as the foam fills her palm. She rinses off with hot water and adjusts the belt on her dress.

"It is okay," she whispers to no one. "You are fine."

Of course she is fine. Why wouldn't she be? Mama used to say that beneath her soft, quiet exterior, Audrey had a flair for the dramatic, an

undesirable trait she must have received from Baba. Her exaggerated emotions are as long and as hyperbolic as his dinner party stories.

She returns from the bathroom and walks back down the theater aisle. Calvin is yawning as the lights shutter, a warning that intermission is almost over. He turns to her.

"Do you like the movie so far? I think it's kind of boring."

"No."

"No?"

"I mean, no, it's good," she insists. "I like it very much."

"Well," he says, amusement washing over his face.

The stragglers search for their seats—the elderly women and the couples with no afternoon plans. Audrey's feet sink into the carpet, and she imagines the recently disposed licorice rolling across the floor, covered in dust and dirt, along with her dress, and that spot on the inside of her thigh.

The lights dim, and the screen flickers back to life. Audrey shifts in her seat. And once again, she is plunged into darkness.

OceanofPDF.com

22
Dawn Chin

The best part about Sanborn Academy is its three-week-long winter break. The worst part is that, unlike over the summer, Dawn has to fly back to California. She has to see her parents. They pick her up at the Santa Barbara Airport's departures terminal because her dad says it's statistically less crowded than the arrivals one. Dawn isn't sure if that's true, but she doesn't argue. Besides, an argument with her parents would go something like this:

Daughter: Confused or irritated statement or question.

Parents: Exasperated sigh at daughter's general probing and existence.

Daughter: Gives up.

Parents: Uses this opportunity to ask her about her grades and extracurriculars.

Rinse, repeat.

When they arrive at their Santa Barbara home, Dawn breathes in the house's familiar scent of cedar and laundry detergent, amazed at the way it hits her the moment she walks through the door. She examines the old leather couch, the waxed (never dirty) wood floors, the weedless patio. It's all the same, unchanging, like her parents are Sims: cartoonish versions of themselves muddling through their routines and making the same placid, empty remarks about dinner, work, and the garden.

Dawn drops her bags on her bedroom carpet and flops onto her turquoise comforter. The walls are also turquoise, which is a horrific choice she made in fifth grade that she didn't realize would plague her forever. Her parents

won’t paint since she’s not home long enough to need a non-turquoise bedroom.

Rolling onto her stomach, she clicks open her phone to a series of texts, mostly packed inside a group chat with her Sanborn friends. Stephanie and Delia are on a grand tour of Italy with Delia’s family for winter break and they keep sending pictures of naked statues’ penises. *Museums are boring*, Delia complained in the group chat this morning, *so we had to make it interesting.* Dawn can’t believe Delia’s complaining about *museums* as if the Sistine Chapel or the statue of *David* could be anything less than incredible. Dawn’s always wanted to go to Rome and Florence and examine art and eat pasta until her stomach hurts. She’s tempted to write that she’ll swap with her friends—Delia and Stephanie can spend winter break in California, and she’ll go to Italy. Instead, she replies, *palazzo penis is definitely the winner* and the girls laugh at her response.

Dawn’s head sinks into her bedspread as she absentmindedly scrolls through social media. Fitz has posted an artsy photo of his feet strapped into neon-blue skis. He’s included his location—the French Alps. Guess everyone from Sanborn is in Europe this year. Thankfully, Dawn’s friends have stopped pestering her about her self-labeled summer fling with one Fitzgerald Rutherford III, which is just what she wanted, just what she planned. But as Dawn examines Fitz’s blurry, snow-dotted face, she wonders if he’s forgotten all about her too. Maybe he doesn’t remember the nights in his bed or her bloody body beneath the rosebushes.

The thought makes the shrimp chips she ate for lunch skate up her windpipe and land in the back of her throat. Swallowing hard, she forces the chip mash back down. She will not vomit over Fitz.

Returning to her texts, she scrolls past the Italy group chat, the airport one-liners with her parents, until she lands on her conversation with Pen—she’s been messaging the hot not-librarian since she arrived in Santa Barbara. Talking to Pen, after all, is much better than not talking to her parents.

Pen’s last unanswered message is a photo of her and her little brother e-scootering in their Maryland suburb. Pen’s parents are lawyers in DC, so like Dawn, the children are often left to their own devices. Dawn zooms in: Pen’s brother’s arms are wrapped around her waist, his chin tucked into the crook of her shoulder. He’s cute—maybe eight or nine.

Dawn writes: *you have the weirdest hobbies*

Seconds later, Pen writes back: *It's better than your hobby.*

Dawn raises an eyebrow at the screen. She doesn't have any hobbies. She rolls onto her side as she waits for Pen's response. Pen is likely home now, sitting in her own bedroom. She wonders if it's a cluttered middle school time capsule like hers, or pin-drop neat. She wonders if Pen's bedroom in Maryland looks the same as her dorm room at Sanborn, and then she wonders, despite herself, if she'll one day be invited inside, tangled in Pen's sheets the way she was in Fitz's. She shakes her head. She's getting ahead of herself—assuming too much, wanting too much.

Dawn drops the phone on her chest just as her screen lights up again. Pen's sent a link to a Reddit thread—one of those long-winded ones written by a pretend investigative journalist who is convinced she's related to the British royal family.

You're basically her, Pen says, *except less cool.*

Dawn laughs aloud. The shrimp chips are beginning to settle in her stomach.

Wow, she types, *be careful how you talk to me . . . who knows, I might be royalty.*

Pen texts: *Bring out the birth certificate.*

When I'm back, I'll put it on your desk, Dawn replies.

It's a joke, but it's not far-fetched. After all, Dawn's been spending a lot of time at the library circulation desk—ostensibly to investigate her mysterious grandma, though so far, she and Pen have come up with nothing. Sometimes, they'll talk for hours until the sun begins to set, twilight cloaking the pair in pink-and-orange haze. It's then, as the color shifts on Pen's face, that Dawn will think *God, she's perfect* and reflexively step backward, glance at the clock on her phone, and decide she needs to study, or eat dinner, or hole up in her bedroom—far away from the fullness of Pen's lips, her kind face, her entrancing stories about indie bands, her heinous yet adorable cackle when Dawn inevitably says something stupid.

"You've been hanging out there a lot," Caroline perceptively announced the Friday before winter break. She and Dawn were eating stale pita and hummus in the dining hall.

Dawn had shrugged. "Just trying to do well on my research paper. I gotta be more like you, you know?" She winked for effect.

Caroline snorted and dug her pita through the last of the hummus, as Dawn changed the subject to crew gossip.

Now, Pen texts: *Speaking of royalty . . . has your grandma arrived yet?*

Dawn shakes her head. *No*, she replies, *not yet.*

Her infamous grandmother arrives on Thursday—Christmas Eve. They'll be stuck together for a week in the house, and she's nervous that with all that time, she might accidentally blurt out inappropriate questions, ones that could reveal what she knows and upend the disguise her grandmother seems hell-bent on wearing for the rest of her life. And then what would happen? Her grandmother might never speak to her again. Not that she ever really did.

There's a knock on her door. "Dawn? Can you help with the laundry?"

Dawn sighs. "In a minute!"

She drops her phone on the nightstand and catapults off her bed. She shouldn't text Pen so much anyway. It's not good for her.

Nai Nai arrives on Christmas Eve as scheduled with a pint-sized suitcase, her own pair of slippers, and a stiff pat on the back for her granddaughter. The holidays are a whirlwind of aunties and uncles and cousins—entirely from Dawn's mom's side, since Dawn's father doesn't have any siblings. They come with red envelopes and ask Dawn the usual irritating questions about school and her future plans beyond Sanborn. *None!* Dawn wants to scream, though she smiles politely like she knows her parents want.

All week, she tries to catch her grandmother's eye. But Nai Nai spends most of the vacation on long solitary walks through the windy Santa Barbara streets, returning to help cook and watch Chinese-dubbed K-dramas on the living room television. She chatters with the aunties and uncles in Mandarin—a language Dawn cannot understand—and says little to her granddaughter beyond *pass the snow peas* and *what time is the church service?*

The revolving door of extended family finally closes on New Year's Eve. Dawn is particularly thrilled to send off Rachel, who will not shut up about *Harvard this* and *Harvard that*. Dawn keeps silently mimicking her nasally offer to *look over her résumé and give her tips* as she pulls weeds with her father, a task he has roped her into.

When she yanks the last green stalk from the cobblestone, wrenching its grimy head from the dirt, her father pushes up his glasses and stares at her.

"What?" she grumbles, wiping dirt on her old khakis.

“Nothing.” Her father sniffs. “We just haven’t talked much these past few days. You know, with . . . all the family.”

“Oh.” They’ve had plenty of time to talk, she wants to say, but he never asks real questions.

Dawn’s father pulls off a gardening glove and dabs at the sweat beading on his forehead. “So, uh, how are you? How’s school?”

“Fine,” Dawn answers. “Good.”

She wraps the weed’s head around her pointer finger, the roots dangling over the cobblestone. It’s painful, the way he tries. Does Pen’s family have conversations like this?

“That’s good.” Dawn’s father nods. “We haven’t seen you since the summer, you know, so I just . . .”

Dawn glances up from the weed and looks at her dad. His face shifts into something she can’t name, like it’s struggling against softness, against a real question.

“What, Dad?”

Her father squints, his eyes glazing over the trees and the old wood fence separating their backyard from the rest of the Santa Barbara hills. “Just happy you’re home, that’s all.” He clears his throat and jerks his head at the screen door. “Tonight, for dinner, I’m thinking chicken lo mein. Sound okay?”

Dawn tries not to feel disappointed. Why should she, anyway? She tosses the dead weed into the giant plastic bucket filled with other weeds and dirt. “Sure,” she says, “all right.”

Her dad moseys back inside and the screen door slides shut. Dawn stays outside for a few minutes, the sun beating on her face.

At seven, like promised, they eat chicken lo mein and steamed broccoli, each of the family perched on an end of the long cherrywood dining table. Dawn is sitting across from her grandmother, and she watches Nai Nai vigilantly twirl glossy noodles around her chopsticks.

After the eighth minute of silence, David Chin looks up from his plate.

“Dawn,” he says, “how is that history project going?”

“Oh yes,” her mom pipes up, “did you turn in everything on time?”

“Uh, yeah,” Dawn replies. “My outline is in, and I get it back from my teacher sometime in February. My paper isn’t due till the spring.”

“February?” Bettina Chin’s lips purse. “Why does your teacher need such a long time to grade?”

“It’s not for a grade. It’s just notes for the paper.”

“Still.”

Her father dumps more chicken onto his plate. “Well, what have you learned? Mom, you’ve been telling her some good stuff, right?”

Nai Nai doesn’t respond.

“This is an important project,” he continues, “that could make or break Dawn’s entire history grade for the year.” He chuckles like he’s joking, but Dawn knows he’s really not.

Deliberately, Dawn moves her gaze from her food to her grandmother’s face. She’s looking at her son with this empty expression—the kind Dawn is used to seeing in Nai Nai’s New Hampshire kitchen. But then, her eyes imperceptibly widen, filled with something Dawn isn’t sure what to name at first. *Fear*, she realizes. She drops her chopstick.

“She’s telling me great stuff,” Dawn interjects. “You’ll have to read the paper when it’s ready. Don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

“Surprise? Maybe you know more about my mother than I do.”

Dawn ignores her dad. “I’ll even do my presentation for you when I come home for the summer.”

She’s regretting every word coming out of her mouth. Picking up the broccoli again, she shoves it down her throat, her cheeks ballooning.

“Well, I’m so glad you two are connecting,” her mother says, “and that you seem to be taking this project so seriously. Who knows, maybe this’ll be the seed of your Common App essay.”

“Mmm,” Dawn replies, attempting to chew and not choke.

Her *Common App essay*. Leave it to her mother to bring it back to college.

“Rachel wrote about her great-aunt for her college essay,” Dawn’s father adds. “Your mom and I read it.”

“Right! It was honestly ingenious. Her way with words is remarkable. Dawn, you could—”

Dawn washes down her broccoli with a glass of water and stares at a point on the cream wall behind her grandmother’s head. It’s a trick she’s learned whenever she wants to tune out her parents. Meditate on a blank space until her parents’ empty chatter fades like the jumbled adult voices in *Charlie Brown*—brassy and unintelligible. Instrument instead of human.

When her mother thankfully switches the topic to another documentary she and Dawn’s father are watching, Dawn snaps her eyes from the wall.

She reaches across the table to shove more lo mein onto her plate, and her hand touches another. It's her grandmother's, wrinkled and veiny, reaching for the same bowl.

"You first," Dawn says, pulling her hand back.

Nai Nai shakes her head. "No, you go." She pushes the bowl in her granddaughter's direction.

Dawn obediently picks up the serving spoon and glances at her grandmother. And for the second time that evening, she thinks she recognizes another emotion carving its path across her grandma's face. Relief.

After dinner, the Chin family celebrates New Year's Eve the same way they always do: huddled around the living room television watching *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve* until everyone falls asleep, usually long before midnight. At one point in her life, Dawn muses, she must have found this fun, or at least cozy. But now she's just bored, smushed into a corner of the couch across from her grandmother. Her mom is half reading her Kindle, and her dad is watching the celebrities performing in Disneyland with equal parts confusion and horror.

"That singer is half naked." He balks, wagging his finger at the television.

"Uh-huh," mumbles Dawn. She could give him a speech on bodily autonomy and feminism, but she'd rather not.

When midnight rolls around, her parents are predictably slumped over. Fireworks explode on the television, the screen flooded with couples kissing and cheering, interrupted by her father's intermittent snoring and her mother's head shifting on the lumpy recliner.

Dawn peeks at the other end of the couch and is surprised to see her grandmother awake, her back flat against the cushions.

"Happy New Year," Dawn says.

"Happy New Year," Nai Nai echoes.

The television host is shout-singing "Auld Lang Syne," and Dawn winces at his off-key rendition. She swings her legs to the floor and moves to get up when her grandmother says, "I'm surprised you're not with friends for New Year's. Are they with their families?"

Dawn glares at her legs. *Great.* Even her seventysomething grandma thinks she's boring.

"They're in Italy. Well, two of them."

"Italy," her grandma repeats. "I've never been there."

"Me neither."

At this point, Dawn isn't sure if she's lying or telling the truth. Her grandmother could have lived in Italy for years for all she knows.

"Maybe next year I'll go with them," Dawn says, though she knows she won't.

"When I was your age," Nai Nai says wistfully, "my friends and I dreamed of traveling."

Dawn turns back to her grandmother with tepid curiosity. "Really? Where did you want to go?"

"Oh, anywhere. I liked the idea of Europe for a while. It was silly. Mostly, we fantasized about where we would go for college. I had a friend who wanted to go to California."

Dawn wrinkles her nose. There is nothing interesting here. "Why?"

Her grandmother shrugs. "People always want to be someplace different. They think it will be better."

"But you didn't go anywhere different for college," Dawn says, treading lightly. "You stayed in New Hampshire."

"That's right. And I'm happy where I am."

Unlike at dinner, Nai Nai is completely stoic, her eyes reflecting the Technicolor television screen. Dawn's toes clench in her fuzzy socks. She's lost her window—that sliver of time between night and morning, between an old year and a new one, where everything seems unreal, like it won't matter tomorrow. Like her grandmother could divulge her secrets without Dawn having to ask, as if they might wash away with the California tide come sunrise.

"I'm glad you're happy." Dawn keeps her voice low. And then something comes out of her that even she doesn't expect: "I don't think I am."

It's like a different Dawn is speaking, one that's been threatening to surface since the summer. The confession feels like a paradox—a weight lifting from her chest while a new one pushes down on her rib cage.

Nai Nai turns toward her granddaughter. "You're not happy," she murmurs, seemingly unfazed by her confession. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Dawn's knee trembles. She hopes that her parents are truly asleep. "I'll be fine," she replies, forcing a smile as she rams her fist into her knee. She wants to take back her words, but she knows she can't. "Maybe I should take a page out of your book."

"Out of my book?" her grandmother repeats.

"Yeah," says Dawn. She tries to fake laugh, but it comes out like a bleating goat. "I'll go out more and go to parties, like you. That'll make things better."

"Perhaps," Nai Nai says seriously. "Friendship is always helpful."

She's still staring at her granddaughter, and Dawn has to look away, unable to hold her gaze. She thinks deep down, secretly, she wanted her grandmother to tell her a real truth. Instead, she's critically close to revealing too many truths of her own.

The screen blips from party to party, highlighting the bashes in other cities with earlier midnights. The ball in Times Square flickers as it drops, frenetic flashes of color descending on the cramped crowd. Dawn steadies her legs and tries not to think about that night under the thorny rosebushes, the cloudy bathroom mirror and the scratches that haunt her all these months later.

"You're hiding something," her grandma declares, "something that makes you unhappy that you haven't told anyone about."

The August night pinging in Dawn's mind blares like an alarm. "What?"

"It's okay. I don't know need to know what it is."

Her statement is nonchalant, casual. Dawn is struggling to comprehend it. How could her grandmother know? How could she even guess? She thought she'd put on a good show—for her grandma, for everyone.

"I—" Dawn begins, but she is interrupted by her father's snoring, louder and heavier than before.

Nai Nai stands. She steps forward and tenderly brushes her fingers against Dawn's cheek. Dawn thinks it's the first time that her grandmother has shown her any kind of physical affection. At once, she feels like a child again, standing on the cruise ship's deck and tugging on her grandmother's blouse, desperately hoping to connect.

"We all have our secrets," Nai Nai whispers, "don't we?"

"I—" Dawn stammers again. She is still picturing her grandmother on the deck, playing cards.

Nai Nai steps around the sofa and the coffee table and Dawn's mother, whose head has sunk into her collarbone. She lingers in the darkness of the living room's awning.

"It's far past my bedtime," she says, "so I should say good night."

Dawn nods, the words looping through her mind: *We all have our secrets, don't we?* Her father stirs in his sleep. She glances at his prone body, at her grandmother's wiry frame in the awning. *We all have our secrets, don't we?*

"All right," she croaks. "Good night."

She listens as her grandmother's slippers patter up the creaking stairs, one by one, until the door clicks shut.

OceanofPDF.com

23
Audrey Zheng

Audrey Zheng hates to admit it, but she is getting tired of all the parties. After American New Year comes Chinese New Year—her parents send her a red envelope stuffed with money with their usual monthly letter, which details the lavish party they're throwing at a Taipei banquet hall. Auntie Fan throws a similar though less extravagant party in her dining room. Patty and Beverley attend, and Calvin of course, who plays with the boys and schmoozes with the adults. Audrey meets Uncle Wen's boss, a formal, middle-aged Caucasian lawyer with graying hair and a suit that reminds her of Principal Havemeyer's. He picks at the Peking duck.

"It's the year of the horse," she tells the white boss as Auntie Fan totes out sweet red bean buns and Bobby and Teddy chase each other around the dining room. Bobby has tied one of the paper lantern strings around Teddy's wrist; he grips the puckered lantern in his fist as Teddy runs in circles, tugging on the makeshift leash.

"What does that mean?" asks the lawyer. "The year of the horse?"

Audrey explains that it's one of the twelve zodiacs. "The horse is free and fearless. And beautiful."

"Right," he replies, "okay."

Audrey can tell he has no idea what she's talking about, but she's not thinking about him anymore; she's too focused on the idea of *free* and *fearless*. She'd like to be the horse, unbridled, galloping through the world without cares or worries. She thinks that maybe in Calvin's arms, she can.

Swiftly after Chinese New Year comes Valentine's Day, a foreign holiday to Audrey, but Patty says it's the most romantic day of the year, especially for couples.

"And the worst day of the year for me," she groans. "I should just forgo college and become a nun."

"You're being dramatic," chastises Beverley. "Besides, you don't need a boy. You have an excellent mind."

"Says the girl with a boyfriend," Patty grumbles.

It's true: Audrey isn't the only one going steady. Two weeks ago, Marcia spectacularly broke up with Robert in between classes. The next morning, he moved on to Beverley, and now he follows her around like an eager puppy, carrying her textbooks and feeding her bites of his bologna and mayonnaise sandwiches at lunch.

"Robert's good fun," Beverley acknowledges, "and he's taking me to a restaurant in the West Village for Valentine's. But come college, so long." She puts a hand to her forehead and sharply salutes, and the girls laugh.

Calvin is taking Audrey out for Valentine's Day too, an Italian restaurant on the Upper West Side (*in the good part above the Philharmonic*, Calvin assured her, though she hadn't asked, *not in the seedy area*). And of course, that weekend, he's hosting another party—love-themed for the holiday, and Audrey is already fatigued thinking about the tacky floors, the drunk boys with their cigarettes sloshed over the open window, her creaky body that she'll have to haul to church the next morning. But she shouldn't complain. She should be grateful for the parties and the friends, and the devoted boyfriend. Last week, Calvin even gave her copies of his keys—in case she wanted to visit him unannounced, which Audrey knows she'll never do. Still, she carries the keys with her like other women carry their purses.

The morning of Valentine's Day, all the girls with boyfriends show off their roses, some strung together in tissue-papered bouquets and others tied around the girls' wrists in corsages. Calvin hands Audrey hers at her locker before homeroom. At first, he pretends he's brought nothing. But just as her face begins to fall, he whips out two dozen fresh roses—a crimson-red bouquet as well as a ribboned corsage sprinkled with baby's breath.

"I couldn't decide," he says, grinning as he tightens the ribbon around her wrist, "so I had to choose both."

"Thank you," Audrey gushes, admiring the deep red against her olive skin. She holds the bouquet to her nose.

“Nothing but the best for you.”

He leans forward to caress her cheek and Audrey sucks in a breath as his palm brushes her jaw and the side of her neck, making its way down her skin until it reaches the collar of her starchy uniform shirt. He stops there and curls his fingers back around her neck, pushing Audrey closer to kiss her.

“Calvin,” Audrey whispers, “we’re at school. People will see.”

She can already imagine her gym teacher walking past, shaking his head in disdain.

“We’re always at school,” whines Calvin, his lips grazing hers. “If I can’t kiss my girlfriend here, then where?”

The movie theater, Audrey is about to say, but she stops herself, thinking of his hand on the inside of her thigh at *Doctor Zhivago*—its heat, its clamor for more. They’ve seen more films since then, but only evening showings, when the theater is crowded and the rowdy boys monopolize the back row again. He hasn’t touched her leg at any of those movies.

Audrey turns Calvin’s face and pecks him on the cheek. “I have to go to class,” she says, tapping his watch, “and so do you.”

“Miss Punctual,” he mutters, but he relents and steps backward.

“Punctual,” she sounds out slowly. “On time?”

“Correct.”

Audrey grins. “My English *is* getting better.”

Except it isn’t. In English class, Mr. Abernathy passes back their short response exams on *The Scarlet Letter* and the paper slides off the desk and drops onto Audrey’s pleated wool skirt. A red pen *C* is circled at the top. Audrey doesn’t understand. She read this book multiple times—she knows everything about Hester Prynne’s scarlet *A*, the minister, and the baby. Her scallion and fried oil fingerprints stained each page, fraternal twins of the text, following wherever it led. She thought she had grasped every word. But when she scans Mr. Abernathy’s writing underneath the grade, she spots something new: *Poor analysis.* It isn’t enough to understand English. She is supposed to be able to pull the language apart, to apply meaning to it. How can she do that when she barely knows how to pronounce the surname *Prynne*?

Salty tears prick Audrey’s eyelashes, but she bites them back. Cs were acceptable for October—a marked improvement from her Fs in September—but now it is February, and they are barreling through her final year of

American high school. Soon, college acceptances will come, and after that, actual university. Audrey isn't prepared for any of it. She had written in her applications that she aspired to be a librarian. What a ridiculous thought. She can't even read.

After class, Beverley finds her in the hall, that dreary fluorescent corridor that continues to unmask all of Audrey's greatest flaws: her sunspots and freckles, her Chinese tongue.

"Bad grade?" Beverley asks, adjusting her pink corsage from Robert. Audrey's is beginning to itch.

"How could you tell?"

"Oh, I don't know, because you look like you might stab someone. Or yourself."

"Beverley!"

"Come on, out with it. I won't tell Calvin, don't worry."

"I got a C on my English test again," Audrey confesses miserably, "third one in a row." It is decidedly worse to reveal your poor grades a second time. She feels like a certified dunce.

Beverley pulls out mauve lipstick and a pocket mirror. "Well, you didn't take my advice," she says simply, smacking her lips.

"I studied very hard. I read English novels almost every night," Audrey says, as if she is a defendant in her self-imposed trial.

Beverley smiles at one of the cafeteria clique girls by the lockers and clicks the cap back on her lipstick. "Samuel," she says. "You didn't ask him to tutor you."

Audrey stares down at her distorted reflection in the corner of Beverley's plastic mirror. "I thought I could handle it on my own. Calvin was—"

"Calvin gets worse grades than you." Beverley snorts. "That is, when he shows up to school."

Audrey ponders her friend's words. She's seen the inside of Calvin's backpack before, strewn with crumpled papers and late assignments. Calvin says he has dreams beyond Beecher, ones that teachers can't teach, and so effort in school is ultimately futile. Why waste his time when he could be entertained? When he could enjoy what else New York has to offer?

Perhaps the film education wasn't enough. And these past few weeks, Calvin hasn't tried to teach Audrey any more English words or help her deconstruct the films' complicated language. He has other things to think

about. Perhaps a boyfriend is suitable for love and romance, and not for academic instruction.

"I'm right," Beverley says, "and you know it."

"You often are." Audrey nods.

"I *always* am."

Audrey is still thinking about Beverley's advice at the end of the school day, her head swimming with scarlet As and Samuel's potential tutoring. She'd call him, but Calvin ripped up that page with his number months ago, and she didn't get a chance to ask Beverley before class started. Now she and Patty are up ahead, their arms linked, talking about her date with Robert tonight, no doubt. Calvin walks beside Audrey as they meet the bitter winter air. He is holding her hand, though his wrist buckles against the corsage's large red roses.

"Where's your bouquet?" he asks.

"What?"

Calvin drops her hand. "You've got the corsage. But the bouquet, where is it?"

"Oh," Audrey says. "It's in my locker. I left it there by accident, I'm sorry."

She'd been so distracted by her bad grade, she'd completely forgotten about the bouquet.

"You left it in your locker? Why would you do that? It'll rot in there."

Audrey detects the building irritation in Calvin's voice. It reminds her of that afternoon on the bridge in Central Park overlooking the lake, how his sudden ire had made her want to slip through the bars and into the water below.

"I'm really very sorry," Audrey repeats, "I've had a lot on my mind today. I'll bring a vase from home and put the roses in there first thing tomorrow. And then I'll put the bouquet in the sun as soon as I get home from school."

She does feel bad. Calvin has spent so much money on her and has made her feel so special, so loved. Isn't that what every girl wants? She is horrible, and she knows his frustration is justified. She will give him every moment of her attention at dinner tonight.

"I'm sorry," she says again.

They've stopped on the sidewalk, Calvin's arms crossed, his jaw clenched as he looks out at the muddy tire-tracked street. Beverley and Patty pause too at the traffic light several paces ahead.

"Don't wait for me," Audrey calls out to them. "I'll see you later."

"Are you sure?" asks Patty. "We're happy to—"

"No." Audrey shakes her head. "Enjoy your evenings. And your date tonight, Beverley." She wiggles her eyebrows for extra effect. "I can't wait to hear about it tomorrow."

Beverley purses her lips but nods as Patty blows them a kiss.

"Bye, lovebirds!" Patty shouts, and the girls run across the street before the light changes.

Audrey turns back to her boyfriend. She touches his muscled arm, tense with anger.

"Please don't be mad," she pleads.

"Why did you have a lot on your mind?" Calvin asks.

"What?"

"You just said you had a lot on your mind today. What about?"

Audrey removes her hand from his arm and toys with the ribbon on her corsage. "I got another bad grade in English today. I thought I was improving and I'm not."

"What does it matter? You already turned in your transcript for college applications, right? Who cares?"

"Well, I want to know I can do well *in* college," Audrey says, pulling on the ribbon's frayed ends, "and Patty and Beverley said that if you get wait-listed, they make you turn in your spring semester grades."

"Patty and Beverley don't know what they're talking about," Calvin grunts. "You want to trust them over me?"

"No, of course not," Audrey quickly replies. Privately, she thinks how funny it is that Beverley practically said the same thing about Calvin just a few hours ago.

All she really wants is to finish this conversation so she can go back to being an adoring girlfriend. She can return home and change into a nice dress and eat delicious food and talk about anything other than school and her humiliating grades. But Samuel keeps cropping up in her brain, his impassioned party speeches and too-long hair, his rumored intelligence and generosity. She will reach him, and she will get the help she needs. Audrey

braces her shoulders. She would rather Calvin hear it from her than through the Beecher grapevine.

"I know you don't like him, but I'm going to ask Samuel for tutoring," Audrey says. "The girls say he helped them with their writing a lot. Hopefully, I'll only need a few sessions."

Calvin's head vigorously shakes back and forth. "No, I can do it. I can help you."

"You've helped already," Audrey says gently, "and I really appreciate it. I'll pay Samuel from my allowance."

"You'd spend money on that creep?" Calvin scoffs. "Please. He's bad news, Audrey."

"Why?" she presses. "Why is he bad news?"

He's self-righteous, sure, and a loner, despite going to many of Calvin's parties. But Audrey remembers the way he talked at that Halloween party about politics, and though she didn't fully grasp what he was saying, much less agree, she could tell he truly believed his own words. He wasn't putting on a show, and that, she surprisingly admires. Besides, she doesn't need to like him. She only needs a tutor.

"You don't know him," Calvin says. "He's got . . . he's . . . he's dangerous."

"*Dangerous?*" She can hardly imagine anyone being dangerous at eighteen years old. It feels as preposterous as a children's television program being dangerous.

"I don't want him tutoring you," Calvin says firmly. He takes Audrey's non-corsaged palm and kisses it, and she is confused by the gesture coupled with the sentiment. "Promise me you'll stay away."

"But I don't—"

"Promise. You have to trust me. We'll find you another tutor."

Her palm is still wrapped in his, caught between their bodies. Audrey can feel him tugging.

"Okay," she says, "fine, I promise. I'll stay away."

Calvin releases and Audrey's hand limply returns to her side.

"Good." He pinches the hollow of her cheek. "Thank you."

OceanofPDF.com

24
Audrey Zheng

Five days later, Audrey is on a singular mission. The sky has melted into inky candle wax, the night dribbling down Calvin's windowpanes. The walls are strung up with paper hearts, and fuchsia drinks splash inside Calvin's expensive crystal glasses, matching the girls in their red minidresses and knitted sweaters. Calvin is collapsed on the velvet ottoman again, his body crushing the coats underneath.

"Baby," he calls when Audrey walks past, "c'mere."

Audrey pats the top of his slicked-back hair. "Later," she says. "Drink some water." She feels she is talking to her younger brothers instead of her boyfriend.

Calvin drank too much at their Valentine's Day dinner too. It was her first time having Italian food (Beecher's dry cafeteria spaghetti did not count), and as she was indulging in rich penne alla vodka and meatballs soaked in marinara sauce, Calvin was indulging in cocktails. He was angry with her, she knew, or pretending not to be angry because she had promised not to ask Samuel for help. But the suggestion rattled him, and when the bill came, Audrey had to peel his credit card from his blazer pocket and apologetically hand it to the waiter.

Tonight, she is not apologizing for Calvin's drunkenness. Instead, she searches the crowd for someone she really hopes is here.

She starts with the dance floor, where Patty is simultaneously shimmying and regaling her friends with a story about Auntie Aihan. Audrey heard this story yesterday on their walk to school: Auntie Aihan caught another girl at

their boardinghouse stealing the laundry change from the bowl in the foyer. She was about to kick her to the streets when Patty stepped in and convinced Auntie Aihan to give the girl a job mopping the floors instead—that way, she'd earn money, she wouldn't have to steal, and Auntie Aihan might stop complaining about her back breaking every day.

"You should have seen the look on that girl's face," Beverley pipes up. "I think she worships Patty now."

"Guess we have another person to sing hymnals about at church," Kimberley teases.

Patty's ensuing laughter drifts across the parlor floor. Audrey smiles and moves into the gallery hall. But she doesn't find him there either, or in the kitchen, where she thought he'd be. Traipsing through Calvin's apartment, jostling the boys and their cigarettes and stepping around Marcia and her new suitor coiled around a pendant lamp, Audrey reaches for the bathroom door. If she can't find him, she can at least find solace. But then the door opens, and there he is.

"Audrey Zheng, we meet again," Samuel says.

He looks exactly like he always does: mussed hair, worn button-down, wrinkled trousers. It feels like déjà vu, the two of them circling the bathroom, pecking at each other like vultures. Tonight, she is hoping to be a different kind of bird.

"Samuel, um . . ." She realizes she does not know his last name. "It's nice to see you."

"It's nice to see you too," he replies, his lips turned up in a half smile. "I heard you're dating Calvin. Officially speaking."

"Yes."

"How's that going?"

"Good," Audrey says, mirroring him as he leans against the door, "great."

"I'm glad for you."

"Thank you."

Samuel pushes off the door and scratches the back of his neck. "Well, I'll let you use the bathroom," he says, and he curves around the corner, his sleeve brushing hers.

"No!" she shouts, and Samuel stops, caught between the wall and her body. "I mean, I'm not here to use the bathroom."

"You're not?" he asks, stepping backward to look at her.

Audrey shakes her head. She is doing this all wrong. She glances at the end of the hall, Calvin's empty bedroom peeking through the doorway. Behind Audrey, Calvin is hopefully still slumped over the ottoman, and the boys are too busy smoking, the couples too entangled in each other's skin and lips to notice the pair poised in darkness. But she can't take any chances.

"Come," she says, and without thinking, she grabs Samuel's hand and drags him into the bedroom, shutting the door behind them.

She's always imagined what Calvin's bedroom would look like, but seeing it in person, up close, is entirely different. Here are the actual cream sheets Calvin sleeps in every night beneath the wide windows overlooking the park, the plush Persian rug hugging his feet when he walks across the room. It all feels so intimate. And worse yet, she feels delinquent standing here not with Calvin but with someone else, someone he thinks is dangerous.

"Audrey," Samuel says slowly, "what's going on with you?"

"Talk quieter," Audrey instructs.

"Why?"

Audrey stares at the ornate headboard behind Samuel so she won't have to stare directly into his eyes. It's gold-painted and presumably antique, with little dragons whose open mouths meet in the center.

"I want to ask you something, but you have to keep it a secret," Audrey says. "Can you do that?"

"Did you murder someone? 'Cause that's going to be a bit difficult."

Audrey narrows her eyes at Samuel. Leave it to him to annoy her in a moment when she's trying to be serious.

"Sorry," Samuel replies, smiling. "Okay. I swear on this very expensive rug that whatever you want to ask, I'll take to my grave. Now what is it?"

Audrey's breath hitches. Calvin's anger burns in her brain, his pursed lips and pinched nose, the promises he made her make. Every relationship has its secrets, right? She crosses her arms.

"If you have time, I'd really like you to tutor me," she begins. "I'm failing English. Well, not failing anymore, but not getting the grades I want. I don't have a lot of money, but I can—"

"Of course," Samuel says, "I'd be happy to."

Audrey's mouth parts in a tiny o. "Really? But I didn't say how much I could—"

“We can figure out the money later. Don’t worry about it.”

Instinctively, she takes Samuel’s hand and squeezes it. He squeezes back and she immediately drops hers, rubbing her clammy palm against her dress.

“Thank you,” she says. “Truly, thank you.”

“Sure.” Samuel shrugs. “We can meet at the Yorkville library on Monday after school. You go to Beecher, yes? So let’s say four o’clock?”

Audrey pictures Calvin leaning against the metal lockers after chemistry in his half-buttoned uniform shirt and leather loafers, waiting to walk her home. She’ll think about that later.

“Okay. That’s fine.”

“Great.”

Cautiously, he steps to the side and moves to open the door, a patch of light shifting across his sleeve as a car passes on the street below them. Audrey examines his profile, so similar to Calvin’s. She can see why they call him *poor man’s Calvin*, a rude nickname, but an accurate one. Although, she supposes, she doesn’t really know if he’s poor. She doesn’t know anything about him.

“Samuel,” she says, just as the door creaks open and the sounds from the party trickle into the bedroom, “please don’t tell—”

“I know,” Samuel interrupts, “I won’t tell Calvin or anyone. Taking it to my grave, as I said.”

She’s surprised he doesn’t question her, ask her *why* tutoring has to be a secret. Maybe he’s simply good at keeping promises, or maybe he understands Calvin more than she does.

She nods and he steps out of the bedroom, Audrey following close behind, walking in his shadow until she rejoins the party, one with the crowd and Calvin again.

OceanofPDF.com

25
Dawn Chin

School restarts in January. Crystal Lake freezes over and along with it, Dawn's motivation. She hates the winter, the waning sunlight, the heavy snow two feet high, burying the dead grass and both her and her grandmother's lies. *You're hiding something, something that makes you unhappy that you haven't told anyone about.* The thought makes Dawn queasy. It's the truth and yet she too cannot seem to unearth her secrets. She wants to be known, and yet, hypocritically, she despises being seen.

For the next several weeks, Dawn does nothing but sleep, doomscroll, and space out during class. Ms. Codderton has stopped talking about their yearlong project in favor of intense AP exam prep, so even Dawn's investigative journey has slowed to a teetering stop. She doesn't answer Pen's text messages. She doesn't want to ignore her, but she can't find the energy to respond.

Worst yet, she is consumed by Fitz. Not once has she spotted him on campus. But he is everywhere: stalking her in the dining hall when she's deciding between pasta or chicken, crowding her dreams so she wakes up soaked in sweat, interrupting her foggy, cold mornings with memories of wicked summer heat. It's like her grandmother flipped a switch in her head.

One Saturday in early February, Dawn decides she at least has to shower. She smells. She can hear the girls in the common room talking about their summer plans. Stephanie is shadowing a Sanborn alumnus at his medical practice in rural Vermont, Giselle's budding ballet career is taking her to Miami for a monthlong summer dance intensive, Delia is applying to

fashion magazine internships in New York, and Caroline is hoping to get recruited at a prestigious coxswain camp in Amsterdam. They've had the sense to avoid asking Dawn since they know she has no plans, as usual. Rolling out of bed, she lumbers to the Jack-and-Jill bathroom between her and Caroline's room. When she steps out of the tub, she is relieved to no longer hear her friends' voices. They must have left.

After bundling up in her cousin's hand-me-down Patagonia, Dawn at last meets the winter air's biting chill. It makes her momentarily miss Santa Barbara, and she thinks again of her grandmother's words on New Year's Eve—*people always want to be someplace different.* She trudges through the Gothic corridor; it snowed last night, so her footprints carve out a fresh, winding path. Someone jams into her shoulder, their fur hood sweeping the side of her cheek.

"Geez," she mutters, "you could have—"

The person stops and turns. "Oh, sorry," they say. Their hood drops backward. "I literally have no spatial awareness."

Dawn's face blooms with recognition.

"Pen, hey," Dawn says, "sorry, it's okay, I—"

"Well, if it isn't—"

"The hood thing really threw me. . . ."

Her words trickle off and the girls awkwardly laugh. Dawn tugs on her coat zipper. "So, how are you?" she asks. "How are things going?"

Pen has stepped to the side, and it feels like déjà vu, the two of them mirrored in the corridor. Pen shrugs. "I'm fine. How are you?"

Dawn nods. "Also fine," she says, and then, trying to imitate her initial winter break pep, she adds, "Really good."

Pen looks off at the courtyard and rubs her nose with the back of her wool glove. "Oh, nice. I hadn't heard from you in a while, so I wasn't sure."

The rawness in her voice stings and Dawn isn't sure how to respond. She's ignored Pen for weeks. But she thought—queer or not—that Pen was like Fitz, moving from one source of entertainment to the next. Fitz was never bothered. She could have ghosted him one night, and by morning, he'd have found another girl to crawl under his covers. All summer, she knew this. And so, she had tried to control the seesaw: the tenuous balance between affection and flippancy, between care and I-couldn't-care-less.

"I'm sorry," she says. "Everything got really busy. With summer applications and stuff."

Pen's eyes narrow—neither of the girls believe Dawn's lie. She's out of practice. *You're hiding something*, her grandmother continues to remind her. She's one to talk.

"Anyway," Dawn says, changing the subject, "how's the new semester been for you? See any good concerts yet?"

Pen sniffs. "Yeah. Saw the Agoraphobes last weekend. They played again in Gilford."

"Oh my god, you're *obsessed*," Dawn exclaims. "Seriously, you might need an intervention."

Pen's lips turn upward. "Please. You know you're just jealous."

"Spoken like a true groupie."

"Well," Pen says, brushing snow off her parka, "you had a chance to be a groupie too. I, like, texted you weeks ago about the concert."

"You did?" Dawn's brief lightness deflates. She thinks about the forty-five unread messages on her phone. And then she thinks about the two of them shoulder to shoulder in a cramped concert hall, their heads tilted together as the Agoraphobes croon about dreams and metaphors and unrequited love. Is it bad to admit that she would have liked that, even loved that?

"Guess you were really busy," Pen says. "Those summer apps, huh?"

"I'm sorry," Dawn repeats, and she means it. "I promise I'll be better from here on out." She tries to playfully bite her lip. "So, like, how can I make it up to you?"

"Make it up to me?"

"Yeah, should I go listen to another weird indie album? A weirder one? Maybe *I* buy Agoraphobes merch?"

Pen grins, and Dawn is instantly grateful for the return to their familiar game.

"Well, first you can buy me a muffin. And an iced green tea."

"Done."

Pen gestures to the observatory on the other side of the corridor. "And after that, I have a take-home exam for my astronomy class due Monday and I'm, like, deeply procrastinating on it. I was going to sit by the telescopes and hope they'd motivate me or something, but since you so deeply owe me, we could work together instead? If you have homework, that is."

Dawn snorts. “Homework is an understatement. Let’s do it. I’ll get you your weird snacks and then we can meet at the study center. Deal?”

Pen puts her hood back on and stuffs her curls inside. They peek out like a lion’s mane. “That place is always so crowded on the weekends. How about the dorms instead? I’m in Asbury.”

Asbury is the outlier of the dorms, closest to the woods and the rolling hills on the edge of campus. Dawn nods.

“Okay,” she says, “let’s go.”

Dawn had imagined Pen’s room over winter break and now—sooner than she thought—she’s here. It’s clean and very put together. Her twin bed sits in the center of the room like a statement piece, her lilac duvet cover’s edges folded smoothly under the wooden bed frame. Making a right angle with her nightstand is her desk—pushed against the window, devoid of anything but a pen holder and a framed picture of her family on a beach.

Dawn drops the tea and the muffin she picked up at the café cart on Pen’s desk. “Aw,” she says, peering at the framed photo, “this is sweet.”

Pen unlaces her winter boots and places them neatly together on the shoe rack. Dawn eyes her own shoes scattered by the door and fights the urge to go back and fix them.

“Yeah,” she says, “that was in Aruba. Though my dad spent the rest of the vacation pretty much glued to his iPad.”

“What kind of lawyer is he again?” Dawn asks. In the photo, Pen is hugging her little brother, just like when they were e-scootering. They seem to be attached at the hip. She wonders what it would be like to have a little sibling, if she’d be as protective as Pen.

“Financial or something.” Pen plops down on her white shag rug and pats the spot next to her. “The boring kind.”

“Ah.”

Dawn crisscrosses her legs on the rug and unzips her backpack. Sitting on Pen’s shag rug has suddenly made her nervous, though she doesn’t understand why. She’s been such a disturbing roller coaster of emotions today—from ever-dreary to flirtatious to guilty to anxious. No one in her family is ever this tumultuous, even in private. Now that she thinks about it, she’s never seen her parents cry.

Pen hops to her feet to grab her tea and muffin on the desk and Dawn startles, pressing a hand to her chest.

"Oh my god," Pen says, laughing as she sips her tea, "are you okay? Do you need some of my tea?" Pen gently shakes the cup. "It's still hot."

"No," Dawn replies, her cheeks flushed. "I'm good."

"Well, let me know if you change your mind."

Slowly, Pen sits back down, tucking her knees under her thighs. She opens her laptop, and the room is at once quiet save for the whistle of the old heaters. Dawn breathes in Pen's ocean Febreze. She stares at the lilac comforter and wonders if Fitz has lain on this duvet, on these pillows. Dawn pinches the inside of her wrist. Months ago, she promised herself that she wouldn't act like this; she blames her grandmother and that horrible New Year's discussion on her parents' couch.

"Ugh," Pen says after five minutes, "I hate astronomy." She puts her elbows on her laptop base and rests her chin in her hands. "Tell me something interesting. Anything new from your grandma?"

"Didn't you say something about a take-home exam?"

"Shut up. I'm bored. Ever figure out who those girls are in the picture?"

Dawn had forgotten she'd told Pen about that. It was during one of their marathon chats in the library before winter break, when the sky was milky and dark, and Dawn was blabbering on about whatever came to mind. She had painted the newspaper clipping, the girls, and the lie as intriguing and silly. But now she finds everything a little nefarious. After all, on New Year's, her grandmother essentially admitted to lying to her. Dawn shakes her head. Her family is twisted.

"Nope," Dawn tells Pen. "Grandma's a locked vault."

"So interesting." Pen sighs and taps her fingers against her cheekbones. "You know, maybe your grandma used to be an international spy. Like that movie."

"Which movie?"

"I don't know, one of those gazillion spy movies. *Mission: Impossible*? That one?"

"I have no idea what that movie is about," Dawn says.

"Me neither."

They both giggle and relax. Dawn leans back, her hair waterfalling down her spine and etching mazes through the white rug.

“Oh, I forgot,” Dawn says, “she told me she went to a lot of parties. Not that that’s helpful.”

“Parties? Really?”

“Yeah,” Dawn confirms. “Apparently all the time. And I’m pretty sure she drank too.”

“Wow,” Pen says. “So, your grandma was, like, cool.”

Dawn snorts. “Cooler than me. I’ve never been to a party.” As the words come out of her mouth, she realizes how pathetic she sounds. She’s a junior in high school—a boarding school, no less—and she’s so prudish and sheltered.

But Pen replies, “Me neither. Well, I used to go out, but not anymore.”

“Why’d you stop?”

Pen swivels to the side and squishes her toes against the wooden bed frame. “Because I went with Fitz.”

“Oh. Right.”

Dawn feels like all the air has been sucked out of the room. It’s the first time Pen’s brought up Fitz since that first afternoon in the library. She wishes Pen hadn’t said his name at all. She’d love to talk about something else, anything else, but she also feels the acid in her stomach burn. She and Fitz never went out, got drunk, jaunted around campus kissing and snuggling so that everyone could giggle and gossip about them the next day. Dawn was hidden away—Fitz’s little summer captive.

“It wasn’t, like, fun going out with him,” Pen adds.

“Mm,” Dawn says noncommittally.

“Yeah, he always got insanely drunk. And not cute, happy drunk. He got so sloppy and randomly angry. And then he’d throw up and immediately pass out. One time, he vomited all over my brand-new Doc Martens. And he was being such a pain when I tried to clean up. So, I ended up lugging him back to his room. He was, like, super heavy.” Pen pushes her computer off her lap and stands up. “I fully dragged him across the floor,” she says, miming the action, “like a potato sack.”

Dawn laughs, despite herself. She imagines Fitz waking up with rug burn, and it briefly feels like karmic retribution. “Wow,” she says, “that is really shitty.”

“Tell me about it.” Pen sits on the rug and leans her head back. She lets out a heavy sigh.

“We should rectify that.”

Pen’s still staring up at the ceiling. “Rectify what?”

“Your party experience,” Dawn says. “We could go out. You know, with my friends . . . your friends.” She imagines Pen in a tight, thin dress and swallows. “Or whatever.”

“Hmm,” Pen says, “I’m not opposed.”

Dawn thinks about her grandmother tossing back cocktails and dancing under the New Hampshire—or more likely, the New York—moon.

“It’d be fun,” she says more confidently. Maybe this will even get her out of her winter slump.

Pen lifts up her head and leans forward. “We can get ready together,” she suggests. “I’ll put together a playlist. I’m good at that.”

“Yeah.” Dawn nods. “Perfect.”

“Great. We just have to find a party to go to, then. A good one.”

“We will,” promises Dawn. She drags her fingers through the rug’s tangled fluff. “I’ll make sure of it.”

OceanofPDF.com

26
Audrey Zheng

Every Monday and Wednesday at three thirty, Audrey Zheng walks nine blocks uptown and crosses over three avenues—from the ritzy golden storefronts dotted with old women and their wiener dogs to the old brick buildings and rusting lampposts hitched together with telephone wires. Audrey likes the walk and the change in the neighborhood: despite the short distance, it feels like another planet, one where she can peel off her uniform blazer and girlfriend persona and just be Audrey. At the stoplight, she subconsciously glances over her shoulder, worried she'll see Calvin, even though she's told him she has to take the children to chess practice twice a week so he can't walk her home. The lie was easy to tell and mostly true: the boys *have* started playing chess at Uncle Wen's encouragement, but his hours have been better lately, and he insists on dropping off the boys at chess practice himself. (He believes his sons will become international chess champions—a fantasy that makes Auntie Fan hysterically laugh.) Audrey picks them up after her tutoring sessions and takes them home like usual.

It seems the fates have aligned for Audrey as she hustles down Third Avenue, past Little Ukraine and the Polish butcher, until she finds the glass doors that lead into the library. She scampers across the carpet and turns the corner into the vestibule, where her tutor is sitting at his usual booth, the desk lined with loose-leaf paper and sharpened pencils.

"Hello, Audrey," Samuel says.

“Hello, Samuel.” She slides into the seat across from him and drops her backpack on the floor. As long as he doesn’t go on another one of his boring political rants, she’s decided she doesn’t dislike him—or at least she’s too desperate to dislike him.

“What’s today’s news?”

It’s what he always asks when he sees her. Samuel doesn’t mean the regular news but *her* news and her friends’. He says it’s a good way to ease into English conversation, but Audrey thinks he secretly likes hearing about her day. So she tells him about her chemistry teacher’s bad helium joke, about a hall monitor reprimanding Beverley and Robert for making out at the lockers (*unladylike and altogether inappropriate*, they said, and Beverley snorted in response), about Patty’s morning epiphany that she wants to write novels like Jane Austen (*why ache for romance when you can write about it instead and get rich?* she declared), and even about Calvin, who is particularly excited to spend the weekend with Audrey because her host family is taking the train to Connecticut to visit relatives. Audrey opted to stay home.

“Ah, a weekend alone for the lovebirds,” Samuel says, crossing his arms as he leans back into the booth cushion.

“Sure,” Audrey says nervously, though she doesn’t know *why* she’s nervous. She and Calvin will probably spend their afternoons at the movie theater like usual, or maybe they’ll go out for Italian food again. Hopefully this time, Calvin won’t be so drunk. “Anyway, what’s *your* news?” she asks.

“Nothing much for me since Monday,” Samuel replies, “but one of the boys I live with—”

“Let me guess which one,” Audrey interrupts. “Albert?”

Samuel laughs. “Wow. How’d you know?”

“Albert is always up to no good,” Audrey reasons, happy she was right.

While Samuel doesn’t talk much about school (beyond his future career aspirations: he’d like to be an architect), he does share funny stories about his roommates. He has four of them and they live in an apartment on the border between Chinatown and the Lower East Side, near the garment factories. Audrey can’t fathom how five boys live in one apartment, but Samuel doesn’t seem to mind. She asked him where his parents were once, and he said *back in China*, and didn’t elaborate beyond that. She supposes that’s what she’d say about her parents too.

“True,” Samuel says, nodding. “Albert never fails to entertain. Anyway, he and a few friends were making protest posters—”

“Against the Vietnam War?” Audrey interjects.

“Yes,” Samuel confirms. It’s another thing he and his roommates are frequently doing, though they never seem to *go* to the protests. “And this new girl showed up. Albert *swears* she’s the prettiest girl he’s ever seen.”

“He said that about the girl he met at Gristedes last week.”

“Well, he’s moved on from her,” Samuel asserts. “Anyway, he was too shy to say anything while they were making posters and while everyone was there, you know. So he waited until the very end of the night to talk to her. He said he really had to use the bathroom, but he refused to get up once because he was worried she might leave in the minutes he was away.”

“Oh no.”

“Right. So he desperately has to pee, and she takes—according to him—practically forever to finish her poster. Finally, she finishes and Albert blurts out that he’d really like her telephone number. Because he might wet his pants if he doesn’t ask her now.”

“He said that?” Audrey gasps. “He said he’d *wet his pants if he didn’t ask her now*?”

Samuel nods, cackling. “You heard it here first.”

“Did she give him her number?”

Samuel shakes his head. “Unfortunately, no.”

“Another loss for Albert, then.” Audrey sighs. “I guess he’ll have to lick his wounds at Gristedes again next week.”

Her tutor sits forward, placing his elbows on the wood table. “*Lick his wounds*,” he echoes. “That’s new vocabulary.”

“Yes,” Audrey says victoriously. “It may not help with my English papers, but at least I know new slang for college.”

“Indeed,” Samuel replies, grinning, “indeed.”

They move on to grammar lessons—Audrey is learning adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions this week—followed by a reading comprehension exercise. Audrey hasn’t had any more literature essays to write recently, but she’s scoring better on her English and history quizzes. She got a B+ on her Civil War pop quiz last Tuesday. As Samuel writes out different prepositions in tidy cursive, Audrey wonders if she may have misjudged him, at least slightly. Things are looking up.

Things continue to look up on Friday afternoon, when Audrey waves goodbye to Auntie Fan, Uncle Wen, and the children as they squish into a taxi on their way to Grand Central Terminal. Audrey can't imagine what Connecticut looks like, but she reasons it can't be better than New York, this busy, beautiful city that she now has all to herself. Darting up the apartment steps and jiggling the keys to unlock the top bolt, she relishes the empty kitchen, the fridge filled with food Auntie Fan has kindly made for her—steamed pork buns and vegetable gyoza with egg tarts for dessert. If she's feeling particularly daring, she might take her plate to the living room so she can eat on the couch and watch television at the same time.

The shrill ring of the telephone interrupts her daydreams, and Audrey dashes to answer it.

"Hello?"

"It's me," says the person on the other end, and Audrey immediately recognizes Calvin's low voice. "Your family's gone?"

"Yes," Audrey confirms, looping the cord around her index finger. "They're on their way to Connecticut as we speak."

"Wonderful," says Calvin. "Then we can see each other."

Audrey deflates slightly, thinking of her leftovers and comedy television night. But her boyfriend wants to be with her. "All right, where should we meet?"

"I'll come to you," Calvin instructs. "Put on something nice."

The phone receiver clicks, and Audrey places the telephone back on the wall. She walks to the bedroom and opens her rickety closet doors. Calvin's seen all the dresses she's bought in New York, so she opts for a silk, aquamarine qipao from Taiwan. She found the fabric at a market stall in Shida and immediately fell in love with it. It was beyond their budget, but Mama bought it for her anyway and stitched it into a lovely, knee-length dress. She slips it over her head and walks to the bathroom to admire her reflection in the mirror. She's beginning to appreciate the dresses Mama made for her so many months and years ago. Maybe she will wear one to graduation in May.

A half hour later, the buzzer rings, and Audrey grabs her purse, coat, and keys and runs down to meet Calvin. He's smoking, his wool peacoat sleeve crinkling at the elbow as he holds the cigarette to his lips and inhales. When he sees her, he taps the cigarette on the railing before dropping it on the cement and crushing it with his loafer.

“Why didn’t you let me up?” asks Calvin, running a hand through his pomaded hair. She hadn’t noticed at school, but his skin is paler than usual.

“Oh,” Audrey says, tottering down the stoop steps in her heels, “I figured it’d be easier to meet you here. Sorry.”

Calvin shrugs and looks out into the street. When he doesn’t reply, Audrey awkwardly kisses his cheek, her lips forming small depressions in his skin.

“Is everything okay?” she asks.

“Of course. Why wouldn’t it be?”

“I don’t know,” Audrey replies, though for a moment, she worries he’s found her out and is waiting for her to tell him of her betrayal, of her secret tutoring sessions with Samuel. But Calvin only pushes a hair behind Audrey’s ear and touches his lips to her forehead. She melts into his caress.

“I don’t want to go out tonight,” he murmurs. “I want to stay in.”

“Oh,” she says, confused, “we can rain check for tomorrow, then, if you like.”

“No, no, that’s not what I meant.” Calvin steps backward and points to the apartment’s front door. “Let’s go inside.”

“What?”

“No one’s here, right? We have the place to ourselves?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“How often do we get that opportunity? Pretty much never.” Calvin’s eyes and nose are pinched like a rat’s.

Audrey’s shoulders fall. “You’re right.”

“Okay, so let’s go. I bet Auntie Fan left you some dinner.”

Audrey thinks of her pork buns and gyoza waiting for her in the fridge. “Yes,” she relents, “she did.”

“Perfect.” Calvin taps his shoe against the weary brick and Audrey nods, taking his hand and leading him back up the stoop steps.

They enter the apartment, and unlike earlier, Audrey feels odd standing in the kitchen without her host parents and the rambunctious children running through the halls. She isn’t sure what to do or how to act: Should she take the position of hostess like Auntie Fan and offer Calvin something to drink? He’s been in this apartment more than her over the years, so he likely knows where the glasses are.

But she doesn’t have to worry, because Calvin opens the fridge and pulls out the pork buns and vegetable gyoza as well as the cast-iron pan Auntie

Fan always handles delicately because it was a gift from her mother. He finds a container of rice in the back and dumps its contents into a metal pot. As the food warms on the stovetop, Calvin reaches for a cup and fills it with water, downing it in one gulp.

"I'm starving." He groans.

Audrey fiddles with the neckline of her qipao. "I hope it's enough food. We could always go out to dinner if—"

"It'll be plenty," Calvin insists. "Auntie Fan always feeds us well."

She had meant to feed *just* Audrey this weekend, not Calvin, but Audrey holds her tongue.

They eat at the dining room table, taking up two chairs at the end, closest to the archway. Audrey worries that Auntie Fan will notice Calvin's fingerprints on the linen tablecloth, his scent on the chair cushion. What would her second mother think if she found out he was here, unchaperoned? She reasons that all couples eventually spend time in each other's apartments alone, but she imagined that would be when they were in college, or at least older than she feels right now, on the brink of eighteen. When they finish their meal, Audrey washes the dishes in the sink while Calvin flips through channels on the television, never settling on one for more than a few minutes. She wonders if this is what their lives will be like in twenty years—if they're still together in twenty years—him on the couch, her in the kitchen. She wonders what Samuel would think of that. He always has an opinion, something to say. She likes that about him.

When she's finished with the last dish, she walks to the living room and sits next to Calvin on the couch. His legs are draped sideways, and he doesn't move them, so she needles her body into the space between the armrest and his feet.

"What are we watching?" she asks, trying to sound as chipper as possible.

Calvin shrugs. "Nothing that good." He grabs the remote on the coffee table and flicks off the television; the screen turns fuzzy before fading to black.

The pair are left in the silence. Audrey can hear the sirens coasting past their window, the hum of the building's heater through the vents, her shaky breath as she inhales. Calvin swings his legs to the floor and scoots closer to her. He weasels his hand behind her waist, and it lies there between her spine and the armrest.

“Hi,” he whispers.

“Hi,” she whispers back.

He kisses her, one hand rubbing her hip, the silk qipao fabric curling into itself, the other tangled in her hair. Calvin has never kissed her like this before, never pressed her body this close to his.

“Calvin . . .” she murmurs.

“Let’s go to your bedroom,” he says.

“My . . . bedroom?”

“Mm-hmm.”

With his hand still on her hip, he yanks her to her feet, and together, they stagger through the kitchen and back down the hall. She hasn’t had a single sip of alcohol, yet the walls seem to tip, and she worries they’ll topple in on her as she reaches the bedroom door. Calvin twists the knob, and they tumble inside.

He is kissing her neck, but she is observing every inch of her room: her knitted pink blanket, her girlish daisy-patterned sheets. The jade figurines lie immobile on top of her dresser, and above them, the painting of the six Chinese boys surrounding the girl in the karate pose, prepared for battle.

Calvin’s lips travel farther down her collarbone. He whirls her around and pushes her onto the bed. Audrey can feel the pink blanket scratching her bare arms.

“Wait,” she says as his body careens onto hers, crushing her breasts.

She can feel Calvin unbuttoning his shirt, his bare skin on the aquamarine qipao Mama sewed for her.

“Wait,” she says again, this time louder. She jabs his shoulder and Calvin winces like he’s been hit by a bullet. He rolls off her body and stumbles to his feet, clutching at her nightstand for balance.

She looks at the sight of them—his half-buttoned shirt and her dress rolled up past her thighs—and immediately feels embarrassed.

“I’m sorry,” she blurts. “I’m really sorry.”

Calvin’s fists clench and he turns away to face the closet—*her* closet, with all her clothes inside, but it seems foreign to her, like when she first moved into this room in September and didn’t know English or anyone. Her boyfriend is muttering something she cannot hear.

“What did you say?” she asks.

“I don’t understand,” he snaps. “We’ve been together for almost four months. You’re home alone with no one to ask where you’re going or what

you're doing. What's the problem?"

"There isn't a problem," Audrey replies hastily, pulling at the qipao fabric so it sinks down past her knees. "I just wasn't . . . I wasn't prepared."

"People have sex all the time, Audrey."

She knows that. She's read magazines and books and heard talk from Beverley and Patty. She thinks about kissing Calvin every day. Sometimes, she thinks about more than that. And Calvin has laid out the facts so plainly—the evening alone, no parents, a near-four-month relationship. How foolish she is. How shameful that she can't want more, can't want it right now.

"I'm so sorry," she says again. "I . . ." She doesn't know how to finish her sentence. Instead, she smooths out the impressions on her pink blanket where their bodies lay moments ago. "I guess I need time."

"How much time?"

"I don't know," Audrey admits.

Calvin turns from the closet to look at her. His shirt is still unbuttoned, his hair disheveled, no longer pomade-perfect like she's used to. His eyes are dark, matching the blue-and-purple-tinged circles underneath, and he looks past her as he speaks.

"It's going to be spring soon, and then we'll be graduating. Who knows what will happen after that," he says, more of a statement than a question.

"Okay," she replies, but she doesn't understand. What does high school graduation have to do with their relationship? Besides, they have the whole summer—that bridge of time between adolescence and adulthood unburdened by grades or applications, and hopefully, the questions presently swirling in Audrey's head.

"I'm a man, Audrey," Calvin continues. "Right now, I'm *your* man. And if we can't, if you're not ready by May, then . . ."

Audrey is at last piecing his words together.

"Then what?"

"Then maybe we're not right for each other."

Tears pool in Audrey's eyes and stream down her face, smearing her makeup and staining her qipao. She hates that she's crying in front of Calvin, in this tiny bedroom that she sleeps in every night. She hates that she will remember this moment when she's lying in her flannel pajamas, trying to dream.

Calvin’s arms pull her into an embrace before she can understand what’s happening. “Hey,” he says, “don’t cry. It’s okay. It’s fine.” When she doesn’t respond, he adds, “Just forget about it. I got carried away, it doesn’t matter.”

Audrey sobs into Calvin’s shirt. She wants to follow his advice and forget this entire night, but she knows she can’t.

“Shh, shh,” Calvin whispers, petting her hair like she’s a baby or a cat, “it really doesn’t matter. Seriously, forget about it.”

Audrey buries her head further into his chest.

Tenderly, he kisses the top of her head. “Let’s go to the living room, all right? We can turn on the TV and watch one of those game shows you like.”

Audrey sniffles, wiping snot off her boyfriend’s shirt pocket. “Okay,” she says, her arms limp around his stomach.

She can feel his body relax at her acquiescence, and she drops her hand down to his, their fingers intertwining as he carts her out of the bedroom and back down the hall. But as her tears dry, Audrey isn’t sure she believes him anymore. She doesn’t believe what happened in her bedroom didn’t matter. She doesn’t believe a night of her favorite game shows will change anything.

Audrey Zheng knows what she has to do: she must have sex with Calvin by May if she wants him to stay, to love her. She’s a liar, and now he is too.

OceanofPDF.com

27
Duanfang

At last, after years of waiting, Duanfang approached the pinnacle of his ambitions: America. The Manchu government decreed that he and several other officials would depart China in secrecy from Qinhuangdao to Shanghai, and then on an American ship to Japan, Europe, and the United States. The travel would be well worth it: the mission was to garner inspiration for the Qing dynasty's constitution. Of course, Duanfang had greater hopes than this. He was known for being gregarious and charming. He could make anyone his friend. After all, that's how he founded China's first kindergarten, how he developed Jinan Academy, and how he wrote articles supporting the revolutionary foot emancipation society against foot binding. He was celebrated. He could charm a dull American man and a rigid Japanese one just the same, even in his qizhuang and with his hair pulled into a queue—the long braid stemming from his half-shaved head, a centuries-old symbol of Manchu power.

On the trip, his charisma did not fail him. He dazzled, despite the language barrier. (He was a man of many delightful facial expressions.) But what you might be most drawn to, what the public never saw, is who he was when he returned to his hotel room, in a foreign country, in a strange land. There, he was quiet. He was methodical. He remembered everything the dull American men said, and he wrote their words down with meticulous precision.

Indeed, he was not here simply for the Qing dynasty's constitution, nor was he here to entertain. He was planning for his future, for his legacy, like

he had since birth. He could admit to himself that this strategy exhausted him, that every evening, it dragged him into a deep slumber he was afraid he would not awaken from.

Still, morning came, and Duanfang emerged from his hotel room, ready to dazzle again.

OceanofPDF.com

28
Dawn Chin

Dawn Chin is wearing borrowed clothes and has objectively never looked hotter—or less like herself, which, to her, is the same thing. The faded bootcut jeans are from Stephanie, the silver clawed belt is from Delia, and the black see-through lace top is a back-of-the-closet find from Caroline, who insisted it would fit despite her muscular crew arms and Dawn's wimpy ones. Dawn runs her hands down the lace swirls that trail across her ribs. Tonight, she, Pen, and all their collective friends are going to a real high school party.

"You look amazing," Pen gushes as she applies mascara to her already spider-long eyelashes. She's wearing a maroon fitted dress that hugs her hips. Dawn stares at Pen's reflection in her dorm room mirror.

"Thanks," she says. She can't tell if Pen means the compliment in a real way, or in the way that her straight friends reassure her she's pretty every time she goads them.

Dawn tears her eyes from Pen's body and kneels on the floor to zip up her heeled leather boots. She found them under her bed earlier this afternoon and remembered that she bought them freshman year in a panic when her mother insisted she needed nice shoes for important events. This is the first time she's worn them, and they crack with stiffness.

"When are your friends coming?" Dawn asks, wincing as she rolls her ankles.

"Oh, they're going to meet us there." Pen turns back to the tabletop vanity mirror she brought from her room and dots more blush on her

cheeks. “They’re coming from the study center.”

Of course they are, Dawn thinks. Everyone is always coming from the study center or emerging from a marathon cram session they had in some damp, dusty corner of Sanborn, as if freedom and fun are rewards rather than givens. She doesn’t have more time to privately gripe because Caroline and Stephanie are bursting through the door.

“All right, gals, we ready to rumble?” Caroline asks, fluffing her hair as she struts into the room. It’s her one night of freedom from crew practice. Tonight, she’s instituted a rule that no one is allowed to talk about homework or grades or summer internships—especially Stephanie.

“Yep,” Dawn says. She scurries to find her phone hidden in her unmade bed.

Pen drops the blush brush in her makeup bag. “All ready,” she confirms, “and just so you know, my friends are going to meet us there. They’re coming from the study—”

“Nuh, uh-uh!” Caroline wags her finger. “No talk about school.”

“Understood.” Pen laughs. She casually loops her elbow through Dawn’s, as if they’ve done this dozens of times before. Their skin touches through the holes in Dawn’s lace shirt.

“Great,” Stephanie says, “because Giselle and Delia are already in the common room, and if we don’t leave now, Ms. Slussy is definitely going to notice the beer Delia smuggled in her bra.”

“She smuggled beer in her *bra*?” Pen repeats. “Impressive.”

“All right, let’s go, let’s go,” Caroline says, and the girls scamper out of the dorm room.

Except for Asbury, all the residence halls are connected to form a rectangular quad. The boys’ dorms are separate from the girls’ dorms, and at ten thirty, the entryways between the residence halls are locked. But the dorm heads don’t realize that rich kids are exceptionally good at picking locks. Delia leads the way to the vestibule and confidently slides her credit card between the door and the frame. She wiggles the knob, and the door separating the wings opens.

“Voilà,” Delia says, bowing. Dawn feels like she’s part of a heist.

Last summer, the elective kids were in one dormitory—the heteronormative separation of boys and girls no longer relevant since there were twenty of them wandering through a ghost town campus. It was easy for Dawn to slip into Fitz’s bedroom.

Now she follows her friends as the hallway bends into the Fishbowl, the cluster of senior rooms sitting farthest from Sanborn's prying dorm heads. Aptly named, the smell distinctly changes from gym sneakers and ramen to tequila and beer. Delia eyes each doorway like she's trying to answer a riddle before settling on one in the center of the Fishbowl. The girls walk in.

"Wow," Dawn hears herself say.

The common room is only eight by ten feet at most, but it's packed with people, girls in similar see-through tops, their hair Dyson-wrapped into loose waves, boys in jersey shorts drifting toward the center like fireflies flocking to artificial light. Someone's playing loud, indiscernible music on a portable speaker, and in the back, the seniors have combined their desks to make an L-shaped bar, filled with punch and beer, and stereotypical red plastic cups—the ones Dawn always sees Fitz tossing back on social media.

Dawn can't believe she has this many classmates. She hardly recognizes any of them.

"Wow," she says to Pen, "this is—"

But then she realizes that Pen's elbow isn't linked with hers anymore. They've only just made it inside and already, she's disappeared into the crowd. In fact, *all* of Dawn's friends have scattered: Delia and Giselle are leaning over the makeshift bar requesting drinks, Stephanie's found her premed friends near the speaker, and someone from the crew team has dragged Caroline away so Dawn can only see slivers of her long blond hair swishing between the bobbing heads.

It seems Delia's chosen the right room in the Fishbowl for everyone—that is, except Dawn. She tries not to feel sorry for herself. She spends so much time holed up in bed, or pretending that she's *not* holed up in bed, that it's reasonable to understand why she's alone at her first party. Still, it hurts. Straightening her shoulders, Dawn pretends her outfit is a costume and attempts to embody her grandmother in the '60s—happy, carefree. Pushing her way through the throng of rich kids, she marches over to the bar, just as Delia and Giselle flit away.

"Dawn!" Pen's arm curls around Dawn's shoulder, her hand pulling Dawn closer to her body as if to shield her from the party's chaos. Pen holds up a can of beer. "I got you a drink." She smiles. "Come on, I want you to meet some of my friends."

"Oh," Dawn replies, blinking as the drink is handed to her and the beer pools in the can's rim. "Well, that's . . ." She tries to think of a clever

response, but Pen can't hear her over the loud music and the talking.

Pen drags Dawn to the far corner, where a bunch of people are playing beer pong.

"Everyone," she says, "meet Dawn. Dawn, meet everyone!"

"Hey," Dawn says, in a voice that she hopes sounds nonchalant.

Pen introduces her friends one by one: her freshman-year roommate, Carla; Mariam, who's in Dawn's English class; Remi, Mariam's boyfriend; and Brooke, who's sporting a Sanborn basketball jersey and gym shorts and seems to be winning this round of pong.

"Heard you guys met in the library," Carla says without looking up from the red cups before her. "That's interesting."

"Yeah." Dawn fake laughs and paws at the back of her ear. "You know, research project . . . needed some books . . . was getting desperate." Is she incapable of making full sentences? What happened to casual and carefree? She clenches her beer. "I have Ms. Codderton for history," she adds like that's helpful to the conversation.

Mariam tucks her box braids behind her ears and taps her chin. "Ms. Codderton, the new APUSH teacher. I have her too, just in a different period, I think. You're talking about that yearlong research project she's making us do?"

"Yeah," Dawn says, relieved that someone knows what she's talking about.

Remi groans. "It's such a pain. I can't believe she's making us do it when we have APs to study for."

"Hey, no talking about school," Pen scolds. Her arm is still around Dawn's shoulder, and she leans into its crook. "It's a rule."

"Whose rule?" asks Brooke as she shoots the Ping-Pong ball into the opposing team's cup. It sails in, the beer triumphantly dribbling over the sides.

"You're too good at this," whines Mariam, as Pen answers, "Dawn's friend's rule. Caroline Foster from the crew team, you know her? Anyway, it's a good rule, and I think we should stick to it."

Remi shrugs. "Fine, whatever. No school talk."

The conversation settles as Remi takes his shot and misses catastrophically. The girls laugh and boo at him—especially Mariam, who boos the loudest before plopping a lip-gloss-stained kiss on his cheek.

Dawn takes a sip of the beer and tries not to wrinkle her nose, the frothy liquid leaving an aftertaste of what can only be described as sewer water on her tongue. It tastes nothing like the beer she and Fitz had over the summer—before August, before that horrible night. He'd gone home one weekend to see his parents and returned with artisan bottles his dad had received on a business trip in Munich. Dawn couldn't believe that Fitz's dad would openly offer him alcohol, and that he'd share it with her: a nobody, a summer fling. She remembers the way his palm sank into her bare thigh as they drank on his dorm room floor, their feet pushed against the mini fridge to cool off in the July heat.

"Do you want to play?" Mariam asks, holding out the plastic ball. "You can take my spot."

"Yeah, she's bad at this anyway," Brooke jokes.

"Oh god, no," Dawn replies, "I've never played before. So I'd definitely be worse than Mariam."

Brooke laughs and wipes her mouth with the front of her basketball jersey. "All the more reason to play. You gotta start somewhere."

Before Dawn can refuse, the girls are pushing her to the folding table, and everyone starts shouting rules to her all at once.

"It's not that hard," Mariam reassures Dawn. She turns to Pen, who seems amused. "I need more alcohol. Come with me?"

"Duh," Pen says, and the two scurry off, leaving Dawn alone with Pen's friends.

Brooke places the ball in Dawn's open palm. "You got this."

Dawn's fingers curl around the ball. She is too aware of their eyes on her. It dawns on her that she wants to impress Pen's friends, wants to make them like her. Maybe then, they'll report back to Pen, tell her how smart and great Dawn is. But why does she care? What is Pen, she reminds herself, but a flirtation, a distraction, a good time?

Dawn shoots, and the ball sails into the cup. Remi cheers, even though he's on the other team.

"Well," Brooke says, "I think you undershot your pong expertise. You're way better than Mariam."

"Beginner's luck," Dawn says dismissively as Remi scoops out the wet Ping-Pong ball and Carla downs the beer inside the cup.

"Have you ever thought about trying out for Sanborn's basketball team?" asks Brooke. "You'd be a natural."

“I think I’m too short.”

“Nah.” Brooke shakes her head. “Height’s oversold.”

“Stop trying to recruit people, Brooke,” Carla admonishes, flicking droplets of beer at her. “Dawn probably has her own life and extracurriculars.”

No, I don’t, Dawn thinks, but aloud, she says, “Busy is my middle name,” which makes her sound like a cheesy kids’ show host. She downs another swig of beer.

“Yeah, we all know,” Remi chirps. “You’re busy at the *library*.” He grins as Carla smacks him in the shoulder.

Dawn almost chokes on the cheap sewer-water beer.

“Please shut up. Or Pen *and* your girlfriend are both gonna kill you,” Carla warns.

“Don’t listen to him,” Brooke says as she pats Dawn’s back. “He’s just a gossip.”

“I am *not* a gossip,” Remi protests. “I’m only saying that Pen is pretty much *ob*—”

Carla smacks him again, and Dawn avoids looking at either of them. Seconds later, Pen and Mariam return and stare suspiciously at the group.

“What’s going on?” asks Pen. She sets her drink down on the corner closest to Dawn.

“Nothing,” Brooke asserts. “Dawn’s pretty good at beer pong. I was trying to recruit her for the basketball team.”

Pen rolls her eyes. “Seriously, Brooke, not that again.”

Dawn stays silent as the group changes subjects to basketball, Brooke’s hypercompetitiveness, and how she once tried to recruit Mariam, but during tryouts, Mariam mistakenly scored a point for the wrong team.

Dawn is only half listening. She is trying to wrap her head around the idea that Pen likes her—and *not* in a friend way. Or maybe Remi is just trying to rile Dawn up. She doesn’t know him. What was he going to say before Carla smacked him? That Pen was obsessed with her? *Obsessed* is such a strong word, a volatile one. It implies an unhealthy stalkerish attraction; it reminds her of the way she clung to Fitz, how many times she’s rewatched his Instagram and Snapchat stories since he broke things off. Pen isn’t pathetic like Dawn. There’s no way.

“I’m going to get another drink,” Dawn says, holding up her half-full beer like it’s empty.

She leaves before Pen can answer. Instead of heading back toward the bar, she tries to scan the room for Caroline, but she can't find her anymore. Maybe she's left for another part of the Fishbowl. She drops her beer can in an overflowing trash bin and heads toward the door. She's feeling a little woozy even though she's had barely anything to drink. She wonders if Fitz is here and then hopes (prays) that he's not. She needs to find a place to hide.

The Fishbowl bathroom is all-gender because Sanborn likes to cosplay as liberal. Dawn swings open the door—it's nearly empty except for a girl touching up her makeup over the far-left sink. She's surprised there aren't people throwing up in here, but then again, it's probably too early for that. She doesn't look at the girl and heads toward the stall farthest away from her.

On the toilet, Dawn stares down at the black-and-white subway tile floors. She imagines they are dizzying when drunk and nauseous, and then she imagines Fitz vomiting on them and Pen cleaning him up and dragging him out like a maid or a mother. Is that obsession—loving someone so much you treat them kindly even when they treat you poorly? Or is that just insanity? In this bathroom, Dawn thinks she's currently going insane. Why did this party affect her so much?

Dawn hears heels click across the tile and then the door open and close—the girl doing her makeup must be leaving. And then she hears a separate pair of shoes enter the bathroom and a voice quietly humming a song she recognizes. The Agoraphobes, that song about helicopters. It floats under the bathroom door and crawls up her skin. Carefully, Dawn flushes the toilet despite not having used it. She unlatches the door and steps out.

Pen is standing in front of the mirror, dabbing a wet paper towel on her maroon dress. Water dribbles down her chest. She looks up and meets Dawn's reflection.

"Oh, hi," Pen says. "I thought you were getting another drink."

"I was planning on it, but then—tiny bladder." Dawn can actually hold her pee for hours; once, she didn't use the bathroom for an entire five-hour car ride from Santa Barbara to San Francisco and her mother said she was going to give herself kidney damage. But Dawn, like her grandma, is a good liar.

"Ah," Pen says, wiping furiously at her dress. She jabs the dripping napkin at a brown stain sitting between her sternum and her stomach.

“Remi spilled his drink all over me. Typical.”

Dawn walks over and leans her elbows on the bathroom counter. “Does he do this often?”

“Oh yeah,” Pen says, sighing, “he’s the clumsiest person I’ve ever met.” She squeezes out the napkin and examines her half-wet dress in the mirror. “Good enough.” She drops the napkin in the trash can. “Anyway, whatever, Mariam likes him so that’s what matters.”

“How long have they been dating?” Dawn asks.

“Since last May. So, about nine months?”

“A full-term baby,” Dawn remarks, and Pen laughs.

“Yeah, a full-term-baby relationship.” She stops in front of the mirror and runs her tongue across her teeth before fluffing up her curls. “Ugh,” she mutters, “frizzy already.”

Dawn wants to tell her that her hair, in fact, looks perfect, but she doesn’t say that. Pen’s maroon dress is riding up her legs, bunching at her upper thighs. An inch higher, and Dawn would be able to see Pen’s underwear. She wonders if it’s silky and lace or if it’s cotton granny underwear and then she wonders why she’s thinking about Pen’s underwear at all.

Pen leans backward on the bathroom counter, her dress brushing against Dawn’s borrowed jeans. “They like you, by the way,” she says. “My friends.”

“Oh, yeah?” Dawn’s voice rises and she coughs and tugs at her hair. “Well, they’re cool. Even Remi. You know, when we were playing beer pong, he was talking about you and—” She stops herself. What is she doing? It’s like she’s suddenly possessed by some melodramatic demon determined to spill all her private thoughts. She needs to pull herself together. She’s acting like she did last summer.

“He was talking about me?” Pen repeats, twisting a curl around her pointer finger. “Why, what did he say?”

“Nothing,” Dawn answers quickly.

“Oh, come on.” Pen nudges Dawn’s elbow on the counter. “You have to tell me everything.”

“Do I?” Dawn says, trying to sound playful.

“Yes,” Pen insists. “Now out with it.”

Dawn can’t think on her feet fast enough to fib, and yet she can’t tell Pen the truth. “He said, well . . . he actually didn’t finish his sentence, but he thinks that—”

“He was teasing you about how much time we spend together, right?” Pen interrupts. She groans. “I knew he was going to do that.”

Dawn stills. “You did?”

“Yeah, well, I *do* talk about you a lot because, you know, you’re obviously hot and funny and nice when you’re not being mean to me, and he’s such a blabbermouth, so . . .” Pen trails off.

Dawn knows she should act casual, play this off flirtatiously, but she can’t seem to look Pen in the eye. She grows silent, staring at the water dripping from the faucet.

“That is what he said, right?” Pen asks, her voice faltering.

Dawn still doesn’t respond. Instead, she glances up at Pen, at her pink lips, the wet stain on her tight dress, her dark eyes, and she pulls Pen in and kisses her. The last time she kissed a girl was in seventh grade when she and her friend decided to “practice” together. This is different. Pen’s fingers brush the side of her face as their kiss deepens. Dawn hears herself groan into Pen’s mouth, and then, embarrassed, she pulls away. She spots her reflection out of the corner of her eye—she’s flushed and messy, her hands scattered across Pen’s body. She pulls down Caroline’s lace shirt.

“You smell like beer,” she mutters, and Pen snorts.

“Great observation, Sherlock,” she says before kissing Dawn again, flipping her so that her back is pushed up against the counter.

Pen’s tongue is in Dawn’s mouth when the door thwacks open and someone yelps. Dawn shoves Pen to the side as the girls look toward the entryway. One of the senior boys is standing between them. He’s wearing an oversize Sanborn football jersey, and he’s grinning.

“Sorry, ladies,” he says, “don’t let me interrupt.”

Pen rolls her eyes and grabs Dawn’s hand, steering her past the guy and out of the bathroom. “Pee in peace!” she shouts as the door shuts and the girls giggle and run down the hallway.

Dawn is having an out-of-body experience, like she really is wearing a costume and playing a character. Maybe she’s in one of those early 2000s romantic comedies Caroline is always trying to get her to watch. They reenter the Fishbowl, and weave through the crowd. Pen is still holding her hand, and she’s talking to someone; Dawn isn’t sure if it’s one of Pen’s friends or hers, or someone else entirely.

For the first time, she feels drunk: not on cocktails or cheap beer, but on the burning memory of Pen’s kisses and words. *You’re hot and funny and*

nice. She touches her fingers to her lips and holds them there for longer than she should.

OceanofPDF.com

29
Audrey Zheng

By mid-March, New York's winter frost has thawed, replaced by flower buds, and a soft chill teasing the promise of spring. The seasons are changing once again, but Audrey Zheng is at a standstill. She feels like she is watching the pages of her life flip from chapter to chapter, and she can't read them fast enough. All she does know is that every day after school, Calvin is there to pick her up, his presence a gargantuan shadow that looms over Beecher's hallway as he smiles at her with those white teeth and that sharp knife of a jawline. His grasp leaves red marks on her wrists when she leaves for tutoring—or what Calvin thinks is the children's chess club.

Audrey's grades have vastly improved, but she doesn't relish them, not when her boyfriend's roughly kissing her in the hall, on the subway, at the park, in the movie theater, on her stoop in the night, until she tells him *please, okay that's fine, thank you,* and he sighs and lumbers away, silently reminding them both of that night in her bedroom, the memory twisting in her gut.

She'd talk to Beverley or Patty about it, but she wouldn't know where to begin, and she wouldn't want to ruin anything. She knows how they—as well as Auntie Fan, Uncle Wen, and her parents—love Calvin. Besides, what can she say? What does she have to complain about? On all accounts, her life is perfect, or if not perfect, then at least good.

On Monday, after hurrying around the corner of Seventy-Third and Madison and watching Calvin fade into the park on his walk home, Audrey loops her backpack straps around her shoulders and treks to the Yorkville

Library. She wipes at her nose with a rumpled tissue, the skin around her nostrils rubbed raw since last Friday, when she caught a cold and Auntie Fan made her drink ginger tea and eat porridge for both breakfast and dinner. In their most recent letter, her parents wrote that Liwei had a cold too and stayed home from school for a few days. Their letters always arrive in New York a month after they're sent—given the distance they have to travel—so by the time Audrey reads her parents' note, Liwei's illness is long over. Still, she likes to think that their shared colds tether them together, a parasympathetic response from one sibling to another across continents. She's been thinking a lot about Taipei lately. Sometimes, it feels so visceral, like she's at this moment squeezing her brother's hand, her sandals sinking into the grass as she rolls the hard candy from the sugarcane peddler between her teeth. But mostly, it feels like a hazy dream, or a folktale she's read, rather than a real place. She's starting to forget the sounds of Mama's and Baba's voices.

At the Polish grocery store across from the library, Audrey buys cheese strings shrink-wrapped in a film of plastic. She rips open the package and gnaws on them as she approaches Samuel's table. He's finishing up with one of the middle school kids who end school at two.

"I'll see you next week," he tells the boy, whose glasses continuously slide down his nose as he nods. Audrey saw Samuel's tutee last Monday and remembers the facts he rattled off: his name is Marcus, he lives in Chinatown with his family, his mother knows Samuel from when he used to attend First Chinese Fellowship, and he's going to be thirteen in August.

"Very good," Audrey had said.

But today, she is wondering how Samuel tutors middle school children in the first place.

"How do you have time to tutor Marcus?" she asks as soon as the boy leaves and she drops her backpack on the floor.

"Well, hello to you too," Samuel replies. He folds his arms across his usual worn button-down.

"Hi," Audrey says, scooting into the booth. "I just don't understand it. Don't all high schools end around three? And don't you go to school in Chinatown? How do you get all the way to the Upper East Side, tutor him, tutor *me*, and tutor whoever? Do you have a pass from school or something because you're so helpful?"

"I'm glad you think I'm helpful."

“Stop avoiding my questions.”

“But you have so many of them. I don’t know where to start.”

He’s smiling at her with this grin that makes her want to throw her history textbook in his face. It reminds her of the first night they met in Calvin’s kitchen, when she asked why he didn’t attend church anymore. She remembers the way he blinked at her like she was an alien. *We are from the same country*, she wants to remind him. *We come from the same place. We have the same past.*

Audrey aggressively chews the end of her cheese string. “My questions are very simple. And you are being very annoying.” She wipes at her nose. “Also, I have a cold, so if you don’t tell me, I’ll cough in your face and get you sick.”

Her tutor narrows his eyes. “Resorting to threats, I see.”

“Calvin, stop.”

“Calvin?”

Audrey’s cheeks redden and she sinks into her seat. “Sorry,” she grumbles, “I meant Samuel.”

Her tutor rolls up his sleeves and rests his hands on the table. She’s always liked his hands—his long, bony fingers and stubby nails, picked at the cuticles, the skin recurrently puckered with dried blood. She thinks his hands might tell her more about him than his words.

“I’ll explain how I’m able to tutor Marcus, and any other middle schoolers, if you explain why you’re in such a bad mood,” Samuel says.

“I’m not in a bad mood,” Audrey retorts, though she knows he sees right through her. He’s only been tutoring her for a month, yet he seems to recognize every flicker of emotion that crosses her face. It scares her, and it frustrates her that she can’t read him in the same way. “Fine,” she relents, “I’ll tell you. But you first.”

“All right,” Samuel agrees, picking at a hangnail on his thumb, “you know how I want to be an architect one day, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, my last period of the day is an architecture elective. I get to go out and write analyses about famous New York buildings. But instead, I come here, and I tutor.”

Audrey’s forehead wrinkles. “Why would you do that? Isn’t this elective important for the job you want?”

“I can do my elective on the weekend.” Samuel shrugs. “And I need the money.”

More questions ping through Audrey’s head but she wrestles them down. Instead, she settles on: “So you have your elective every day, and this is what you do during it?”

“Yes,” Samuel confirms. He rips the hangnail from his thumb and brushes the loose skin onto the seat cushion, blood beading at the surface.

“Okay. Fine.” Audrey points at his finger. “And why are you always doing that?”

Samuel shakes his head. “I believe, Miss Audrey Zheng, you have some questions to answer first.”

She’d hoped he’d forget, but of course, he’s Samuel. He wouldn’t.

“It’s Calvin,” she admits, staring down at the shadowed space between the desk and her legs. “Or maybe it’s me.”

“What happened?”

“He, well, he . . . he wants . . . and I can’t . . .” A lump stiffens in her throat, and she has to clench her skirt pleats to avoid crying. Why can’t she get her words out? Why is it so difficult to talk about her boyfriend?

“Hey,” Samuel whispers. His hand reaches across the table, fingers curled over the ledge. “Whatever it is, I’m here to help.”

Audrey shakes her head. “He wants things I can’t deliver. I’m not ready, and I don’t know why. And he says it’s fine, but I know it’s not. Sometimes, he can be so rough, and it’s hard to . . . I just don’t know what to do.”

She’s not sure if she’s making any sense, but when she looks up at Samuel, his face hardens, and she knows he understands.

“Audrey,” he says, “no one should be forcing you to do things you’re not ready for.”

“He’s not forcing me. He’s only asking.”

“He’s punishing you for not doing what he wants. That’s not asking.”

“Punishing is a—”

Samuel leans forward. “Audrey,” he says again, “I’ve seen this kind of behavior from Calvin before. You can’t even tell him about our tutoring sessions.”

“Well, only because—”

“I don’t think it’s okay. In fact, I think you should end things.”

The room feels fuzzy and distant like Audrey is looking at it through cloudy binoculars. She flexes her hands across her skirt and repeats

Samuel's words to herself. *I think you should end things.* Moments ago, they were talking about architecture electives, and now he's telling her to break up with her boyfriend. She reminds herself of their relationship: tutor and student. The boy who knows everything, who passes judgment so confidently, and the girl who knows nothing, who has stumbled into a romance that he finds pitiable.

If Calvin were here—the boy who supposedly knows her best—she knows what he'd say. *Samuel is bad news. He's dangerous.*

"I don't want to end things," Audrey says, her own voice hardening, "and Calvin isn't punishing me. It's just something we're working through. As a couple."

Samuel's nose wrinkles. "He's not treating you right. That's not something you're working through together; that's his own problem. You can't fix that."

"What do you know?" Audrey sputters, sweat beginning to rim the top of her forehead. "You think you're perfect, but Calvin has said things about you too."

"What are you talking about?"

"I was supposed to stay away from you. You've . . . you've done bad things."

"Really," Samuel says. He retracts his arm from the table. "You think that's true? What's so bad that I've done? Tutor you for some spare change? Keep your secrets? Tell me, Audrey, what I'm doing here that's so terrible."

"That's not what I meant."

"Well, what do you mean, then?"

"I don't know!" Audrey shouts. "No one tells me anything."

People are looking at them now—the children and their nannies kneeling on the play rug, the librarian at the desk in her wool cardigan, pressing a pointed finger to her lips. Audrey rips a tissue from her blazer pocket and viciously rubs at her nose.

"No one ever tells me anything," she quietly repeats as she crumples the tissue in her fist, "not you, not Calvin. Everyone just expects me to trust them, to do what they say."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You tell me to break up with Calvin because he's terrible for me, but he tells me that *you're* terrible. So which is it? What happened between the two of you?"

“Nothing happened, Audrey,” Samuel mutters, but his hands are folded in his lap, his head turned toward the booth wall.

“You’re lying.”

“I’m—”

“You are. You’re both liars.”

She stands up, zipping her backpack and tossing it over her shoulder. She is sick of being left in the dark, of letting others decide how she thinks, and what she should want.

“I have to go.”

“Audrey . . .” Samuel begins.

Audrey sniffles, her backpack straps digging into her shoulders. “Yes?”

Her tutor blinks at her with an expression she can’t name. “Nothing. If you want to leave, I’m not going to stop you.”

She turns away from Samuel and stomps out of the building, avoiding the librarian’s glares and the children’s curious looks. Mama and Baba would chastise her for her behavior, but she doesn’t care what they think; the memory of her hard candy afternoons in Taipei have soured on her bitter American tongue.

OceanofPDF.com

30
Dawn Chin

Dawn can't stop thinking about Pen. And when she's not thinking about her, she's kissing her—in Hamilton Hall before social studies, on Pen's shag rug in Asbury after dinner, when they're half watching some bad TV show on Pen's computer and Pen ends up kicking the screen with her foot so the laptop somersaults to the other side of the bed. It's like she has a disease. Dawn is still thinking about Pen as she reheats leftover dining hall pizza in the common room microwave.

"You're having pizza at this hour?" Caroline calls out from the lumpy three-seater couch—a hand-me-down from Stephanie's older sister. It's nine a.m., but Caroline's already worked out and is now typing away on her laptop in a matching powder-blue loungewear set.

"Pizza for breakfast is not that wild, Caroline," Dawn quips. The microwave beeps and Dawn yanks open the door, steam blowing into the common room.

"I mean, at least you're eating."

"What?"

"For a while, you weren't eating breakfast at all."

Dawn doesn't answer. She hadn't realized that Caroline was observing her eating habits when she was stuck in bed all January (and part of February). She hates that Caroline saw her like that—she thought she'd hidden her gloominess well.

Dawn hot-potatoes the paper plate in her hands before grabbing napkins from the makeshift kitchen area the girls created earlier this school year.

She plops down on the couch next to Caroline and makes a show of folding the pizza into a sandwich and taking a giant bite.

"Mmm," she says, "yummy."

Caroline ignores her. Her email pings on her laptop and she gasps. "Ack, it's official!" She spins the laptop over to Dawn. The subject header reads *Congratulations! The Amsterdam Coxing Leadership Program Welcomes You.* "I'm going to Holland!"

"That's amazing," Dawn says between bites. "The Dutch don't know what they have coming."

Caroline throws her head over the back couch cushion. "There's only ten of us in the whole program. I bet the other girls are gonna be *really* good." She beams and puts her laptop on the coffee table. Then she asks Dawn the dreaded question: "So what are your plans for the summer?"

Dawn gnaws at the crust and wipes tomato sauce from her chin. "No plans," she says with her mouth full. "Aren't you supposed to tell me what to do with my life, mommy dearest?"

Caroline jabs her arm. "You're so annoying." She rolls an elastic off her wrist and starts pulling her hair into a ponytail. "I know someone who would *love* to spend the whole summer with you, though."

"Who?" Dawn asks, blinking innocently.

Caroline snorts. "I don't know, the girl you keep making out with all the time."

"I don't make out with her *all* the time."

"Our friends would beg to differ."

"We're just hanging out," Dawn says coolly, wiping pizza crumbs on her jeans. "It's no big deal."

She nods as if she's convincing herself of what she's saying. It's not like she and Pen have defined their relationship. Nor does she want to—she likes it this way: casual, unemotional, apart but together. In a deeply perverse way, if her parents acknowledged or accepted her queerness, she thinks they'd be proud of her.

"I'm so jealous of you," Caroline groans. "First Fitz. Now Pen. Everyone is always in love with you."

Dawn flinches. At once, she is flooded with the memory of the rosebushes, the scratches that faded into scars, Fitz's heavy body over hers. That was not love, and this isn't either.

“Download a dating app,” Dawn says curtly, standing up and snatching her paper plate from the coffee table. She dumps it in the trash can, her back to Caroline. “I’ll see you later.” She nudges her head at the door. “Class.”

Seven hours later, Dawn finishes her last boring class of the day and walks over to Elsie’s, a kitschy coffee shop down the road from Sanborn. All the upperclassmen like to go on dates there, and when Dawn walks in, she remembers why: The inside is covered in cozy votive candles and filled with vintage knickknacks that line the crosshatched windows. At the counter sits an array of pastries, and behind them is a chalkboard menu with names of different coffees and teas. Dawn breathes in the smell of chocolate and sugar. Pen texts, *Be there soon!* and Dawn hearts the message and shoves her phone into her back pocket.

She only agreed to come here because Pen said she *needed* organic loose-leaf tea. Dawn will make fun of her for that later. She remembers Caroline’s earlier *everyone is always in love with you* and marches up to the counter, ordering herself a coffee and a chocolate chip cookie and sitting at a booth alone.

Instead of spending so much time with Pen, she should be calling her grandmother and arranging another interview. Admittedly, she’s been avoiding Nai Nai since New Year’s, but it’s the end of February, and she has to start writing her paper. She knows the onus is on her, but it’s irritating that her grandma hasn’t once called or emailed or even written a letter to ask how her only granddaughter is doing. Can’t she at least pretend to care?

“Dawn, hey!” Pen waves from across the café, and Dawn is a little embarrassed that she’s being so loud in front of all the would-be couples and study groups.

Dawn half smiles as Pen pulls out the seat across from her and drops her backpack on the floor. She leans across the table and kisses Dawn.

“I missed you,” Pen says, unzipping her coat.

“I just saw you yesterday.”

“Still.”

Dawn juts her head at the pastry counter. “Hurry,” she says, “I’m pretty sure there’s only one bran muffin left.”

“Yikes, who’s my copycat?” Pen squeals, before jumping out of her seat and jogging to the barista.

She returns moments later with her tea and muffin safely in hand, and they immediately launch into conversation. They talk about Pen's hot astronomy teacher, Remi and Mariam's date in New York City, Caroline getting into the Amsterdam coxswain program, and Dawn receiving an *excellent!* on her history outline.

"I hear for Ms. Codderton that's, like, a big deal," Pen says as she sips her tea.

Dawn wrinkles her nose. "How would you know?"

"I just know," Pen answers simply.

The way she says that so assertively makes Dawn uncomfortable. And then she realizes why—it's the same tone Fitz used when he told her about a book he was reading or an album he was listening to, as if he were the author or the singer or the music producer—he the authority and she the listener.

"Wow," Pen says, cocking her head at the café's beige floral walls, "the last time I came here was over a year ago."

"Oh?" Dawn replies absentmindedly.

"Yeah, Fitz and I used to go here all the time. He was really into mocha lattes. Was he still into them with you?"

Dawn pinches the inside of her wrist and stares down at her half-eaten cookie. "I don't know."

"Yeah, you probably weren't paying close attention to his coffee habits." Pen laughs but it sounds forced. "Oh gosh, one time we were here and . . ." She bites her lip and glances at Dawn, their twin brown eyes meeting across the table. "Well, it was toward the end of our relationship, and I think he was just so over me. Of course, the more I noticed, the more I wanted to cling to him, you know? So, we were in that booth over there"—she points to a maroon pleather booth in the corner by the bathroom—"and halfway through our conversation, I blurted out that I loved him."

At this, Dawn sits up. "You what?"

"Yeah, I *know*. Naturally, he pretended not to hear me." Pen continues to gnaw on her lower lip, ripping the loose skin. "I was so upset then, but I actually think it was a good life lesson." She sighs. "You can't make someone love you who doesn't. And you can't trap people in relationships they don't want to be in. So, I'm not going to do that with you or anyone. Okay?"

Dawn blinks. What is Pen talking about? They're not even in a relationship. And now all she can think about is entrapment. Was Fitz trapping her under those rosebushes that August night? Was that his plan all along?

Dawn stands abruptly, her stomach knocking into the table. She snatches her Patagonia and loops it over her arm.

"It's getting kind of hot in here," she says, fanning her face. "Maybe they cranked the heaters too high. Could we go somewhere else?"

"Huh?" Pen says. "You're hot?"

"Yeah," Dawn answers. She forces a grin and tries to return to their familiar flirtatious dance—the one she's comfortable with, the one that's safe. "We could cool off in your room. Watch a movie . . . or something?" She wiggles her eyebrows suggestively.

At once, Pen's mouth twists into a smirk. "Wow, you're sooo horny for me. All right, come on."

She gets up and grabs her leftover muffin and tea. Dawn is already hurrying out the door, past the barista and the freshmen on a first date (it's not going well). *Why is everyone so fixated on love today?* she thinks, her forced grin fading as she zips up her Patagonia. No one is in love with Dawn. And they never will be—she can be sure of that.

OceanofPDF.com

31
Audrey Zheng

Like most people who just publicly fought with their secret tutor (and sometimes friend), Audrey spends her mornings and nights consumed with fictitious comebacks. In the shower before school on Monday, she imagines Samuel standing across from her with his accusations about Calvin and hypocritical refusal to tell her anything about himself, and she says the exact perfect thing to get him to open up and trust her. She wrings out her damp hair, and spouts arguments with an English fluency and vocabulary fit for her future job as a librarian, stunning the socks off Samuel whatever-his-last-name-is. Audrey whips back her hair, the water spraying the bathroom mirror. He tells her nothing.

On the subway to Beecher, her hair dry and twisted into a businesslike bun, Audrey tunes out Patty's long story, replacing her friend's face with Samuel's frigid stare.

Beverley jabs Audrey, hard. "Audrey!" she scolds. "Did you hear anything Patty just said?"

Audrey clutches her arm, stinging with pain. "No," she says, "I'm sorry. Tell me again?"

Patty sighs. "I got into Vassar."

"Oh my gosh, Patty!" Audrey jerks Patty into a hug, their bodies tilting into the subway pole. "That's amazing, congratulations!" She'd completely forgotten that college acceptances were starting to trickle in. She hasn't heard anything yet from the ones she's applied to.

“Thanks,” Patty says, “though it’s a women’s college and I don’t know if I need to be around *just* women for the next four years.”

“Please,” Beverley interjects, “most colleges we can go to are women-only, anyway. You know that. Besides, you’ll be too busy taking over the world to think about boys.”

“Patricia Gao, Esquire. Or President,” Audrey daydreams.

Patty disentangles her limbs from Audrey’s embrace. “Lawyer and president are very different careers.”

“The world is your oyster,” Audrey insists. She learned that phrase from Samuel, who made her read its origin, Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as an exercise to elevate her reading comprehension. Audrey pinches a pleat in her skirt. She is angry, but she misses him. At the very least, he is a good tutor.

Audrey glances back at Patty, who seems forlorn despite her good news. She tries to piece together what Patty was rambling on about minutes earlier and discerns that she was excitedly telling the story of receiving her first college acceptance letter, pulling the large envelope out of the mailbox. Audrey’s made her moment anticlimactic. She’s ruined it.

They depart the subway and emerge on Sixty-Eighth and Lexington, Patty and Beverley a few feet ahead, their elbows linked as Beverley tells Patty that she’s going to the library later to look up information about Vassar. That’s what Audrey should be doing too. She should go to the flower shop a few blocks away during her lunch period and buy Patty a bouquet of pink tulips. Then she remembers she’s due to have lunch with Calvin on the bleachers, and her stomach drops.

By the time the girls reach Beecher’s front doors, Audrey realizes that to salvage her friendships with the people who are kindest to her—who welcomed her from the instant Audrey walked into Auntie Fan’s apartment—she’s got to get to the bottom of this, of whatever Samuel isn’t telling her, so she can focus. She deserves the truth, doesn’t she?

When the bell rings, Audrey jolts from her seat and scoots out the door, almost bypassing Calvin in the hallway. He snatches her wrist and tugs her back to him, as if his eyes are magnetized to her sweater-vest.

“Really want to get those boys to chess practice, don’t you?” Calvin says, and Audrey ignores his sarcasm.

“Sorry,” she replies, placating him with a kiss, “don’t want to be late. Bobby is preparing for his first chess competition in New Jersey next weekend.” The competition part is true—Uncle Wen told her as much over dinner, bragging and ruffling his middle son’s hair as Edwin stabbed his dumpling with a wooden chopstick.

“He’s five. What is it, a competition for babies?”

“He’s seven, actually,” Audrey corrects him, “and who knows. Might be his ticket to college.”

“College,” Calvin repeats dully. “Of course.”

Audrey kisses her boyfriend’s cheek again. “I’ll call you tonight. We can make plans for Saturday, okay?”

“Fine.”

At last, Calvin lets go of Audrey’s wrist, and she hurries away. She doesn’t stop to make sure he’s walking home on his regular route through the park—today, she’s too preoccupied to focus on Calvin. Her mind is filled with Samuel.

At the library, Audrey stays hidden in the shadows, careful to tiptoe as she slinks behind an industrial brick beam, and then into the farthest corner booth diagonal from Samuel and his tutee. She watches him lean over the assignment, explaining something to the pigtailed middle school girl across from him. The girl nods, and the two laugh at likely another one of Samuel’s bad yet memorable grammar jokes. Audrey catches herself smiling.

When the girl leaves, Samuel lingers at the table. It should be her replacing the middle school girl, sliding into the booth across from Samuel, her elbows on the table as he asks: *What’s today’s news?* She wonders how long he will wait for her, if he will wait at all given their fight last week. The clock ticks by—five, ten minutes—and briefly, Audrey considers going up to him. But no, she’s here for a different reason. And she won’t solve her problems by talking to Samuel. She’s learned that well enough.

Eventually, Samuel zips up his backpack and shifts out of the booth. He walks toward the exit and Audrey’s heart thrums. This is her chance. When he swings open the library door, Audrey counts to fifteen before following him. She’s sure he’ll hear her footsteps several paces away as he walks down the sidewalk. He strides down the subway stairs, and Audrey stumbles at the top. On the platform, Samuel looks to his right and left, but still, he doesn’t notice her, a book from class concealing her face. The 6

train lurches as it screeches to a stop, its doors opening. Audrey squeezes her body between the suited businessmen, hiding behind their expensive jackets and gold-latched briefcases.

The train stops at Fifty-First, Grand Central Terminal, Park Avenue, East Twenty-Eighth, but Samuel does not get off, his eyes trained straight ahead, purportedly transfixed on an advertisement for men's shaving cream. Audrey wonders if he's particularly interested in men's shaving cream or if there's something he's looking at that she cannot see. As the train approaches Canal Street, Samuel abruptly stands. Audrey fights the urge to immediately rise to her feet as well. This is *her* stop, her usual route home after school. Samuel did say he lived on the border between Chinatown and the Lower East Side with all his roommates. Perhaps he's simply heading home, and then what will she do? Climb up his fire escape, sneak into his bedroom, rummage through his things?

As she continues to traipse after Samuel out of the subway and down the long avenues, she begins to think this is a useless mission. She thought by following Samuel, she'd learn his secrets, his reason for disliking Calvin and for keeping things from her. But now she recognizes how foolish she is. She should turn around and walk home. She should do her homework and call her boyfriend.

Samuel ducks into an alleyway and pauses at the entrance of a brick apartment building. Though she's lived in Chinatown for months, Audrey's never been on this street near the Civic Center, where the crowds are sparse and the buildings seem bigger, the area bare and apocalyptic. She waits for him to unlock the front door and walk inside. Instead, Samuel takes two steps past the apartment entrance and walks into a Chinese restaurant, its neon sign half blinking, hanging lifelessly from its faded facade.

Other than Calvin, her friends rarely have money to eat at restaurants, especially at this early hour between lunch and dinner, when eating seems self-indulgent. Peeking through the window, Audrey spots a smattering of mostly empty tables and a few workers looking bored at the counter. Samuel walks past the rows of tables, and Audrey knows he'll spot her if she waltzes in behind him. Steps lead down to the restaurant's basement entrance, where Audrey assumes the workers come out to take their smoke breaks. She hastens down to the landing, flattening her back against the railing. Here, she is sure he won't see her.

The sliver of glass above the basement door is clouded with dust and city grime. Audrey watches the workers' blurry shadows pace back and forth between the sink and the steamer. She's not sure what she's looking for, especially since Samuel is inside the restaurant, eating. Against her better judgment, she pictures the two of them together, gossiping about Albert over a plate of garlic bok choy. It's too easy to imagine twirling an oily peanut noodle around her chopstick, slurping between bouts of laughter as they eat under the warm lamplight.

"Samuel!" a voice calls, and Audrey snaps her head to attention, worried he's caught her. But no, the voice is coming from the other side of the basement door.

And there he is: Samuel in a stained green apron, his sleeves rolled up to his biceps, his loafers traded out for tattered sneakers. He's side-hugging another man in an apron.

"You're early," the other man says, his voice dampened through the glass.

"Gotta please the boss," Samuel replies.

The pair turn toward the sink, and to the pile of dirty dishes stacked high in the basin.

It takes Audrey several seconds to understand. Samuel is not eating here in the middle of the afternoon. Samuel *works* here.

Audrey leans closer to the door, her side pushed against the ragged frame. She listens to the muffled voices rising above the rushing sink water.

". . . and yesterday during lunch rush . . ."

"Sorry I missed it . . ."

". . . your next shift . . ."

". . . tomorrow, I'll be here from nine to three . . ."

Audrey recognizes the last voice as Samuel's. She lifts her head up and watches his mouth move in the foggy glass, his rubber-gloved hands dunked in soapy water. Tomorrow, he'll be at this restaurant from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon. Tomorrow is Tuesday. It doesn't make any sense. He has *school* tomorrow. They all do. He can't be in two places at once.

Goose bumps run up Audrey's arms. It dawns on her that she's achieved her goal—she's learned something: Samuel has been lying to her this entire time. Perhaps he doesn't go to school at all. Who is he, really, the boy with no last name, the loner at the party, her mysterious tutor, her transient

friend? Audrey touches her forehead to the glass. She can't fathom the potential truth: Calvin was right—Samuel *is* dangerous.

Slowly, still facing the basement door, Audrey walks back up the steps, her fingers coiled around the railing. She bumps into someone behind her and almost trips forward, catching herself, her wrist twisted backward.

"I'm sorry," she says, embarrassed that someone has caught here standing here, "I'm leaving to—"

She turns around and the man looming over her comes into view.

"What," Calvin Chin says, his hands stuffed inside his blazer pockets, "are you doing here?"

"What, um—what are *you* doing here?" Audrey stammers, wobbling in her Mary Janes. She returns to the landing and watches her boyfriend's face harden under the dim afternoon light. His slicked hair has fallen from its usual coif, strewn pieces draped over his forehead and hitting his eyes.

"What do you think, Audrey?" Calvin points to the street. "You've been acting weird for weeks—months, in fact. Trying to get away from me as fast as you can. I mean, you can't look at me when you talk about chess. So, I wanted to know what you were really doing every week."

"You were following me," Audrey accuses him.

"And *you* seem to be following Samuel, yes? You're not one to talk." Calvin's speech sprays spittle across the steps, hitting her cheek. She wipes at her skin with the back of her sleeve.

He's right, she knows, and yet she's furious. She doesn't owe Calvin anything.

The basement door bursts open, grazing Audrey's back, and Samuel steps out in his apron, his rubber gloves dripping with water.

"Samuel," Audrey says, the two of them inches apart on the basement landing.

"Audrey," Samuel answers, "and Calvin. Quite a party we have here."

"I can explain. I—"

"No, you're going to disturb the staff. I could hear you through the door. Come on."

Samuel pummels past Audrey and Calvin until he is on the sidewalk and they are looking up at him. He nudges his head to the corner, and they follow him around the restaurant to the back gate.

"What are you going to do, kill us here to keep your secrets?" Calvin jokes.

“Please,” Samuel snaps, “shut up.”

Audrey has never seen Samuel this angry. She trembles as he unlatches the gate, and they walk into the garbage dump, where the restaurant’s plastic bags are stacked high against the wall. Flies circle the trash and Audrey tastes the stench of rotting egg and meat on her tongue. The trio stands there in a triangle, and she is once again reminded of the painting above her bedroom dresser—the girl in the karate pose, surrounded by the six Chinese boys.

“Samuel, I’m so sorry,” blurts Audrey. “I . . . I didn’t mean to come to your work.”

“What *did* you mean to do?” Samuel rips off his gloves, stuffing them into his apron pocket. They dangle like strung-up sausages.

“Yeah, I’d like to know the same,” mutters Calvin.

Audrey digs her shoe into the gravel. “I . . . I don’t know.”

It’s as if she is fourteen again, caught under her parents’ thumb back home in Taipei. That summer, they put her in charge of watching Liwei while they were at work. She and her brother were out playing in the yard, tumbling through the weeds and weaving through their neighbors’ patios, when he tripped on a loose cobblestone and twisted his ankle. She remembers his sharp cry, her panic as she dug through the cabinets to find gauze and medicine. She recalls her parents’ distinctly terrible faces when they returned home. She had disappointed them. She had let them down.

But Calvin and Samuel are not her parents, and this is not a simple mistake.

“I’m sorry,” she says again, “I didn’t mean to intrude. I am just tired of the both of you keeping secrets from me. You clearly hate each other. Aren’t I right?”

“Why does it matter if we hate each other?” Calvin snipes. “I’m your boyfriend, and I told you he’s not good for you to be around.”

“I think you’ve got it backwards,” Samuel says.

“No one gets to decide who is good for me except for me,” Audrey interrupts. “And maybe my parents.” She crosses her arms, feeling suddenly more in control. “Tell me why you hate each other. Tell me what’s going on.”

Calvin shakes his head. “You think you can do whatever you want, don’t you, Audrey? Date me, follow him around. I can tell you’ve been seeing each other behind my back.”

“We’re not seeing anything. He’s *tutoring* me. I need help in school.”

“I told you not to—”

“I don’t have—”

“God, the both of you, honestly, stop.” Samuel slaps his hands against his apron just as a car passes on the empty street ahead of them, its silhouette crossing his face and slicing through the tip of his nose. “You want to know what’s going on, Audrey? I’m here illegally. I was working on a cargo ship from China, I got off the cargo ship, I didn’t get back on. I’m nineteen; I don’t go to school. I work here because they need workers they can pay almost nothing, and I need a job. There, are you satisfied?”

Audrey reels backward, stunned, and the triangle of bodies fractures. She did not know what she expected, but it wasn’t this. Samuel does not have papers or citizenship or a student visa. He has lied to her—about everything. He is not like her or any of her friends. She had assumed they all had the same past, the same present, but she was wrong.

Over supper some nights, when the boys are too busy shoveling food into their mouths to speak, Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen talk about people like Samuel. A few of the women at the garment factory Auntie Fan used to work at are in America illegally. She doesn’t speak to them. *They should come back the right way*, she often says, and Audrey nods absentmindedly, wishing she could be like the children, young enough to avoid listening or having an opinion. Now she cannot understand.

“Why?” she asks him. “Why are you here . . . this way?”

Samuel balls the tips of the gloves in his hands, and they swell like they might pop. “I can’t explain it to you, Audrey. If you don’t . . . Well, I can’t.” Releasing the gloves and adjusting his apron straps, he looks out beyond the fence toward the street. “I ask that you don’t tell anyone. Not Patty or Beverley, or any of the people from school.”

Audrey swallows. “Yes,” she says, not knowing what else to say, “all right.”

“I’ve been out here long enough. I have to go. We have customers.”

She knows they don’t, but she watches Samuel walk out anyway. The gate shudders and clangs until only she and Calvin remain, standing in the trash dump. She notices he has been strangely silent since Samuel’s confession and is tapping the tip of his leather loafer as if he has other things to do. *Of course*, Audrey realizes—he knew this about Samuel already. This is why he thinks Samuel is dangerous. It’s as if Audrey is

putting together a puzzle, yet all the pieces seem to shift and multiply the moment she touches them. She moves toward the gate, yearning to return to the comfort of home and her girlish bedroom, where the covers are inviting and familiar. She knows Calvin will reach for her arm again, just as he always does, and this time, when it snaps forward, Audrey jerks to the side, his nails scratching her wrist.

"Audrey," he calls after her, "let's talk about this."

She's surprised by the sudden gentleness in his voice, and as she approaches the sidewalk, she finds herself stopping. He is her boyfriend after all, and she did lie to him, despite her best intentions. Calvin maneuvers around her on the street, opening the restaurant door.

"Let's go inside," he says, "and talk."

"In *there*?"

"Samuel needs the service, doesn't he?"

He walks through the door, and Audrey instinctively follows him. They sit down at a cramped table by the front window, and Calvin waves over a waiter, a scrawny boy who can't be more than sixteen. Audrey wonders if he is here illegally too—if everyone at this restaurant jumped off a cargo ship to work at a threadbare Chinese restaurant. Isn't it funny, she thinks, how you can escape home only to end up at its replica?

She does not hear what Calvin orders or notice the tea poured in porcelain cups, their bottoms staining the paper place mats. She glances at the zodiac animal illustrations drawn in a circle on her place mat and remembers that it is the year of the horse—the year of unbridled freedom.

"So, let's review the facts." Calvin sips his tea. "You lied to me. You secretly met up with Samuel when I told you not to. And of course, now you can see why I warned you. But you had to push him. And now we both know his secret. Congratulations."

Audrey stares at the trail of steam rising from the cup. "I thought we were going to talk."

"We *are* talking. I'm talking about how you're going to be a better girlfriend."

She thinks she prefers when Calvin was yelling, his unnervingly calm demeanor and low voice frightening her.

"Are you going to tell the police about Samuel? Since you hate him so much?"

Calvin leans forward. "Why do you care? You should hate him as well."

Audrey presses her finger into the tea stain, ripping a hole in the place mat. “You won’t, though,” she says, and she knows she’s right. It’s clear to her that Calvin has known about Samuel for a while now, perhaps for years. He would have ratted him out long ago if he wanted to. There must be a reason why he won’t, but Audrey’s thoughts are too jumbled to figure that out. All she can think about is Samuel beneath their feet in the basement, waiting to wash their dishes.

Calvin drops his teacup back on the table. “I should have listened to Marcia.”

“What?”

“When we first started going out, she told me to pick someone else. I could have had any number of girls.” He faux stretches, like the words coming out of his mouth are mere chitchat. “She said you weren’t smart or pretty enough, but I ignored her.”

Audrey’s fists ball, tears swelling in her eyes.

“And really, she was right. You lie to me, you don’t put out, you meet with other boys—”

“I needed *tutoring*,” Audrey repeats, and the scrawny waiter looks over his shoulder at her, his hands hovering over a water glass.

“Shh,” whispers Calvin, “don’t make a scene.”

Audrey snatches her place mat and crumples it in her lap. She can’t believe she didn’t see it earlier: He has lured her here so that he could say every horrible thing to her in public without an outburst. He has trapped her.

Calvin continues, “I’ve been so patient and understanding—more than any other boy you’ll ever meet—so it really baffles me how you treat me this way.”

Another greased tuft of hair falls down his forehead. Calvin’s hair, his money, his promise of English lessons, and kisses, and flowers—all that is at once meaningless to Audrey. She wishes she had never met him that night at Auntie Fan’s. She wishes she had chosen differently, or not at all. How reckless she’s been. How naive.

“Calvin,” she says quietly, “I am sorry for everything.”

“Well, good start, but you’ll have to do better than that.”

“I see now that this relationship isn’t good. For either of us. I don’t think we should be together anymore.”

Calvin blinks, as if released from a trance. “What are you talking about?”

“I don’t want to be together anymore.” Audrey is resolute. She places her crumpled place mat on the table. “I wish you the best.”

“No. That’s not what I meant.”

Audrey pushes back her chair to stand and feels Calvin’s hand tense around her wrist. “Please,” she whispers, “don’t make a scene.” She peels his fingers off her skin one by one and marches toward the door, hoping he is not behind her.

In the fresh air, Audrey runs to the street corner, unsure if she’s headed the right way home. It doesn’t matter. She will race through Chinatown until she can’t anymore, until Samuel and Calvin and the restaurant feel like nightmares she will soon awaken from.

OceanofPDF.com

32
Duanfang

Isn't it true that what goes up must come down? When a new emperor came to power, Duanfang—revered Manchu politician, ambitious, boundary-pushing mastermind—was immediately ousted from government. He was forty-eight years old, middle-aged, and his lower back hurt when he walked. On the trek home, he thought about the strategic cards he had played; he had chosen correctly for so long, and now, in one fell swoop, the deck of cards had fallen altogether. Duanfang was no longer consequential to Chinese society. It amazed and destroyed him that just a few months ago, he had been its center.

Fame and success are fleeting, but Duanfang was not. He returned home to his wife's cooking and his children, but he was always looking at the Manchu banners proudly hanging from his walls. At night, when his family was asleep, he puttered to the study in his undershirt, massaging his bad back. He sat amid his prized collections of bronze antiques and wrote about his day and his plans in his journal. He was as meticulous as he was back in his hotel room in America.

For one day, he knew, his words would become important again, and those on the imperial throne would become figments of history. It was a delicious thought, better than a bowl of his wife's hot congee.

OceanofPDF.com

33
Audrey Zheng

Audrey Zheng is becoming a permanent fixture of Auntie Fan's home, like the floral sofa and the porcelain rice bowls in the pantry. After school, she comes straight home, using the side doors by the ninth-grade wing to avoid Calvin (though she doesn't think he's waiting for her anymore—or going to school very often, for that matter). She lets Beverley and Patty comfort her on the subway, their sympathetic winces saying so much with so little. When she told them the story of their breakup, she left out the part with Samuel: the restaurant, the argument, the confession.

"I never liked how Calvin touched you. Or talked to you," Beverley declares after her sixth wince, and Audrey wonders what she'd think if she told her about that night in her bedroom on her pink quilt.

Audrey shakes her head. She doesn't want the girls to stop talking to Calvin because of her. But Patty and Beverley are stubborn.

"I think," Patty says as they climb up the subway steps, "we've seen enough of him this year."

When her friends say their goodbyes, Audrey meets the children at PS 23 on Mulberry Street, plucking them from the sea of other Chinese boys with matching bowl cuts and marshmallow cheeks. As they skip to the corner shop and buy their afternoon candy, melted chocolate running in rivers down their fingers, she thinks of Samuel rinsing soapy dishes in the basement several blocks away. She wishes she could go there and talk to him, but she's not sure if he wants to see her. Besides, she doesn't know what to say.

So, Audrey returns home, back to where she belongs. On Saturday, she goes to Bobby's chess tournament (he places third in his division), and in the evening, she sits on the floral couch and watches reruns of *Annie Oakley* with Auntie Fan.

"No plans with the girls or Calvin tonight?" Auntie Fan asks over a cup of steeped chrysanthemum tea.

"No," Audrey replies, "they're all busy."

She fiddles with the crystal necklace he bought her from Saks for Christmas. If she tells Auntie Fan about her breakup with Calvin, Auntie Fan will tell her parents, and they'll be disappointed and crushed. So long to the fantasies of their marriage and their many American children. It is better this way, to omit the truth.

On Monday, when the children are at chess practice, Audrey walks down to the lobby and picks up the mail. Nestled between bills and advertisements are a stack of letters from colleges, each addressed to Zheng Yi. Audrey's heart leaps at her Chinese name. Gripping the letters, she scampers back up the two flights of stairs and beelines for her bedroom.

At her desk, she rips open each one.

Dear Ms. Zheng, we regret to inform you . . .

Dear Ms. Zheng, we are unable to offer you . . .

Dear Ms. Zheng, we sadly cannot accept you . . .

Audrey rips open rejection after rejection. The papers drop to the floor like lead weights. The tutoring, the studying, the folded book pages, the late-night homework—it's all been for nothing. How could she have thought she was going to be a librarian? It's laughable. She can't get into an American university. She's failed.

With the rejections strewn around her, Audrey slices open the last envelope with her pointer finger. It's a letter from the University of New Hampshire. Patty made her apply; she said sometimes rural schools are more eager to admit international students.

Dear Ms. Zheng, the letter begins, *our admissions team has reviewed your application and has decided to place you on the wait list. We know this may not be the news you were hoping for, but . . .*

Audrey stops reading. Patty and Beverley have also told her about being wait-listed; you could be waiting to hear if you're accepted until the week before school starts. Still, she's not rejected yet. Audrey folds the letter and flops onto her bed, feeling like the room has swallowed her whole.

The next day, college is all anyone can talk about. Patty is deciding between Vassar and Pembroke, the coordinate women's college for Brown. Beverley's nabbed the beach and the sunshine just like she intended—she's already signed her letter of intent for the University of California, San Diego. Robert, meanwhile, is joining the military.

"He thinks he's going to beat the commies in Vietnam and win a Purple Heart or something," Beverley says, swiping on mauve lip gloss in her locker mirror. "He's an idiot."

Audrey thinks of Samuel and his Vietnam War protest posters, his stories about Albert—the girl he liked, and his blunder about peeing his pants. She wants to laugh again like she did in the library cubby a few weeks ago, but she is seeing everything in a new light. Samuel has always noted that none of the roommates actually attend the protests—they just make the posters. *Of course*, Audrey thinks, *if they're here illegally, they can't. It's too much of a risk.* She wonders if Samuel's roommates are from the cargo ship too, and that's why they're so close. They can keep each other's secrets.

"Audrey," Patty says, "what about you?"

Audrey is tired of talking about Calvin. "I'm fine," she says, "though when you see Auntie Fan, don't tell her Calvin and I aren't together anymore. She doesn't know, and I think that's best."

"Sure," Patty replies, drumming her fingers against Beverley's locker, "but that's not what I meant. Have you heard back from any colleges yet?"

"Oh, right. Yes."

"And?" Patty clasps her hands excitedly.

Audrey stares down at her Mary Janes. "I . . . got into almost everything. I haven't decided where I'm going, though."

"That's amazing!" Beverley squeals, and Audrey doesn't think she's ever heard her friend sound so happy, even when her own acceptances came in.

Audrey doesn't know why she lied, but she puts on her brightest smile. "Thanks."

"Which ones?" asks Patty just as the bell rings, and the students in the hall start scattering to class.

"I'll tell you later," Audrey says, waving goodbye, and for the first time this school year, she is relieved not to share any classes with her friends.

She thinks about Samuel in math, and in English, and in history. At lunch, the Chinese girls she used to be scared of invite her to sit next to

them. She knows it's because they want to hear the gossip on her and Calvin's breakup, but after their third unanswered question, they give up and return to the topic of nail polish. Audrey chews her cold rice. The image of Samuel's pained eyes, his hurt face, is interrupted only by slivers of her future as a Taipei flower seller at the stalls by the nightclubs. She envisions herself handing out bouquets to Baba's colleagues as gifts for their wealthy, beautiful wives. Then waves of shame wash over her again as she is reminded of Samuel's gloved hands in the soapy dishwater, of the secrets he must hope she and Calvin keep. Why has she decided that flower sellers and dishwashers are so beneath her? When did she come to this conclusion and why can't she shake off her predilections like lint from her old sweaters? She hates to be like Calvin, but she worries that to Samuel, she is.

At the end of the school day, Audrey leaves with Beverley and Patty like usual, and picks up the boys, helping them with their homework until Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen return home. Auntie Fan makes soy sauce chicken with rice and string beans for dinner, and Audrey picks at the meat, despite its juicy flavor.

"I have to go run an errand," she blurts as she stacks the dirty plates on the dining room table. The boys have already run to their rooms, and the adults are too tired to make them finish their chores.

Auntie Fan raises an eyebrow. "What kind of errand?"

"Beverley forgot her . . . chemistry notes. And she has a test tomorrow. I don't want her to do badly."

"Why do you have her chemistry notes?" asks Uncle Wen, cocking his head.

For a moment, Audrey is struck by how much he looks like her father. "We accidentally swapped notebooks. Ours look exactly the same."

She's lied so much today, she's not surprised her words come out with ease.

"Fine," Auntie Fan replies. "But be back in twenty minutes. It's dark out, and you'll be alone."

"And take some cash with you," says Uncle Wen, digging into his pocket and pulling out two five-dollar bills. "In case you need to hail a cab."

She wishes she could hug her host parents, but she worries she might cry into the crooks of their necks and then they'll have questions. Instead, she nods, grabbing her chemistry notebook and taking Uncle Wen's money and rushing down the apartment stairs.

Chinatown is eerie at night without Calvin beside her. The lanterns hanging in the alley where she renamed herself clang in the wind like paper ghosts. As she walks, she hears rustling by the trash bags lining the sidewalks and jumps, thinking it's a rat. But it's not a rat—a man emerges, holding half-eaten macaroni and cheese in a takeout container. He looks at her blankly and Audrey averts her eyes.

By the time she reaches the Civic Center, it's empty and dark, the streets sprinkled with traffic lights and the occasional lit storefront. Audrey doesn't understand how the restaurant Samuel works at stays open.

She approaches the flickering neon sign and the basement window under the stairs. When she decided to come, she hadn't thought about the chance that Samuel might not be working tonight. But immediately, she sees his blurry face in the window, his mussed hair and crinkled eyes, and sighs with relief.

Audrey lightly raps on the glass and Samuel's head shoots up like a startled squirrel. He glances at the empty street before opening the door and walking out into the night. Here they are again, back on the basement stairs, Audrey suspended above him.

"Hi," she whispers.

"Hi, Audrey." Samuel's lips flatten into a rigid line as they walk up the few steps onto the sidewalk. "Following me again?"

"No," Audrey says, "I didn't know if you'd be here, but I . . . I needed to talk to you."

"I'm not sure I want to do that, honestly."

"I know," Audrey continues, "but you have to know how sorry I am about everything. You deserve privacy and respect, and I didn't give that to you."

"You're right, I do deserve those things," Samuel says. "And you're not exactly giving that to me now, either."

Audrey bites her bottom lip. "That's true."

Nothing she can say will fix this. She and Samuel won't magically return to their former selves. They won't slurp peanut noodles together and gossip about Albert's latest crushes. It's silly to think that could happen in the first place. Besides, at the end of the year she'll be back in Taiwan, and the memories of Samuel and Calvin will feel like crackly songs on the record player she can barely remember the lyrics to, dusty relics of a different life.

“I promise I won’t tell anyone anything,” she affirms. “I am really sorry.” She avoids looking at Samuel’s face in the half-lit street and turns toward the direction of home. Uncle Wen and Auntie Fan are waiting for her.

“Audrey?”

Audrey’s head whips around. “Yes?”

“I didn’t mean to be so harsh.”

“It’s all right,” she says quickly.

“These past few days have been . . .”

“Horrible,” Audrey finishes, thinking of Calvin and the rejection letters hidden under her bed.

“Yeah,” Samuel agrees, “not good. Thank you for apologizing.”

She pulls her hair from the nape of her uniform jacket. It’s fallen from its neat school-day chignon and lies limp across her shoulders. “I broke up with Calvin.”

Samuel’s eyes widen. “You did?”

Audrey nods, and she is surprised that her confession momentarily makes her feel proud instead of sad.

“You were right. He wasn’t . . . and he didn’t . . .”

“I know,” Samuel says. “Are you okay?”

“Not really.”

The restaurant sign flickers again, the first two neon letters spelling out *LI* buzzing like mosquitoes hungry for blood. She wonders if the owners will ever fix the *NG’S* in *Ling’s*. That’s probably the least of their problems.

“I’ll be fine, though,” she murmurs.

“Yes,” Samuel agrees, “you will be.”

She wants to touch his sleeve, to tell him he’ll also be all right, but she decides it’s too soon. Audrey pulls her blazer around her chest and shivers in the evening chill.

“I should go home,” she says, “but thanks for coming out to talk to me. And for listening.”

Samuel’s expression shifts into something like kindness, a gift she does not deserve.

“Audrey,” he says, “no matter the circumstances, I always will.”

OceanofPDF.com

34
Dawn Chin

On Dawn's first trip back to New Hampshire since the fall, she and Nai Nai go on a walk. She had expected her grandmother to act more closed off than usual, but instead, she seems chipper, marching through the cul-de-sac in her old coat and worn, flat sneakers.

"Walking is very good for you," she says like she's reciting something she read online. "It leads to a long life."

"Okay," Dawn replies.

The trees are bare, and the roads are covered in a thin layer of late winter slush, but still, the neighborhood looks like a Disney park for people over the age of sixty-five. The little houses sit snug together, their dried, yellowed grass miraculously all the same length. An old woman wheeling her garbage bin down the driveway waves to Nai Nai and she politely nods back.

"Do you know everyone in this neighborhood?" Dawn asks as she crosses her arms over her chest. She hadn't expected to be outside this long and now she shivers in Delia's vintage Celine sweatshirt and scarf.

"No," Nai Nai says.

Of course she doesn't say more. Dawn should be more like her grandmother: private, to the point. She was the opposite last Tuesday in Pen's bed. They were making out on Pen's lilac comforter, Dawn's leg hooked over Pen's hip, her lips on Pen's neck. And then Pen stuck her hand under Dawn's shirt. It's not like she didn't want it. She did—she'd been thinking about Pen's hands and fingers and body all over hers for weeks.

But the hand under her shirt felt confusing and disjointed, like it was a different hand, like it belonged to someone else. Fitz. As if overtaken by a memory, she could feel his rough knuckles scraping her abdomen, his palm pushing her into the courtyard grass. She was losing it. She was histrionic.

She rolled over to the other side of the bed. Pen stilled and then sat up, her T-shirt collar pulled to her shoulder so Dawn could see her bra strap.

"Wait, what just happened?" Pen asked. "Are you okay?"

"Oh yeah, I'm fine," Dawn said. She planted her feet on Pen's hardwood floor.

"Did I do something wrong?"

Dawn shook her head. "No, no, not at all." She winced at how thoughtful Pen was, how much she always cared.

"But—"

"Didn't you buy new records?" Dawn said, pointing to the record player Pen had purchased the week before in Dartmouth. "Let's play one of those oldies you like, yeah? I'll even listen to Joni Mitchell."

"You told me she was too sad."

"Eh, she's growing on me." Dawn stood up then and walked over to the desk—the only spot in the room that could fit a record player. The records were vertically stacked beside the desk and organized alphabetically. Dawn flipped through them and pulled out *Clouds*. She pressed *play* and jokingly stumble-danced her way back to Pen like she was on drugs.

Pen had her hands in her lap, and she was biting her lip like she did in the coffee shop. "Dawn," she whispered, "are you sure we're good?"

"Totally," Dawn said, and she kissed Pen's forehead and fell back on the pillow. After that, they talked about school and didn't make out for the rest of the night.

It's been three days, and Dawn can tell Pen is still worried about it, about her. She's been texting almost every hour even when Dawn doesn't respond.

Dawn grips her phone in her pocket as she and her grandmother curve around the cul-de-sac and turn down the sidewalk.

"How long have you lived in this neighborhood?" Dawn asks. Now that she's thinking about it, she can't remember a time when Nai Nai didn't live here.

"Since your father was born. Same house all these years."

Dawn narrows her eyes at her grandmother. She can't tell if Nai Nai is telling the truth about this one, though she figures her father would remember if they lived in Italy or New York or somewhere else that wasn't small-town New Hampshire. She should put a lie detector on her grandmother.

"Huh," she says. "And you never wanted to move?"

"No," her grandma answers. "Why would I?"

Dawn walks faster down the street. "I don't know. You're the one who told me people always want to go somewhere different."

"Yes, but as I said, I was comfortable here. I *am* comfortable here." Nai Nai chuckles. "I suppose I'm the exception."

Dawn sniffs. Her answer sounds practical, but it also sounds scripted, rehearsed. She quickens her pace, practically breaking out into a jog.

"Dawn!" her grandmother calls out. "I may be active, but I'm not your age. Please, slow down."

Embarrassed, Dawn stops. She turns back to see her grandma yards behind her; she's power walking to catch up. Guilt hits Dawn like a Greyhound bus. When Nai Nai arrives, she's heaving, her weathered hands flattened over her chest.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Dawn says hurriedly. "I didn't realize—"

"It's fine," her grandmother interjects. She links arms with her granddaughter and pats Dawn's hand. "Let's go home. We're almost there."

Minutes later, they return to Nai Nai's white house and blue-shuttered windows. She jiggles open the front door and they step inside, slipping off their shoes in the foyer.

"I'm sorry again, Nai Nai," Dawn says. She worries her grandmother will report back to her parents and tell them what a rotten granddaughter she is—she deserves that.

Nai Nai drapes her coat over the banister and waves Dawn into the kitchen. "Don't worry," she says. "Let's warm up with some tea."

In the kitchen, Dawn leans against the doorway. She should be appreciative of how unmoved her grandmother is, how unflappable. Her consistency unnerves her as much as it amazes her. If only Dawn could act so calmly, could avoid pain and mistakes and complicated, irrational memories.

Nai Nai stands over the kettle, her hands wrapped around the oven handle. "Dawn," she says, "are you all right? You seem stressed today."

“What?” Dawn blinks. “I’m fine.”

With her hands still on the oven handle, Nai Nai twists her neck and cocks her head at her granddaughter like she can read every one of Dawn’s thoughts.

Dawn shifts from left to right. “I was just cold,” she explains, “on the walk. You know it’s freezing this time of year. They always say that it will warm up, but it really doesn’t until April.” When her grandmother doesn’t respond, she adds, “I shouldn’t have walked so fast. I forgot.”

Nai Nai shakes her head and turns back to the stove. The kettle begins to thrum. “You don’t have to apologize. And it’s not that.” She pauses as steam puffs into the air. “I just want to make sure you’re okay, that’s all.”

Dawn sits back in the chair. When has her grandmother ever worried about her? When has she ever wondered if Dawn was okay? She never asked on any of their cruises, or anytime this fall, or even on New Year’s when Dawn said she wasn’t happy. Was this her subtle way of bringing up that subject again? What happened to *we all have our secrets*? Dawn’s toes curl. She isn’t about to confess anything else to her grandmother, not when Nai Nai has lied to her all these months.

“I’m good,” Dawn says stiffly.

The kettle begins to scream, and Nai Nai shuts off the fire. “All right,” she says, and she pours the boiling water into a pair of mugs.

Pen is still texting her when Dawn returns to Sanborn—at first memes and inside jokes, and then updates followed by questions: *Dinner tomorrow? Want to see that movie the French club is putting on? Don’t worry, there will be subtitles.* Dawn slides up the notifications so they disappear from her screen and wraps Delia’s scarf tighter around her neck. It’s dark and unnaturally quiet on campus. The shadows from the lampposts follow her home like ghosts.

In her room, Dawn throws the scarf and the sweatshirt on the bed and sits at her desk. She should write down what her grandmother told her during today’s meeting, though it wasn’t much of anything—just more vague half-truths and general summaries of the Civil Rights Movement and East Coast politics. It’s unfair, Dawn scoffs, that her grandmother can pry into her life, yet she can’t pry into Nai Nai’s.

She opens her laptop, the screen lighting her face. In the mounted pull-out tray under the desk is the newspaper clipping she stole in September; it's the only thing sitting there. She takes it out and sets it beside her computer, staring at the inky black-and-white faces she's memorized by heart. She's even examined their teeth. She's decided that the one standing closest to her grandmother has the straightest smile and the best hair with those sleek, flipped-out ends. And then she realizes something.

Jumping to her feet, she flicks on the overhead light and snaps a photo of the clipping. She can't believe she didn't think of this earlier. Cropping the clipping to hold the face of each girl, she drops them one by one into Google Images. She starts with her grandmother, Nai Nai's beady eyes and shared nose staring back at Dawn like a mirror. She waits as the results spew out text and then scrolls through each headline, but nothing remotely leads to anything about her grandma. Someone's thesis on the Industrial Revolution is one of the hits.

"One down, three to go," Dawn mutters aloud.

She drags the next screenshot into Google Images. It's the girl on the far right with the blunt bangs and long, boxy hair. No hits for her, either. The girl with the beehive is next, but the results are mostly 1960s hairstyle inspiration for the twenty-first century.

Her last try is the photo of the girl with the perfect hair and teeth. She drops it into the search engine. And then, three results down, she spots something: a blog post from over ten years ago, back when blog posts were popular. The title of the post is written in curly, sweet font, like the kind Dawn used to use for creative writing stories when she was ten. It says: *Memories from Adolescence.* Beneath the title is a picture of a girl in a school uniform with styled hair and flipped-out ends. Dawn holds up the clipping to the laptop screen and her breath involuntarily catches. The logo on the uniform blazer is the same. It's a match.

She scrolls down. The blog post talks about immigrating to New York City from Taiwan, forming close friendships (though it doesn't mention any names) and attending college in San Diego. There's a picture of the same girl, older, with long, straight hair, clumsily posed with a surfboard on a California beach. Dawn recognizes the coastline behind her: it's Mission Beach. She went there with her parents on a summer trip two years ago—when her father was itching to get out of Santa Barbara, and her mother

wanted to admire the sea from the car window. It's strange seeing a beach look eerily the same almost sixty years later.

The end of the blog post says *Sincerely, Beverley Tang* like it's a letter written to a personal friend instead of words frozen in time on the internet.

"Beverley Tang," Dawn says aloud, as if speaking her into existence.

She zooms in on a text box on the side of the screen with a little button that says *Contact Me!*

Without hesitating, Dawn clicks the link and starts writing.

OceanofPDF.com

35
Audrey Zheng

The inside of the Golden Goose is bizarrely red, not gold, with scarlet tablecloths draped across the round tables and fake roses in chintzy plastic vases made to look like glass arranged on the center of the tables. Audrey and her friends maneuver around the hostess. They pass by families sucking on chicken feet and balding Chinese men, their last strands of hair stretched across their scalps in gelled desperation. Audrey clutches her purse strap. Even Beverley looks anxious as her forehead nearly crashes into a busboy's tray.

"Sorry," the busboy mumbles, though he doesn't look at her while he's speaking.

Beverley rolls her eyes. "Amateurs."

Privately, Audrey reasons that none of them knows what it's like to be a busboy. They're not Samuel. The girls veer toward the back wall, where a striped sheet mimicking a curtain hangs in the doorway.

"Here we are," Patty says, and she eagerly pulls back the sheet.

They step inside. It was Kimberley's best friend, Jeanie Chun, who put together this gathering. With Calvin hardly ever at school—and thus not planning any parties this month—Jeanie took it upon herself to rally Beecher's Chinese student body as well as a handful of teenagers from First Chinese Fellowship and the Chinatown Chess League (apparently, Bobby isn't the only aspiring chess prodigy). Her uncle owns the Golden Goose, and after much begging, he allowed Jean to use the back room to host her friends.

Lunch leftovers in tin trays cover a card table, and a few opened bottles of tequila and vodka teetering on a cloth banquet chair act as a bar cart for the evening. Jeanie's lugged her record player here and the Beach Boys warble about California girls and bikinis.

"Well," Beverley says, sizing up the room and the crowd, "this is quite a party."

No longer nervous, she finds Robert standing around with a group of his school friends, and motions for him to make her a plate of food. He immediately scurries over. His newfound obedience, Audrey muses, is probably apt for the military.

"Dance with me?" Patty pleads, tugging on Audrey's arm.

Lately, she's been begging Audrey to do everything with her: shop for new shoes at Macy's, do math homework together, help with the nursery kids during church service, walk through the park on Sundays after dim sum, when the children are too tuckered out to play. On the surface, Patty might seem lonely, but Audrey knows it's not that. Patty pities her friend. For weeks, Audrey's been sullen, despite her best attempts at pretend cheeriness. Patty thinks it's because she's upset about Calvin. But the runaway freight train of Audrey's mistakes ends with her lies: she's told everyone—including her host parents, and real parents, after frequent pestering—that she's been accepted to several colleges, rattling off schools whose rejection letters accumulate dust beneath her bed. Her last hope is the University of New Hampshire, which she's still on the wait list for. And if that fails? Audrey will have to face her deceit and return to Taiwan. The mirage of her false American life splinters with each passing day.

"Okay," Audrey says, letting Patty drag her to the dance floor.

They shimmy to the Beach Boys, and then some other song Audrey doesn't know. All the while, Audrey feels like the plastic patient in Edwin's Operation game: they're both toys to be played with at will. Audrey giggles as Patty twirls her around. She's not with Calvin anymore. She'll try to be less plastic.

As the song ends, the girls walk over to the trays of food. Audrey plops soup dumplings and rice on a paper plate and hands it to Patty.

"How are you?" she asks. "Did you decide on a school yet?"

Patty shakes her head, holding chopsticks to her lips and biting into the dumpling. "No. I really can't decide. I even made a pro-con list."

Audrey drops limp scallion pancakes onto her own plate. “What are some of the pros?”

“Hmm.” Patty sucks on her chopstick. “For Vassar, they have a very strong history department, and I think that’s something I might be interested in. They even had a symposium on China a few years back. But Pembroke has an equally good history program. And they’re more integrated with Brown.”

“So you’ll be around more horrible men,” Audrey jokes.

“Ugh.” Patty gags. “Unfortunately, with more men come more opportunities. More clubs for me to join, more classes.”

“Yeah,” Audrey says. *With more men come more opportunities.* She thinks of everything that Calvin showed her, and everything he took away.

Patty sits down at one of the banquet tables shoved to the side of the room and motions for Audrey to join her. They eat with their elbows on the red tablecloth, Patty’s profile caught between the table’s shadow and the fluorescent restaurant light. *She looks beautiful—more mature,* Audrey marvels. In September, Patty was a sweet, lovesick puppy crushing on a boy who didn’t know she existed. Now she’s poised, thoughtful, a soon-to-be college woman. Without realizing it, Audrey has watched her friend blossom into an adult. Audrey reaches across the table and squeezes Patty’s shoulder.

“You’re going to do amazing things wherever you go,” she asserts. “I promise.”

Patty smiles. “Thanks, Audrey. You too.”

Audrey can only hope her friend is right.

As the night deepens, the noise outside the back room grows, overpowering the record player and the boys rolling dice on a banquet table. Jeanie tries to corral her friends to the dance floor with a new song from the Beatles while Beverley chatters with the cafeteria clique by the leftovers. Audrey peeks out through the curtain and finds the balding men still at their table, chewing tobacco and spitting it into their empty cups of tea. She wrinkles her nose and is about to pull the curtain closed when someone slips through the gap. Her eyes move to the face before her, and despite her best instincts, warmth floods her body.

“Hi, Samuel.”

“Hi, Audrey.”

He smiles tentatively, and Audrey beams in return. Even the slightest upturn of his lips feels like forgiveness. Samuel paws at the back of his neck, casting skittish glances around the room.

"So," he said, "new party space, huh?"

Audrey shrugs. "At least for now. Jeanie's uncle owns the restaurant."

"That's what Beverley told me."

"Right." Audrey twists a strand of hair around her finger before pointing to the tinfoil trays. "There's food," she announces as Beverley catches their eyes and waves. "And drinks, though I think the boys have downed most of it."

Samuel laughs. "Thanks. No alcohol for me tonight, though."

Audrey nods, wondering if he has just come back from a shift. She ponders how he can so easily wipe away all traces of fried oil and dish soap and walk into a different world as a different person, unburdened by his secrets. Or perhaps he carries his secrets with him, bubbling underneath the surface. She has always thought of Samuel as unbearably moral, but maybe morality and the law are not one and the same.

They linger by the doorway until another song crackles on the record player, breaking Audrey's trance.

"Samuel, Audrey!" Patty yells, waving them over to the dance floor.

Audrey tugs at her sleeves so they stretch across her knuckles. "Patty's been trying to get me to dance with her all night. You don't have to if you don't want to."

"Well, we can't say no to Patty, can we?" Samuel takes Audrey's hand and leads her across the room.

Beverley and Robert join too, and soon, the group is shimmying to Motown and rock, the blues and bubblegum pop. Before her life in New York, in America, Audrey had never listened to so much music. Occasionally, her parents would play songs on the radio after supper, when Mama would wash the dishes and Baba would read Liwei a bedtime story. But mostly, the radio was used for news, for the ever-present, unspoken fear that the communist government would return to Taiwan and take who and what they believed were rightfully theirs. Audrey doesn't remember what it's like to live under that regime, but she knows Samuel does. Now, still holding her hand, he dips the back of her waist so she's parallel to the linoleum restaurant floor. Beverley and Patty cheer as she returns to an upright position.

“Where did you learn to dance like that?” Audrey asks.

“I watch movies too, you know,” Samuel replies indignantly. “Not just you, Miss Audrey Hepburn.”

Audrey blushes. “All right,” she relents, “you have a point.”

The record player pauses and resumes with a piano ballad and a singer Audrey doesn’t know crooning along to the chords. Beverley pulls Robert away from the boys and the dice and loops her arms around his neck. Audrey turns to Patty, but she has moved on to the makeshift bar and is pouring herself a cocktail of vodka and orange juice. She and Samuel remain, caught in the center of the dance floor, their bodies orbiting each other like planets.

Instead of retreating to the corner, Samuel holds out a hand and carefully, Audrey puts her palm in his. He wraps his fingers around her waist, cool and electric. Inexplicably, Audrey feels like a lightning bolt has hit her.

“You’re a good person, Samuel,” she says, though she’d like to say half a million other things.

Samuel glances at the space behind her head. “I try to be. Sometimes I’m a bit too judgmental. I’m pretty sure you agree.”

“No.” Audrey shakes her head. “I don’t.”

“But you did before,” presses Samuel, “before we became . . . friends.”

“Well, I was wrong.”

“Maybe partly.” Samuel grins. “You know, you are too, Audrey.”

“I’m what?”

“A good person.”

Audrey fights the urge to snort aloud as the singer continues crooning. “I think the admissions committees might feel differently.” She breathes in deeply and looks around the room. No one is paying attention to them. “I didn’t get into any colleges. I got wait-listed to one, rejected from everything else.” She hasn’t said those words aloud before, but it feels right after all the truths they’ve shared—all the confessions and secrets.

Samuel’s forehead creases in genuine concern. “I’m sorry, Audrey,” he says. “That must be hard.”

“I just don’t want to leave.” She rests her chin on his shoulder, and they spin in a slow circle. “I don’t want to go back.”

“I know,” Samuel says. “Me neither.”

Of course—he can’t go to college at all. They are both stuck, in their own ways.

“You *are* a good person, Audrey,” Samuel emphasizes, “though you could probably stalk me less.”

Audrey laughs through bitten-down tears, salty on her tongue. “I’m very sorry, truly. And trust me, I won’t be doing that again.” She sinks her head farther into Samuel’s shoulder, her hair against his taut skin, her breath woven into the fabric of his shirt. She knows Patty and Beverley are watching. They’ll have questions later, but she doesn’t care. “Whatever you want to tell me, I’ll be here. And if you don’t want to tell me anything . . . that’s fine too.”

Imperceptible to everyone but Audrey, Samuel rubs his thumb back and forth across her waist—a sign of affection she’d expect from a boyfriend. Not that she ever got that from Calvin.

“Okay,” he agrees. “Same for me, as well.”

They sway in silence for a few moments before Samuel speaks again. “You know, I can help you with your wait-list letter.”

“Wait-list letter?”

“Yeah, to convince the university you got wait-listed from that you really want to go. Sometimes it helps.”

“Oh,” Audrey says, hope springing in her chest, “that would be wonderful. Thank you.”

“No problem.”

“So . . . Wednesday afternoon at Yorkville?”

Samuel smiles. “Sure,” he says, “Wednesday at Yorkville.”

“I expect to hear the latest on Albert,” Audrey instructs.

“Well, I expect to hear the latest on that situation over there.” Samuel juts his head at Beverley and Robert. “I hear he’s heading to the military?”

Audrey nods. “You heard correctly.”

“Interesting,” replies Samuel, and Audrey discerns that there’s another political speech behind that *interesting*, one that at this point she knows well and, oddly, finds comforting.

With her chin fastened to Samuel’s skin, they sway until the music fades and Jeanie Chun has to run over and change the record. Audrey steps backward, wishing they could have one more song together. Her hand lingers in Samuel’s before she reluctantly lets go.

“I’m going to get a scallion pancake,” he says quietly, and she nods, motionless on the banquet floor.

As he walks away, she realizes—in light of everything—how much she admires Samuel, how much she likes him. And if she's being honest with herself—which she supposes she is these days—she feels much more for him than that, more than she could describe in one evening, in one dance.

OceanofPDF.com

36
Audrey Zheng

Audrey Zheng's return to the library feels like a homecoming: the vinyl booths (Samuel waiting for her at their usual table), the distinct smell of dusty novels (Samuel tracing the word *metaphor* in her textbook), the children's familiar giggles as their nannies read stories on the circular carpet (Samuel's low, melodic voice), the pocket square windows dividing New York's sidewalks and trash cans and branches (her reflection mirrored in Samuel's eyes)—it is infuriating how much the library seems to enthrall her.

Ever since last Saturday at the Golden Goose, her head buried in his shoulder in the middle of the dance floor (*you're the talk of the town*, teased Beverley), Audrey cannot stop thinking about Samuel. It worries her. When she came to America as a naive, stunted teenager, she had hoped to become a woman. Instead, she is still a childish girl wearing different, scratchier dresses, flitting from boy to boy, too preoccupied with a man's face to grow up. Audrey copies the word *metaphor* in her notebook and listens as Samuel explains how she can use this word to beg the University of New Hampshire to accept her.

On Monday, Samuel and Audrey outline the paragraphs that will make up her wait-list letter, and when they're finished, they work on her literature assignment on *Beowulf*. At the end of the hour, Audrey's hand cramps and stiffens, and her pencil drops as she flexes her fingers to counteract the pain.

“Here,” Samuel says, and he stretches across the table and presses his thumb into Audrey’s palm. His fingers curl over her knuckles and he massages her hand until the heat of his skin melds with hers. “Just a trick I learned. Happens to me all the time.”

“From writing?” Audrey asks. The pain subsides, replaced with a feeling of lightness that jolts from her fingertips down to her skirt. She wiggles her hand out of Samuel’s to avoid it. Hasn’t she already suffered enough with Calvin? Why does her body—and her mind—betray her?

Samuel shakes his head. “From washing dishes.”

“Oh.”

They have never talked about Samuel’s other job before, not really. Audrey fiddles with her earrings—pearl studs that her mother used to wear when she was a teenager.

“In China, did you also work at a restaurant?” she asks carefully.

“No. I went to school for a bit, but then things got bad, so I left to work on my parents’ farm.”

“Your parents are farmers?” Audrey asks. She tries to picture Samuel in his button-down shirt and rolled, faded trousers, shoveling hay and herding sheep. *Is that what farmers do?* she wonders. She has always lived in cities—Shanghai, a place she barely remembers, and Taipei, a place that used to be home.

“Yes,” Samuel replies. “I mean, they were. I think they still are. I haven’t seen or talked to them in a while.” He swallows, and Audrey notices his Adam’s apple bob in his throat. “Two years, actually.”

“You haven’t been able to write them,” Audrey says quietly. It would be too dangerous given his status, she understands, too risky. It is now Audrey who wants to touch Samuel’s palm, to massage the sting of separation, the way a life evaporates and a new one begins, fractured and incomplete.

She watches as he draws invisible circles on the wooden library desk. “You know, I haven’t talked about this before with anyone,” he admits. “Well, Albert, and the boys. But not with anyone . . . outside.”

“Do you want to stop?” Audrey asks, already regretting her initial questions.

“No. It’s nice to talk about life from before.”

She thinks of Mama and Baba, Sula and Lula, and little Liwei. “Yes,” she agrees, “it makes it more real.”

Their session is long over, but they spend the next hour talking about Samuel's home in Yuying Village: his enterprising parents, who insisted he continue learning English despite dropping out of school, his raggedy sheepdog Hui who raced up mountains until he got too old, his friends before they became soldiers, and comrades, and guards, and enemies. At seventeen, he got a job as a deckhand on a cargo ship transporting sugar from mainland China to New York.

"It was Albert's idea, actually, to leave the ship," Samuel confesses in a near-whisper.

"*Albert?*" Audrey says.

"Of course he had no plan, though." Samuel scoffs. "So the rest of us pitched in."

It was six of them who ultimately left the Brooklyn pier with their packs. Samuel smuggled in American dollars from a cousin in Yuying, and they got a room in Chinatown with sleeping bags demarcating invisible bedrooms.

"It was hard," Samuel says, "but I don't want you feeling bad for me." He looks past her like he did on the stoop that night she came to apologize. "At the end of the day, I chose this—we all chose this."

Audrey nods. In some way, wasn't this true for all of them? Hadn't they come to America for a life that could not be offered in their homelands, for the tantalizing promise of freedom and success unbound by the threat of war or dictatorship or imprisonment? (Although, of course, there is a war going on here too.) Sometimes the best and only choice is to leave.

"Someday, I'm going to become an architect and make enough money to bring my parents here," Samuel declares, "and you"—he waves his pencil at Audrey—"are going to recommend all the best books to me when you're a librarian."

Audrey laughs. "Sure," she says, "when I actually get good at English."

"You're fine at it, Audrey. You just need to have more confidence in yourself."

If Audrey's confidence were a ship, she thinks it would never leave port. She can't imagine traversing an entire ocean knowing that the moment you stepped on land, the government wanted you to return to the place you were so desperate to leave.

Samuel closes the notebook, and Audrey half smiles, wanting to reach across the table and feel his palm in hers again. Despite her self-

admonishment, her foolish desire for a boy she once detested, maybe that would be the way she'd unfurl her sails.

OceanofPDF.com

37
Audrey Zheng

At the end of the school day on Friday, when Audrey's cotton candy daydreams about Samuel have puffed into sugary pastel clouds, and she can't focus on anything but him (when she's not thinking about college or math or science or English or history, of course), Calvin finds her in the girls' bathroom. She's just changed her sanitary pad and is washing her hands so she won't stink up the 6 train. And then suddenly, her ex-boyfriend's face appears in the dirty mirror, half a foot behind her like a ghost in a horror film.

"God!" she yelps, jumping forward and accidentally spraying cold water all over her shirt. She whirls around, dripping. "This is the girls' bathroom! You're not supposed to be here."

Calvin crosses his arms. There aren't any girls in the bathroom; after all, there's no point in touching up your makeup or gossiping about your fake friends here when you can jaunt to any of the fifteen Upper East Side coffee shops or someone's luxurious brownstone apartment and talk for much longer. Perhaps Calvin knows this, Audrey quickly conjectures. He hasn't been at school for weeks and now he's here, and they're alone.

"Jeez, Audrey," Calvin says, lazily slurring his words like he's drunk, though she knows he's not. "What kind of a hello is that?" he asks. "I expected a little better."

"Hello," Audrey says curtly. "If one of the teachers finds you in here, they're going to write you up."

"Please, like I care. The school year's practically over anyway."

It's mid-April, Audrey almost replies, but she changes her mind at the last second. Calvin simply wants to keep her in the girls' bathroom, crammed between the mirrors and the stalls like that night in her bedroom, when they stumbled between the closet and the bed, and she had nowhere to go. She can pretend it doesn't, but the memory makes her livid. Sometimes, it wraps around her throat and chokes her in her sleep, and she wakes up soaked in sweat.

"I have to go meet Beverley and Patty," she declares. "What do you want?"

Calvin scratches the back of his neck. "Well, it's been a while. I haven't seen you since you ditched me at that stupid restaurant."

"I didn't ditch you. I said goodbye."

"That still counts as ditching."

Audrey sighs, wiping her damp hands on her skirt. "Why are we talking about this, Calvin? We broke up."

He winces like she's poked him with a sewing needle. "I wanted to discuss that, actually."

"What about it?"

Though she doesn't show it, Audrey is startled by the bite in her voice. She shouldn't feel so angry at seeing Calvin again—it was she who broke up with him. But his presence has forced her to cough up the simmering memories normally saved for sleep, and now they linger in the stuffy bathroom air. She can't believe she used to like him. She can't believe she thought she loved him.

"I miss you," he says plainly, stepping closer to her. "Don't you miss us? We were good together."

Audrey shakes her head. "I'm not sure that's true."

"Really? The movies, the park walks, the parties? Wasn't that all nice for you? And Auntie Fan loves me. She thinks we should get married." Calvin waves his arm as if he's a defendant on trial, gesturing to an unseen jury.

"It *was* nice," Audrey says. "But it . . . it got bad. I think for you too."

"That's because Samuel made it bad," Calvin grumbles. "He ruined us."

A spark of anger whips across Audrey's face. "No," she snaps, "*you* ruined us. He had nothing to do with it."

Calvin steps even closer—Audrey can taste his familiar sandalwood cologne on her tongue. "Seriously, Audrey, we all know he basically forced

you to see him for tutoring or hell knows what you were doing, which is bad enough, and dare I mention the—"

"I'm not going over all of this with you again," she interrupts. Pushing off the sink's ledge, she shifts around Calvin, her backpack knocking into his shoulder as she strides toward the door.

It was silly of her to entertain this conversation at all. She should have ignored him when she had the chance—scurried past his dizzying reflection and rushed outside to Beverley and Patty. In the safety of the subway, they could giggle about her ex-boyfriend's unexpected appearance and say things like, *Gosh, isn't he such a loser?* Her hand curls around the doorknob as Calvin grabs her other wrist like she's a puppet on a string invariably tied to its master.

"Calvin," she says, yanking as his grip tenses, "come on, please."

Calvin leans in so her arm is bent at an angle, her hand dangling in his like a dead fish. His uniform sleeve bumps against hers and the heady cologne overwhelms her. "I heard about that little party you guys threw. At the Golden Goose?"

Audrey's eyebrows fold together. "Jeanie organized that party, not me. Besides, what does that have to do with anything?" She makes a fist around the doorknob. Maybe if she pulls hard enough, she can tug her arm from his grasp.

"You think you're so above it all, don't you?" Calvin scoffs. "Miss Chinese America. But I *made* you, Audrey Zheng. I made this whole thing. You can't throw it away that easily."

Audrey reasons that she should be frightened—he is strong enough to overpower her—but instead, fury continues to steam in her lungs, threatening to boil over. "You sound like a movie villain," she says. "Don't be ridiculous."

Muscles straining, Audrey jerks at the doorknob. Her arm tunnels through his grip and the bathroom door swings open, slamming against the concrete wall. She leaps through the opening. Though the school day is over, a handful of students traipse through the halls: on their way to track practice or newspaper club or rehearsal for the school musical. This year, they're doing *The Pirates of Penzance*; Marcia is in the ensemble and won't stop bragging about it.

Audrey's eyes settle on the lobby doors in the alcove to the right of her chemistry classroom. She marches toward them, sidestepping the white

girls who make fun of her hair, Patty's old crush Herb in his letterman jacket, and the janitor sweeping up chip bags tossed near the lockers.

"Audrey," Calvin calls out, his fingers skimming the hem of her skirt as it flaps against her legs, "I just want to talk to you."

"But I don't want to talk to *you*," Audrey shouts back. "Please, Calvin, leave me alone!"

She pushes forward, inches from the door, anticipating his continued pleas and vacuous threats. But to her surprise, she is met with silence. Against her better judgment, Audrey turns around. Calvin is standing in the middle of the lobby, staring at her, his expression stony. For some reason, he reminds her of President Chiang Kai-Shek in his uniform and regalia, watching the crowd cheer after one of his speeches about the horrors of Mao Zedong and a broken China. It's the first time she's been afraid of Calvin since he appeared in the girls' bathroom.

She wrenches open Beecher's lobby doors and walks through the entryway. As she's met with spring air and Beverley and Patty waving from across the block, Audrey puzzles out why the president of Taiwan and Calvin seem so similar: they both look like they are at war.

"He's awful, Samuel," Audrey whispers, her mouth pressed up against the receiver.

She's sitting at Auntie Fan's makeshift work desk—a thin slab of wood perpendicular to the kitchen counter. At this hour, the whole building should be asleep. Auntie Fan's snores waft into the kitchen (Uncle Wen is away on business again), and the children are snug in their bunk beds. She had read them a bedtime story in her imperfect English: *Stuart Little*, which is Teddy's favorite. Edwin always says he's too old for bedtime stories, but tonight, he curled under her arm, his head lolled back against the inside of her elbow. As his minty breath blew steadily on her cheek, she almost forgot about Calvin. But now her anger flares like it did in the bathroom.

"He's rude," she continues, "and petulant and . . ."

"That's an impressive vocabulary word," Samuel says on the other end of the line. "Nice going."

"Don't tease," Audrey scolds.

"All right, all right."

Though she can't see him, Audrey knows Samuel is holding up his hand to mimic a stop sign, like he does during tutoring sessions when she's annoyed with him or frustrated at the English language. He sounds tired despite his irritating joviality—he's just come off a shift and stopped at a pay phone to call her. He's been doing that on evenings when he's not tutoring her. Audrey softens. Hunched over the desk, she rustles through Auntie Fan's neat stack of envelopes. Electricity and rent bills, she realizes. And stuffed in between, a letter from her parents, probably to gush to Auntie Fan about Calvin and Audrey's saccharine romance. They are both liars, she and Samuel. At least Samuel—unlike her—has a good reason to lie.

"Just ignore him," Samuel advises. "Eventually he'll get bored and move on. He's like a child that way."

Audrey chews on her lip. "I don't know. He looked . . ." She thinks of Calvin's face in the hallway. "He scares me," she finishes. "I can't explain it."

"He's used to getting what he wants," Samuel says, "at least lately. He'll get over it, I promise."

"How do you know?"

"I've known Calvin since I got here. We used to go to church together, remember?"

"Right," Audrey says, recalling that first night she met Samuel, when he wouldn't tell her why he didn't attend First Chinese Fellowship anymore. She had thought him to be so mocking and pompous. Now she can admit to herself that she wishes they were cuddled on the couch instead of talking on the phone. In a preposterous scenario, she imagines him cupping her face in his hands and kissing her forehead. She shakes away the thought and loops the phone cord around her pointer finger.

"Why did you stop going?"

"Going where?"

"To church," she says. "You never told me."

"I thought this was *your* time to rant."

"Well, if you really want me to believe Calvin's so harmless, then you should tell me about church."

"Why do you think he has to do anything with me leaving First Chinese Fellowship?"

Audrey groans. “Because,” she says, “he’s always involved in anything bad.”

“Hmm.” He pauses like he’s mulling it over. “I guess that’s true.”

He falls silent, and Audrey listens to the phone line crackle. They’re only supposed to talk for a few minutes—by now, their call is costing them almost two dollars. That’s practically all of Samuel’s nightly tips.

“I’ll tell you why I left the church if you promise not to tell anyone,” Samuel finally says, “not even Beverley and Patty.”

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to,” Audrey replies, remembering her former sins, “but I won’t say a word. So you’re welcome to put it on me.”

“You mean *lay it on me*?”

“Oh yes, that.”

Samuel laughs through the receiver. “I *do* want to tell you. I think I can trust you.”

“You can,” she assures him.

“Good. You can trust me too.”

So he tells her: After he and the boys left the ship, they found their way to Ling’s. One of the busboys didn’t work on Sundays because he attended church—First Chinese Fellowship, he said, and encouraged them to go. He talked endlessly about the community and the hymns, and the sermons in Mandarin. The busboy promised that the church asked no questions—something about God accepting all people. Samuel’s friends didn’t go, but the following Sunday, he did. Religion was banned in China, and hadn’t Samuel escaped his homeland for just that? The freedom to choose your religion, your life, whatever you wanted. And so he found himself in a synagogue basement where he didn’t know anyone and was constantly worried he’d be caught by the police. Thankfully, he wasn’t caught by the police. In fact, he became good friends with the congregation; that’s how he met Beverley and Patty.

After a few weeks, he volunteered to usher with Calvin and at the end of the service, they’d count the money and deliver it to the pastor. Except one morning, between benediction and the counting, Calvin dipped into the storage closet behind the pulpit and took forty dollars from the plate.

“I caught him when I circled back to use the bathroom,” Samuel explains, “and he begged me not to tell anyone. Said he’d pay it back next month.”

“Why would he have to steal, though?” Audrey asks. “He’s so rich.” She’s known this since before she arrived in America, since Mama gave her that slip of paper with his name on it and told her about his parents, the car accident, and the inheritance. When they were together, he bought her jewelry from Saks, and all his weekend clothes were designer labels she hadn’t heard of that he picked up on Fifth Avenue after school.

“He overspends,” Samuel says bluntly. “From what I understand, his parents instructed his aunt and uncle to wire the money in monthly installments. It’s a lot of money every month, but you know Calvin. He likes his parties.”

“So he dipped into the donation plates.”

“Yes, and he tried to swear me to secrecy. I let it slide the first month, but he never paid it back and then he kept doing it again and again.”

“How did you know?”

“I counted before the benediction and after the service every time after that.”

“That’s smart,” Audrey says.

“No, *Calvin* was smart. He acted like we were friends, but he knew what I was doing and he knew that eventually, I’d tell the pastor. I let my guard down and he secretly tracked me for a few days, found out where I worked, pieced together that I wasn’t . . . well, you know. And the rest is history.”

“He blackmailed you.” Audrey gasps. It’s a word she learned a few weeks ago in English class, and now it sits heavy in her gut.

“Pretty much. And then I guess I didn’t really want to go to First Chinese Fellowship after that. Though for some reason, I still went to his parties. I guess I still missed everyone and wanted to see them.”

“He’s *awful*,” Audrey cries, returning to her original point. “The worst person on Earth.”

“I don’t know, I wouldn’t say that.”

“How can you not?” She sits back in Auntie Fan’s chair, stunned. After all that Calvin has done to Samuel, after all that he could still do, she can’t fathom anyone defending him, much less his victim.

“Because,” Samuel replies, clearing his throat, “I don’t think there *is* a worst person on Earth. And if there is, it’s not Calvin. He’s not evil—he’s just sad and, well, extremely privileged. After his parents died . . . I don’t think he knew what to do with that sadness. So he gets angry and he takes it out on people who don’t deserve it.”

“Wow,” Audrey says, trying to unravel everything he’s telling her, piece by piece. “You’ve really thought a lot about this.”

“Well, there’s not much else to do but think while washing dishes.” Samuel laughs again, but it’s halfhearted.

He’s spent at least three dollars on this call by now. Audrey should pay him back. With the cord still looped around her finger, she pulls the coil and releases. It bounces back against her palm, its rings leaving light marks on her skin.

“We should hang up,” Audrey whispers.

“Yes, we should.”

“I want to talk more, though, later,” she says. “Not just about this . . . about everything.” *I like talking to you. I* like *you*, she wants to say, but she doesn’t.

“Sure,” Samuel agrees. “We can chat during tutoring.”

“I can’t go this coming week,” Audrey says, biting her bottom lip. “Bobby has chess tournaments almost every day after school, and Uncle Fan says he’s getting good, so I have to watch him play.”

Samuel chuckles. “He’s working poor Bobby to the bone, isn’t he?” He pauses. “All right, well, I’m at the restaurant this weekend, but I’m off the Saturday after. Are you free then?”

“I’ll have to check,” Audrey replies, “but I think I am.”

“All right, well then, Saturday. Most likely.”

“Most definitely.”

“Goodbye, Audrey.”

“Bye. Get home safely.”

She clicks the phone on its cradle and stands up at the desk, pressing her weight into the wood. The city outside her windows croaks and grunts as it jostles its tenants to sleep. She should go to bed too. In her silk slippers, Audrey patters to the bathroom, where she mechanically brushes her teeth and squints at her freckled reflection in the mirror above the sink. Is Samuel pulling back his covers, thinking of her, thinking of Calvin? *He doesn’t know what to do with all that sadness*, Samuel had told her. She wants to feel sympathy for him, to grant him that grace after everything he’s taught her these past several months, but she can’t muster the emotion. She even tries to spark tears in her eyes, but it doesn’t work.

Instead, her afternoon anger simmers low in her body, layered with indignance at Samuel’s story and her own silent wounds. Walking to her

bedroom and pulling her nightgown over her head, she tucks herself under the covers and feels the knife of her temper sharpen in her belly.

OceanofPDF.com

38
Dawn Chin

It's been two weeks since Dawn sent that email to Beverley Tang. In history, in English, in the dining hall, when walking through campus, Dawn reflexively checks her inbox and her spam (just in case). Nothing. Instead, she receives texts from Pen: *Lunch break? Snack break? Come to the library?* The more Dawn doesn't respond, the more Pen texts, like they're in some kind of torturous game. So after several days, Dawn shows up at Pen's library shift with a muffin and two tickets to see Zeros, another indie band Dawn hasn't heard of. She slides the gifts across the circulation desk on Friday afternoon.

"It's not the Agoraphobes," she says, "but who knows, maybe they're even better." She winks, and when Pen doesn't look up from the scanner, she braces herself for the argument, the inevitable breakup (though technically, they can't break up since they're not in a relationship). Maybe this one won't hurt as much as it did with Fitz.

The red light from the scanning machine leaves laser print streak marks on Pen's chin.

"What happened?" Pen asks, and Dawn is surprised at how timid her voice sounds. She's usually so blunt, so confident. Dawn's always liked her confidence. "Did you get really busy or something? Are you in an AP craze like the rest of them?"

Dawn doesn't need any clarification on who *the rest of them* are. It's the first week of April and APs are a month away—the whole school is in a constant panic.

“Yes,” Dawn says without thinking.

It’s the easier answer of the two options: being crazed over AP exams or being crazed in general, stuck in the pit of wanting but not wanting, clawing at the walls of her Fitz-induced depression.

“I’ve been working really hard on my history project too,” she adds, trying to change the subject. She pulls out the paper from her backpack like she’s presenting proof. “Got an A on my first draft.”

Pen glances up from the desk. “Good. You deserve it.” She puts the scanner back in its holder. “You know, I’ve been really busy too.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.” Pen tucks her hair behind her ears and surveys the muffin and tickets in front of her. “Maybe too busy to hang out with you.”

Now that they are face-to-face, Dawn notices new freckles peppering Pen’s nose—probably from sitting out in the courtyard all day. They’re cute. She wants to tell her so, but she holds her tongue. Instead, she places her hand on Pen’s and runs her thumb up and down Pen’s knuckles.

“Okay,” Dawn says, “I’ll just take Caroline, then.”

Pen narrows her eyes. “Caroline hates indie music.”

“Exactly.”

Pulling back her hand, Pen digs through the Elsie’s bag and snatches the muffin. She takes a giant bite. “Fine,” she says after she swallows, “I’ll meet you for dinner before the concert. And then we’ll head out together. Sound good?”

Dawn grins. “Perfect.”

A day later, Dawn is wearing Pen’s old sweatshirt and a too-tight pair of jeans from middle school as she takes the Greyhound to her grandmother’s. It’s her last visit before her paper is due, and she wants to make sure she gets all the information she can—which, of course, won’t be much of anything. She’s not too bothered. Ever since her chat with Pen, she’s been in a good mood. In a few hours, she’ll head back to campus, and they’ll gossip over mashed potatoes and take an overpriced Uber to Gilford and dance to singers they’ll pretend aren’t off-key. It’ll be nice. She won’t think about Fitz, or rosebushes, or breakups.

But when she knocks on her grandmother’s door, Nai Nai is surprised to see her. She got her schedule mixed up and her church friends are coming over in a half hour when Dawn has just arrived.

“I’m sorry,” she says, hustling around the kitchen and ripping open a box of butter cookies, “I’m forgetting things in my old age.”

“It’s all right,” Dawn replies. Perhaps, she muses, pressure is what she needs. Time—or the lack thereof—will force her grandmother to share.

As Nai Nai dumps butter cookies on a place, Dawn picks out mugs for the two of them. She chooses one for her grandmother that says *The Lord is my strength.* Dawn wonders if the Concord church has pivoted to selling holy kitchenware, or if her grandmother is a frequent visitor of her local HomeGoods. For herself, she chooses a cup with a blue and white *NH* sports logo.

“What’s this stand for?” she asks, pointing at the logo. “Are you a secret New Hampshire basketball fan or something?” (Dawn doesn’t know anything about basketball, or most sports.)

Nai Nai dusts the crumbs off her hands in the sink. “It’s a University of New Hampshire mug,” she says. “I went a few years ago for an alumni weekend and they gave us a bunch of free things. This included.”

“Ah.”

At least she knows that Nai Nai genuinely went to college in New Hampshire. Or she stole a University of New Hampshire mug like a lunatic. Dawn pours the hot water into the mugs and drops in the tea bags.

“Sanborn does that too,” she says.

“Does what?” her grandmother asks as she sets the mugs on the kitchen table.

“Gives us random free stuff,” Dawn explains, “like it’s making up for the ridiculous tuition.”

Nai Nai laughs. “Capitalism masked as generosity.”

Dawn grins. She never thought she’d hear anyone in her family criticize capitalism.

She sits down as Nai Nai pulls two butter cookies from the box and places them neatly on napkins.

“One for you and one for me,” she says, nudging her head at the full plate. “They’re better from the box than from the plate.”

“Really?” Dawn raises an eyebrow. “I didn’t know that was a thing.”

“It is,” Nai Nai says confidently, pushing in her chair.

Dawn bites into the crumbling cookie. It tastes like three sticks of butter laced with sugar, a treat she would have loved as a child. It strikes her that this is the type of activity she and her grandmother could have done

together when she was ten. They could have run down the cruise ship's spiral staircase to the promenade and gobbled down free chocolate chip cookies from the warm trays in the café. Instead, she and Nai Nai were on separate planes: her in the promenade, and her grandmother on the sky deck, playing cards and gazing at the sea.

Dawn wipes at crumbs scattered across her bottom lip and remembers the last meeting they had, when her grandmother asked her if she was okay.

"I wish we could've done this earlier," she blurts out.

Nai Nai nibbles on her cookie. "Worked on your project, do you mean? Why, is it overdue?"

"No, no." Dawn shakes her head. "I mean . . . this. Eating cookies together. Talking and stuff." When Nai Nai doesn't respond, Dawn's cheeks burn. "Um, do you remember when we went on cruises? Like every summer?"

"Of course," her grandmother replies, "those were fun."

"Yeah." She thinks of Nai Nai on the sky deck again, playing cards as the ocean's reflection rocked in the window beside her. "I, um, I wish we got to spend more time together on them, you know?" Dawn stumbles through her sentences. "The cruise ships were so big, so . . . we were always doing different things."

Carefully, Nai Nai sets down her cookie on the napkin. She stares at her granddaughter's flushed face. "When you were very little, maybe three or so, we went on a cruise to the Caribbean. Same old ports, but it was your first time. Your first cruise." She smiles. "You wouldn't leave our side."

"Yours and Dad's?" Dawn asks.

"No," Nai Nai says, "your yé ye's. At dinner, you'd sit on his lap the whole time and cry if he tried to take you off."

"Really?" Dawn says. She doesn't remember this and barely remembers him. He died when she was five from pancreatic cancer, and the only thing she can recall is the open casket at the wake. It was her first and only time seeing a dead body.

"Yes," Nai Nai replies, "and you held both our hands at every port and wouldn't go anywhere without us. We went to get massages, and you tried to come with us too." She chuckles. "Your mom had to distract you with ice cream so we could get to our appointment."

"Wow," Dawn says, "sorry I was such a pain."

“It was sweet. We loved it. Especially your yé ye. He thought you were the funniest little girl.” She shakes her head, and Dawn feels her grandmother’s grief weigh heavy in both their guts. She doesn’t know what to say.

She settles on the lousy: “That sounds like a good cruise.”

“Yes, it was.”

Dawn pictures her toddler self curled up on her grandfather’s lap, rocking to the rhythm of the boat. “Where did you and Yé ye meet?” she wonders aloud.

“In high school,” Nai Nai replies, blowing on her tea before taking a long sip.

“Oh,” Dawn says, surprised, “I didn’t realize. He immigrated to, um, New Hampshire too?”

She waits for her grandmother to flinch. But Nai Nai only nods. “Yes.”

It’s a good story, Dawn thinks, *one that makes sense.* She’s seen old photographs of her dad riding his bicycle around a suburban New England cul-de-sac under the toasted October leaves. He’s told her about *Laconia*, the boat they rented as a treat every summer on the shoreline, the engine thrumming as the family set out on the lake.

“So New Hampshire high school,” Dawn repeats, wrapping her hands around her mug. “Did you guys share a class together? Or—”

The landline phone rings and they both look up. Nai Nai scurries to the phone and talks quickly.

“One of my church friends is coming early,” Nai Nai announces as she hangs up. “She ran some errands in the area so she’s nearby.” Dawn’s grandmother points to a photo on the fridge: it’s a Polaroid of a bunch of smiling women standing politely in a park, their hands folded over their skirts. “Grace Blevins. That’s her on the end.”

“Right, okay,” Dawn replies. She can tell their conversation is over. She crumples the napkin in her fist, crumbs spilling across her jeans.

“You don’t have to leave,” Nai Nai says. “We’ll just be playing mahjong if you want to join. Do you know how to play?”

Dawn shakes her head. “No, I don’t.”

“I can teach you. You should learn.”

“Oh, but—”

“More time together. We can make up for it, yes?” Her grandmother pauses in the archway and smiles, and suddenly Dawn feels a lump build in

her throat. She glances at her phone—she has some time before her Greyhound bus back to Sanborn and Pen.

"Okay," Dawn says, swallowing hard, "sounds great."

Her grandmother leaves the kitchen and disappears into the hall. Dawn can hear her rummaging through a wicker basket in the living room as she searches for the mahjong set.

She returns just as the doorbell rings. Nai Nai rushes back out of the kitchen and into the hall. The front door creaks open and the sound of another old woman's voice floats through the house. Dawn listens as the twin pairs of footsteps move closer to the kitchen.

"Grace, this is my granddaughter, Dawn," Nai Nai says. "Dawn, Auntie Grace."

Grace Blevins—or Auntie Grace—is a Black woman nearly ten years older than Nai Nai with chin-length gray curls and a pale blue cotton shirt draped over navy pants that remind Dawn of the L.L.Bean outfits her dad often buys for Nai Nai on her birthday.

"It's really nice to meet you, Dawn," Auntie Grace says warmly. "I've heard so much about you."

Even after their chat today and her grandmother's *are you okay* last week, Dawn still can't believe her grandmother talks about her at all. "Thanks," she replies, "it's nice to meet you too."

Surrendering the kitchen table to the butter cookies and the mahjong set, Dawn scoops up her backpack and her almost-empty tea.

"Oh, you don't have to move your stuff, sweetie," Auntie Grace says, patting Dawn's shoulder. "We like to eat and play in the garden." She points to Nai Nai's backyard, now bursting with azaleas and daffodils and trout lilies like they're a subsection of a botanical garden. Dawn didn't realize Nai Nai had seating there, but sure enough, when she cranes her neck to the side of the window, she spots a small stone patio and a wrought-iron table with six chairs around it—perfect for games and church gossip.

"Dawn will be joining us," Nai Nai says as she refills the kettle. "We're going to teach her how to play."

"How fun! Your grandma taught me how to play too, back in the day. Now I kick her butt," Auntie Grace jokes.

"Mmm," Dawn says. "Excuse me. I have to go to the bathroom."

She dips into the hall and closes the bathroom door behind her. On the toilet, Dawn stares at the clear plastic shower curtain, the pink bath mat,

and the wobbling bathroom caddy with the Vaseline and the face towels and the Bible on the lower rack.

She picks at the stitching on the toilet paper, perforating through the quilting to make tiny holes like a miniature kaleidoscope. *More time together. We can make up for it, yes?* Is that really what her grandmother wants? Or is she simply using Dawn's vulnerability as a tool, an excuse to play mahjong and avoid talking about the important things: Yé ye, and New Hampshire, and the New York life she claims doesn't exist? Dawn sticks her eye through one of the holes she's made in the toilet paper. Her grandmother will always lie to her. This, she is sure of.

"Dawn!" Nai Nai calls, rapping on the bathroom door. "We'll be in the backyard when you're ready."

"Okay!" Dawn shouts back. She rips the mangled toilet paper in half and flushes it down the toilet.

Minutes later, she leaves the bathroom, listening for Grace's and her grandmother's voices on the patio. Instead of joining them, Dawn turns left and walks into the hallway.

At the end of the corridor is Nai Nai's bedroom—simple with a wooden bed frame and a tan quilt matching the tan carpet and the tan walls and the walnut dresser. The window overlooks the front yard, the shade half-closed so that sunlight dapples the floor and the bedspread.

Not knowing what she's looking for, Dawn haphazardly opens each dresser drawer, scanning her grandmother's folded shirts, her Boscov's jogger pants and fuzzy wool sweaters. She lands on Nai Nai's baggy underwear and shuts the drawer.

Dawn approaches her grandmother's nightstand. It has two drawers with brass handles; Dawn opts for the bottom one. She's seen enough crime dramas to know that a person hiding something never keeps their secrets in the top drawer. Tugging on the handle, Dawn peers into its toile-papered inside to find a stack of cards and letters. *Bingo.* She rummages through them: Hallmark birthday cards from her father (he never wrote a note, just signed *Love, David* after whatever pat saying he'd picked in the card aisle at the pharmacy), an old bulletin from Concord Methodist Church, a gift receipt for a scarf bought in 2005.

She roots through the drawer until she reaches its base. Slotted in the slit of the wall and its floor is another piece of paper, this one heavier than the other cards, and yellowed, like it isn't from the twenty-first century.

Kneeling on her grandmother's carpet, Dawn carefully extracts the paper. It's a square note written in neat, slanted cursive. At the bottom is a name Nai Nai hasn't mentioned before. Dawn runs her fingers over the ink. The letter doesn't answer any of her questions about her grandfather, but it does tell her something else about Nai Nai, about the secrets she'll never share.

Pulling her phone from her jeans pocket, she snaps a photo. And then she places the note back in its slit and tiptoes out of the bedroom, moving through her grandmother's house in a haze. As she slides open the screen door and walks down Nai Nai's back porch steps, waving to her grandma and Grace Blevins on the patio, Dawn only has one question on her mind: *Who is Samuel?*

OceanofPDF.com

39
Audrey Zheng

On Saturday afternoon, after she's lied to her host parents about meeting up with Calvin, her still-assumed boyfriend, Audrey takes the subway to the Bronx Zoo. It's the first time she's been on the subway alone, but she's not worried: the subway is a second home. She knows the types—the businessmen, the white mothers with their peeling layers, the construction workers who look like ducks in their yellow hazard vests, clucking together in packs. When she's pushed against a metal pole, stuck to its sticky backside like a suction cup, she finds comfort in the familiarity of the routine weekend crowd that has forced her into this position.

The entrance to the Bronx Zoo is made up of five archways—two on each side of the building and one larger one in the center—and is topped by an ornate windowed dome, reminding Audrey of the basilicas in Florence, which she's never seen but has read about in *A Room with a View*, the newest book she's been muddling through. She started reading it to keep herself busy after mailing her wait-list letter to the University of New Hampshire.

In front of the archway is a gated dirt pit where a singular enormous elephant lumbers inside its cage, its tusk knocking at the bars. Audrey is startled to see the animal while standing in line. The juxtaposition of such a fantastical creature dumped behind a taxi stand, across from the hot dog seller and the passersby rushing to their next destination, confuses her. The elephant has been here for months (possibly years), Audrey reasons, so New Yorkers simply consider it another part of their commute on their way to

their jobs and their families. Audrey imagines calling up her parents (which she can never do, as the international fees are too expensive), and saying, *Ah, yes, and on my way home I said hello to Poppy the elephant; she was looking a little hot today.* She wonders what they do with the elephant in the winter.

Someone in line thrusts forward, stepping on the back of her heels as the swarm of parents and children eager to enter the zoo nudges closer to the ticket booths. If she were a good older sister, she would have taken Edwin, Bobby, and Teddy here and treated them to ice cream cones when they were tired of looking at the animals inside. Instead, she is meeting Samuel.

He appears as she reaches the front of the line, and she waves as he jogs toward her, breathless.

"Sorry," he says, adjusting his turtleneck sweater, apt for a breezy afternoon like today. "Got caught up with the roommates."

"Don't worry," Audrey assures him. She admires how his brown eyes complement the olive green of his sweater, and then promptly sweeps the thought under the dirt beneath the elephant's gigantic feet.

Samuel takes notice of the elephant. "Wow," he says, "this place is crazy."

"Have you ever been here before?"

"No. Have you?"

Audrey shakes her head and Samuel smiles. "A new adventure for the both of us."

They step through the archway, where a middle-aged man wearing a costumed train conductor hat vigorously points at the sign on the glass exterior that says *Adult ticket: fifty cents.* Audrey pulls four quarters from her purse and slides them under the opening.

"Audrey," Samuel says, "let me get this one."

"But I—"

"You're a student, and I make money," he interjects. "It's only fair."

You should be a student too, Audrey thinks. The man in the ticket booth glares at the pair as the throng squeezes in behind them. She removes two of her quarters and takes two from Samuel's readied hand.

"There," she says, "now it's equal."

Samuel scrunches his nose, but nods in reluctant agreement, and with tickets and a crude zoo map in hand, they walk through the underpass to the other side.

Not only has Audrey never been to the Bronx Zoo, she's never been to a zoo at all. She had chosen this spot for their rendezvous to get out of Manhattan and her familiar haunts: the movie theater, the dim sum restaurants, the Upper East Side and the Upper West Side, where she imagines Calvin is stewing over her. She didn't know what to expect when she entered the zoo, but it was not this.

Animals flounder in cages, the bars so close to the ticket holders that a person with particularly long, thin arms could stick their hands through the gaps and swat at a rhinoceros's crusting nose or a wolf's shaggy fur.

"Where should we go first?" asks Samuel, looking just as lost as Audrey.

Audrey spots a young girl with blond pigtails and a white puffy skirt marching decidedly toward a sign that says *This way for the tigers!* She starts chasing after the girl, beckoning Samuel to follow, like they are the children, and the pigtailed girl the parent.

The sign is a bit misleading—the tall, crosshatched cage holds *one* tiger who crouches on a platform in the center of the ring. Like at the entrance, hordes of people encircle the cage and the tiger, leaving Audrey and Samuel at the back of the pack.

Samuel leans over, his sleeve knocking into Audrey's elbow. "Is it going to do anything?"

"The tiger?" Audrey cocks her head at it. "Maybe it will do tricks?"

"Tigers do tricks?"

"I don't know," Audrey says, shrugging. "You're the one who's supposed to know things."

"I'm a history and English tutor, Audrey, not a zoologist."

"Oh, shush."

The tiger stretches its limbs and slowly stands up, and the crowd begins to murmur with excitement. Ahead, Audrey can see the blond girl in the puffy skirt jumping up and down, her pigtails flapping against her ears. Audrey and Samuel inch forward, Audrey on her tiptoes to get a better look. The tiger opens its black, cavernous mouth and yawns. It lumbers across the platform and then sits back down in its original spot.

"I think it's safe to say," Samuel asserts, "that this tiger is *not* going to do tricks."

Audrey laughs in response. "Maybe that *was* the trick—it was a distraction."

"A distraction for what?" asks Samuel.

“Stealing everyone’s money, of course,” she preens, “and secretly becoming a millionaire.”

“The first millionaire tiger.” Samuel taps his chin. “Impressive.”

“And the first tiger heist,” Audrey adds.

“Ah, yes. Very important.”

He grins at her, and Audrey smiles back, sheepishly fussing with her hair to avoid looking directly in his eyes. She sees Samuel so often, and yet every time they meet, she forgets how much she likes talking to him, how much she likes being with him.

“Okay, my turn, since you picked before,” Samuel announces. “We’re going to see the opposite of a tiger.”

“What’s that?” asks Audrey.

“A sloth, naturally.”

They see the sloths, and after that, the speckled deer, the meerkats, and a family of gorillas. When they pass by the sea lions wading in a shallow manmade pool, Samuel squints into the distance, like he’s thinking hard.

“What would you be, if you were an animal?”

Audrey ponders the question seriously. “In the zoo, or in the wild?”

“In the wild, in the water. Wherever.”

A zookeeper walks up to the pool wall and holds out a scrap of fish. The sea lions scurry toward the man, battling to make it to him first. One does—and when it chomps victoriously on the fish scrap, the crowd around it cheers and the zookeeper bows.

“I don’t know,” Audrey says, “maybe one of the sloths.”

“A sloth?” Samuel repeats. “Why would you say that?”

“Because,” she replies, “I’m . . . slow. Slow at English, slow at realizing things about Calvin.” She kicks the gravel with her heel. She can tell Samuel is looking intently at her. “And I love to sleep,” she jokes. “So sloths and me, we’re the same, yes?”

Samuel doesn’t say anything. Silently, they walk toward the flying cage—a series of pointed metal archways stacked beside each other, giving the illusion of an open-air tunnel. Inside the flying cage are tropical trees and fake moss, and an assortment of birds that squawk and flutter back and forth between the bars. There are far fewer people here than in the other parts of the zoo they’ve visited. Audrey supposes that makes sense: You can see birds anytime. You can’t find a tiger on the street.

“What about you?” Audrey asks tepidly. “What kind of animal would you be?”

They make their way through the archways, accosted by birds soaring past their ears.

“I’m not sure,” Samuel says. “You tell me.”

Audrey sighs. Leave it to Samuel to make her do the hard work. She thinks for a moment.

“You would be a chimpanzee.”

“Really? A chimpanzee? Why’s that?”

They pause in the center of the flying cage and Audrey gathers the courage to look at Samuel and stare right into his dark eyes. “Chimpanzees are one of the most intelligent animals,” she says. She read that on a sign somewhere in the zoo. “And they are interesting, and sociable, and kind. And they have high levels of empathy.”

Samuel chuckles. “I buy the intelligence stuff, but I’m not sure chimpanzees are all the other things you said.”

“They are,” Audrey insists, even though she’s only half-sure she read that sign correctly, “and you are too.”

The pair comes upon a flamingo standing inside a smaller enclosure under the metal archways. The flamingo creeps behind one of the imported tropical trees, hidden save for its head popping out from behind the trunk. The sign next to the enclosure says it’s a James’s flamingo, a species once thought to be extinct. According to the placard, the Bronx Zoo is the first in the world to house one. Audrey peers at its black-and-orange beak, its pink neck shaped like the letter *u*.

“I think you’re wrong,” Samuel says as a couple hustles past them, using the aviary as a shortcut for some other destination in the zoo.

Audrey frowns. “About you being a chimpanzee?”

“No,” Samuel says. “Though those were very nice things you said about me. I meant about *you*. You are not a sloth.”

“Why not?”

“Because you aren’t slow,” Samuel belabors, his voice tensing. “Not at all.”

“Samuel,” Audrey says, embarrassed by his sudden passion.

“You are like this flamingo.” He points at the bird, who is gradually stepping out from behind the tree.

“I don’t understand.”

“Audrey.” Samuel turns back to her and steps so close, the wool nap from his sweater prickles her bare arms. “You are rare and beautiful. In more ways than I know how to say.”

Audrey finds herself speechless, gaping at him as he draws in a steadying breath.

“You’ve turned my life upside down,” he continues.

“I—I know,” Audrey stammers. “Same with mine.”

“And sometimes you’re very frustrating. And stubborn.”

“All right,” Audrey agrees, “that’s mostly true. Though you’re occasionally frustrating and stubborn too, you know. And opinionated. I take back what I said before about you not being judgmental.”

“Oh, I know. We both have problems.” Samuel snorts and shakes his head. “But despite all these things, or maybe because of them, I like you, Audrey Zheng. Zheng Yi. And if you choose a different name one day, I’ll like that too.”

Abruptly, Audrey bursts into laughter, surprising herself. When she walked through the Bronx Zoo turnstile, she couldn’t have imagined this confession, this revelation from the person she has cared for and wanted more than she’d like to admit.

She opens her mouth to tell him she feels the same way but stops when Samuel pulls out a carefully folded note from his trouser pocket.

“I’m not very good at talking,” he says, “so I wanted to give you this.”

“But you’re great at talking,” she protests. “You just—”

“Read the letter. Please?”

Audrey examines his pleading face. “Okay,” she says, “of course I’ll read it.”

Their fingers brush as the note passes hands (did he notice every time their hands accidentally touched in the library, like she did?).

She unfolds the letter, Samuel’s familiar tidy handwriting laid out before her.

Audrey, it begins, *I know we are friends, and I know things are and will always be complicated, but I felt I owed it to you and to myself to tell you this. , . Love, Samuel.*

“‘I’d like to hold hands with you,’” she murmurs, translating the old Chinese proverb into English. “‘I’d like to grow old with you.’”

“It’s cheesy,” he says, “but strangely, it’s been on my mind lately. But if you don’t feel the same way, that’s fine, really. We can stay friends, and I’ll

always tutor you, so please don’t feel like—”

“Samuel,” Audrey interrupts, tucking the letter inside her jacket pocket and taking his thin, bony hands in hers. She laces their fingers together. “I’d . . . I’d like to kiss you. If that’s okay.”

Samuel doesn’t miss a beat. “Yes,” he says, “yes, that’s perfectly fine.”

Beneath the canopy of birds and beside the rare flamingo, Audrey’s and Samuel’s lips touch. Her hands curve around his neck like that night in the Golden Goose, and his fingers slide under her jacket and land on her waist, warping the fabric of her linen dress. Warm in the sunny chill of the April afternoon, they sink into each other’s bodies, as if they’ve become one stationary bird, fixed inside the flying cage.

OceanofPDF.com

40
Dawn Chin

For days, Dawn has been thinking about that note from a boy named Samuel. She punched the Chinese characters into Google Translate and discerned that the letter was clearly a declaration of love. Teenage love, maybe, but love all the same.

It's still on her mind in the dining hall as she sits shoulder to shoulder on a bench between Pen and Carla and across from Mariam and Remi. They're talking about Sanborn's upcoming spring carnival where they all wear white and braid ribbons through their hair like they're in a cult. Dawn goes every year because her friends make her and she's a sucker for the fried dough they wheel in on a food cart.

"This year, I want to braid Mariam's hair into a crown," Remi announces. "Like in *Midsommar*." He spews little bits of chewed-up corn all over the farmhouse table as he speaks, interrupting the milky would-be image of Samuel swimming in Dawn's mind.

"Ew," Pen shrieks, wiping corn off her face, "you're so gross, Remi."

"Also, cute idea, but you don't know how to braid, much less make a crown," Mariam says.

"Also, also," Carla says, "*Midsommar* is a horror movie. Kind of bad vibes, no?"

"Stop ganging up on me," Remi whines. He crosses his arms like a toddler, but simultaneously smiles at Mariam, corn wedged between his front teeth.

Dawn returns to her mashed potatoes and the foggy image of Samuel—she pictures him first as a Chinese boy with permed waves. Then she remembers that he's in the 1960s, not present day, and straightens out his hair, adding a tweed jacket and round tortoiseshell glasses.

"There's Remi corn on you too," Pen says, dabbing Dawn's shirt collar with a napkin.

"It's a disease," Dawn jokes. Privately, she wonders, why did Samuel and her grandmother break up? Or did they even start?

"So, are you down to go?" Pen asks, nudging Dawn's shoulder. "To the carnival?"

"Yeah," Dawn says, still looking at her food, twirling her fork through the watery potatoes like they're spaghetti, "definitely."

"Great," Pen replies, "then on Saturday, we can meet up in the quad. Maybe at noon?"

Dawn nods. "Okay."

She knows she's not engaging as much as she should. It's not her greatest performance. She glances up from her tray and surveys Pen's friends. She's beginning to understand each of them, like they are paint-by-numbers squares that make up Pen's personality, her desires, who and what she's drawn to. She enjoys learning about them, and in turn, about Pen. Like her, they're loyal, smart, empathetic. She imagines they treated Pen with immense kindness after her breakup with Fitz. Would her own friends treat her the same way if she told them the truth? What would they think about her secrets, her shame? She returns to her grandmother's many secrets, to Samuel.

Her phone—which has been sitting face up next to her cafeteria tray—lights up and both she and Pen glance at it. Dawn bends over and squints at the screen. She's received an email notification. An email notification from Beverley Tang.

Dawn drops her fork, and it clatters and splashes in the mashed potatoes. She swipes up and reads.

Dear Dawn, the email begins, I am sorry it took me so long to get back to you. I haven't checked this email in years—I mostly use it as a trash bucket for ads. Ha. I do recognize your grandma. That is indeed the both of us in the picture. Wow, it has been so long! We were very young then, and now we're all old and gray. I do have one question though. You said your grandma's maiden name was Liu? The Audrey I know—the girl in the

photo—her maiden name is Zheng. I even checked our yearbook to make sure. Maybe you heard incorrectly?

Dawn scrolls down.

> Anyway, I would be happy to talk about our life in New York and help you with your school project. You can email me at Beverley.Tang9021@founder.net. That's the email I actually check. We can schedule a time to talk. I pride myself on being good at all forms of technology, including video call. Talk soon, Beverley.

"Holy shit," Dawn says, scrolling up to reread the message.

Pen leans forward, hitting Dawn's shoulder with her back to get a better look. "What? Who is this?"

"Beverley Tang," Dawn murmurs, scanning each line of her email, "she's one of the girls from the photo. The, uh, newspaper clipping."

"Who's Bellemy Wang?" Remi asks over the salt and pepper shakers.

Without looking at him, Pen waves a hand across the table. "We're not talking to you, Remi. Shh."

Dawn can't believe it. She'd given up on Beverley Tang responding. And now here she is, sitting in the palm of her hand, happy to talk. Every emotion in Dawn's body bounces back and forth like a hundred Ping-Pong balls set loose in a cage. At last, she's dangerously close to the truth.

"I don't understand." Pen says. "How did you find her?"

"It's a long story. Basically, Google Image reverse search."

"Oh. Well, exciting." Pen shifts back into her own seat and clasps her hands in her lap. "You really are Sherlock, off on your own adventure."

She's joking, but Dawn can hear the hurt in her voice. After all, they had agreed to investigate together all those months ago. Guilt eats at Dawn and so, clicking off her phone screen, she tries to focus her attention on Pen. Out of the corner of her eye, she spots Carla and Mariam sharing a knowing look while Remi focuses intently on the napkin holder.

"The whole thing was very complicated," Dawn says carefully. "I'll tell you everything later."

"All right."

"And," Dawns adds, "once I talk to Beverley, I promise to update you immediately." She theatrically holds out her hand, her arm dangling over Pen's middle. "All right, Watson?"

Pen snorts as she examines Dawn's outstretched hand. She hesitates before shaking it. "Fine," she agrees at last, "I'll hold you to that,

Sherlock.”

OceanofPDF.com

41
Audrey Zheng

D*ear Mama and Baba*, Audrey Zheng's letter begins. Her pen hangs over the college-ruled paper she tore from her chemistry notebook. *I'm not going to marry Calvin. I'm in love with someone else.* (Is it love? Or is she being rash again?) *You don't know him, and you wouldn't like him, but he's wonderful.*

Audrey digs her pen into the loose-leaf, and the ink bleeds underneath. *How are you?* she scribbles in messy Hanzi. *I'm doing well. Calvin sends his regards.*

When she's finished her letter, she places it inside an envelope, licks its seal, and exits her bedroom. It's early Friday morning, and she still has time to catch the postman. In the kitchen, Auntie Fan is yelling at the boys, dollops of congee splattered on the countertop and all over Teddy's nose. Edwin and Bobby are fighting over the last piece of fatty sausage in the pot. Audrey secures the envelope under her armpit and rubs at Teddy's nostrils with a napkin.

"Clean that up," she says, pointing at the dribbling congee while swatting the other boys away and rooting through the watery pot for the last sausage slice, "or Auntie will get madder."

"That's right," Auntie Fan agrees.

In a rare show of obedience, Teddy climbs onto a step stool and wets a paper towel in the sink. He hurriedly scrubs the counter and the floor, salty sausage flecks dotting the corners of his lips.

When he’s finished, Audrey shepherds the boys into the hall. “All right, put on your sneakers in thirty seconds or no after-school candy.”

“But—” Bobby protests.

“Twenty-nine . . .” Audrey’s volume heightens. “Twenty-eight . . .”

“You’re really getting good at this,” Auntie Fan remarks, moving from the kitchen to stand next to Audrey in the awning. She unties her apron strings. “I don’t know how I’m going to survive without you in the fall.”

Audrey had almost forgotten about autumn—the changing leaves, the way life starts anew. What will that life look like? To everyone on the outside, she’s deciding between several schools, flashy universities whose rejections are collecting dust under her bed. In reality, she’s waiting to hear back from the University of New Hampshire after sending in her letter begging them to take her off the wait list.

On May first, all seniors must commit to a school. So on Monday, May second, Beecher allows its fourth-year students to wear their college shirts with their uniform skirts and pants. It’s the only uniform concession of the year, so everyone’s already picked out their outfits; Beverley and Patty spent the past few weeks scouring their university catalogs for the cheapest logo-emblazoned tops. Patty’s officially decided on Vassar and she’s used the last of the money her parents sent over to buy a burgundy scarf to match her shirt. If Audrey doesn’t hear back next weekend, she’ll be the only one walking around in her starched white uniform shirt, and the whole school will know she’s a failure. She won’t be able to hide it any longer.

Months ago, Audrey stood in her stiff new stockings and promised Principal Havemeyer she’d be a meaningful contribution to Beecher. She’d make him proud. She’s sure her collegiate future hinging on a single school is not what he had in mind.

“You’ll survive fine,” Audrey tells Auntie Fan, patting her sleeve. Bobby jumps from his knees to his feet, proudly showing off his tied laces. “The real question,” she adds, “is how will I survive without *you*?”

“Nonsense,” Auntie Fan scoffs, right as Edwin swings open the door, the knob crashing against the thin hallway wall. Audrey races after the boys as they clomp down the stairs, scolding them for their rudeness. She can hear Auntie Fan chuckling behind her, and she savors her teasing laughter as if it’s a good song on the radio.

The last week of April passes by in a blur, no matter how long Audrey tries to prolong it. She focuses entirely on school during the day, trying not

to think about university chatter, or Calvin, who shows up at the lockers intermittently, the heat of his glare ever present on the back of her neck. At lunch, she avoids the Chinese gossip girls and opts to eat lunch on the breezy bleachers by herself, chewing on cold rice and studying for her upcoming tests.

It's the Monday and Wednesday afternoons that she especially wants to stretch out like putty. With Samuel's work schedule, they haven't had much time together, so their tutoring sessions double as dates. Sometimes, when no one's looking, they sneak behind the bookshelf closest to the back wall and kiss between whispers and giggles, her fingers hooked around the historical nonfiction ledge to steady herself.

"Saturday," Samuel murmurs late on Wednesday, holding her cheeks in his hands, "I'm not working in the afternoon. Are you free?"

"Yes." Audrey nods eagerly. "After lunch."

"All right, then, two p.m.? Where shall we meet?"

Audrey thinks about all the places she hasn't been to yet, the ones she won't have a chance to miss if she leaves America. "The Met," she declares. "I've heard good things. Pretty nice architecture, don't you think?"

Samuel laughs quietly. "I'd say. Okay, see you then."

"See you then," she says, and she kisses his forehead.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is more ornate than all the buildings on the Upper East Side combined. The large limestone stairs are separated by towering, sculpture-topped columns and filled with equally sophisticated tourists in silk headscarves and belted trench coats, accessorized with flower hats and cat-eye sunglasses that would make Beverley groan with envy—a few weeks ago, she ripped out the latest Macy's spring sunglasses exclusive and taped it to the inside of her locker.

The Met's interior is just as impressive as its facade: Audrey's heard that works by some of the world's most famous painters, like Van Gogh, Monet, and Picasso, are in there. Samuel says as much when he excitedly gives the cashier a quarter for the pay-what-you-wish fee and picks up a map, unfolding it like it's a painting in itself.

But Audrey has another piece of art she wants to see first. She was reminded of it when she told Auntie Fan that she was going to the Met after

she took the boys to the playground—of course, with Calvin, who Auntie Fan promptly bemoaned never came to supper anymore.

"He'll be back soon," Audrey had lied. "We're just enjoying the nice weather, that's all."

As they ate their post-playground lunch, Auntie Fan instructed Audrey to head to the second floor of the Met when she got there, to see the art Mama had boasted about for so many years. Audrey couldn't believe she hadn't thought to come sooner.

Now Audrey plucks the map from Samuel's hands and scans its contents like she's trying to decode a riddle.

"What are you doing?" asks Samuel.

Audrey takes his hand and presses her lips to the inside of his wrist. "Let's go. I want to show you something."

They walk up the grand staircase in the middle of the great hall, stopping on the landing in its center to catch their breath.

"Richard Morris Hunt designed this staircase," Samuel notes in awe. "I read about him in a book."

"It's a beautiful staircase," Audrey replies, fanning herself with the map. "It makes me feel like I'm in a ballroom."

Samuel continues up the stairs. "One day, when I'm a real architect, I'll build you a whole house that looks like this. And you can feel like you're going to a ball every night."

"Can I wear pretty dresses to dinner too? With diamond necklaces?"

"You can wear whatever you want," Samuel affirms. "And I'll wear a tuxedo as well, if it'll make you happy."

"It will," Audrey says as they reach the top of the stairs. She beams at her boyfriend, wanting to kiss him in front of the beautiful women in their hats and the stern security guards. "I can't wait."

"Me neither," says Samuel, and he beams back at her.

Audrey looks around the balcony. "This way," she says, ushering him toward a small wing labeled *Far East Asian Art*. On the other side of the balcony, the elegant women and the men in suits shuffle toward the many European art galleries, bright and airy, and stuffed with tourists.

Audrey and Samuel duck into the Far East Asian Art wing. It's devoid of people and instead filled with rows of glass cases, whose outlines under the low lights leave shadows on the carpet.

“I wish you’d tell me what we are looking for,” Samuel says. “I could help.”

“But that would ruin the surprise,” Audrey argues. She crouches down to examine each case.

On the right, next to a wall filled with Japanese paintings, Audrey spots what she’s come to see: a faded bronze altar set, its centerpieces composed of archaic wine jugs and warmers, five drinking cups, and a rectangular table with corrosion marks where the vessels might have sat centuries earlier.

“This,” Audrey says, gesturing to the display like a newly minted tour guide, “is my family’s bronze collection.”

“Your family’s bronze collection?” Samuel repeats.

“Well, my great-grandfather’s bronze collection. He collected early dynasty antiques. These are from the Shang dynasty, I think.”

Samuel peers at the set. “I think this is a story I need to hear.”

“According to my mother, my great-grandfather was a viceroy in the Manchu government, during the Qing dynasty. He was very important. He created a university, and he was against foot binding, and he wanted women and international students to have an education.”

“Wow,” Samuel replies, “seems like your great-grandfather and I would get along.”

“I’d think so,” Audrey says, smiling. “Except he had a secret. The whole time he was in power, he was pretending to be Manchu, when he was actually ethnically Han Chinese. And eventually, he was murdered. After that, our family lost a lot of their money, so my wàigōng sold the collection to a wealthy European man who knew about art. And that man sold the set to the Met.” Audrey stares at the glass. “Mama used to tell me stories about my great-grandfather to get me to fall asleep at night. And now, here’s his work.”

Samuel shakes his head. “This whole time,” he says, poking her arm, “you didn’t tell me your family was Chinese *royalty*, Audrey.”

“A politician is not considered royalty,” Audrey retorts. She slumps onto the slatted bench underneath the Japanese paintings, and blinks at the altar set’s profile. “Besides, he was killed. Not exactly a great ending.”

“No,” Samuel agrees, “but I understand him.”

“You do?”

“Yeah.” Samuel squeezes next to Audrey on the bench. His head knocks against the frame of one of the Japanese paintings; it’s a black-and-white watercolor of a hawk perched on a jagged rock. It looms over the couple, its wings set back like it might break through the scroll and fly through the Far East Asian Art wing, screeching. “Like your great-grandfather,” he says, “I’ve come here pretending to be someone I’m not. I’ve done things to get ahead.”

“But that’s not—”

“I know,” Samuel interjects. “But still. I hate that this was the option I had.”

“It’s not who you are.”

“No, it’s not.”

“And it’s really the government’s fault,” Audrey insists, even though she knows very little about both the Chinese and American governments.

“Blame is such a tricky thing,” Samuel murmurs, more to himself than to Audrey. He stands up and walks back toward the front of the case, leaning forward to squint at the written description on the left side of the glass. “Duanfang,” he says. “That’s your great-grandfather’s name?”

Audrey nods and moves next to Samuel. She brushes her hand against his and, immediately, he interlaces their fingers.

“Yes,” she says, “Duanfang.”

OceanofPDF.com

42
Duanfang

Sequestered in his home, Duanfang had ample time to think. In the evenings, he furiously outlined meticulous plans for his legacy. But in the mornings, when his wife was looking after the servants, and his children were with their tutors, Duanfang could do nothing but pad around the walled garden like a prisoner aching for sunlight. Amid the foliage, he ruminated on his family's secrets, his history. He hadn't thought about them in ages. For why perseverate on your own blood, when there was so much to be spilled out there?

Yes, for years, he had ignored his true Han ancestry, his shameful blood. After all, he was nothing like them—prideful, narrow-minded, arrogant. The Han assumed that because there were so many of them scurrying through China like cockroaches, they deserved to rule. They deserved the power. Duanfang crushed a garden leaf in his fist. The lie his great-grandfather had crafted had become such a reality, he deluded himself into it being fact: He was a Manchu; he would always be a Manchu. And so would his children.

Now, they were young and naive, but soon, Duanfang avowed, they'd grow into esteemed, respectable Manchu politicians, greater and more important than he had ever been. His children's birth, their Han blood, the burden of who they really were—all this they did not need to know. They would rule for the rest of eternity.

OceanofPDF.com

43
Audrey Zheng

As the sun begins to set, the sky awash with strokes of yellow and pink, Audrey hurries home for dinner with her host family. She can't wait to tell Auntie Fan about Duanfang's altar set on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She has seen the proof: her family is a fixture of New York. In some way, maybe that makes her one too.

She turns the key in the front door and leaps up the steps, thinking of Mama and Baba and Liwei, China and Samuel, who she longs to see tomorrow and forever. Walking into the apartment, she kicks off her Mary Janes and slides on her flat slippers.

"Hello!" she shouts, breathless. "I'm home."

"In here!" Auntie Fan calls from the living room. Audrey is surprised she isn't already preparing for dinner. All the same, she weaves through the boys' tiny, discarded sneakers, and ambles past the kitchen sink, the rotary phone, her bedroom door, until she reaches the living room.

Everyone is present, as if Audrey has walked into an impromptu family meeting: Uncle Wen is reading a book in the recliner, the boys are on the floor playing with a train set the elders at First Chinese Fellowship gave them for Christmas, and Auntie Fan is sitting on the couch, her hands folded in her lap. The family's eyes move to Audrey as she enters the room, and her insides twist. She hadn't considered that this family meeting might be about *her*. Perhaps they have found out about Calvin and Samuel and all her lies—the gossiping women from the garment factory must have seen her on the street. She's been careless.

“Audrey, hello,” Auntie Fan greets her.

“Auntie, I—” But Audrey doesn’t know how to continue.

She follows her host mother’s gaze toward the coffee table. Between the catalogs and the cups of half-drunk tea is a fat, rectangular envelope.

“I know you’ve gotten so many acceptances,” Auntie Fan says, “but this is the first one we’ve gotten to—”

“Mama says the big envelope means you got in!” Teddy interjects.

“Teddy!” Auntie Fan scolds, and Audrey, inhaling her fears, the truths she thought she’d have to confess, wills herself to pick up the envelope, heavy with the weight of a thousand hopes.

She rips open the seal.

Dear Ms. Zheng,

We hope this letter finds you well. We appreciate your continued in interest in attending the University of New Hampshire this fall. It is thus with great pleasure that we offer you admission—

“Oh,” Audrey says, and she watches the room shift and spin before her, until it at last sinks into darkness with the sun outside. She’s done it. Gone are her imagined plane tickets back to Taipei, her deceit, her dread come Monday morning.

Audrey flips through the acceptance letter and the offered scholarship and shoves the entire packet into Auntie Fan’s arms. Her ears ringing, she picks little Teddy off the floor and spins him in a circle, his arms snug around her waist as he explodes into giggles.

Audrey Zheng is officially an American woman.

OceanofPDF.com

44
Dawn Chin

On the first Saturday of May—a week after the spring carnival—Dawn opens her laptop and hovers over the video chat link she sent Beverley.

The Vermont weather is decidedly warm, the grass outside Dawn's bay windows covered in petals like the perpetual start to a wedding when the flower girl skips down the aisle. The dorm has no air-conditioning, so Dawn's cracked open a window, and the slight breeze causes goose bumps to creep up her neck. She toys with the neckline of her shirt—a professional boatneck she's once again borrowed from Delia.

"Okay," she says aloud, "you can do this."

She clicks the link and the screen buffers and loads. A woman's face comes into view. She looks exactly like the newspaper picture and the blog photos, just older, with deep lines dragged across her forehead and faded sunspots darkening her cheeks. Her hair is styled into a neat, shiny bob, and she's wearing mauve lipstick and light concealer. She reminds Dawn of one of those classy elderly women she used to see in commercials.

"Hi," Beverley Tang says, "can you hear me?"

"Yes!" Dawn clears her throat. "Yes, I can hear you."

"Oh good."

Dawn glances down at the notebook next to her laptop. A few days ago, she drafted questions for Beverley. Now they look like a foreign alphabet scrawled across her page.

"Um," she says, "it's really nice to meet you. As you know, I'm Audrey Liu—sorry, Audrey Zheng's—granddaughter, Dawn."

“Yes,” Beverley says, “it’s nice to meet you too.” She picks up a mug and drinks from it, and Dawn shifts in her seat. “So, Dawn, you’re doing a school project on your grandma?”

“I am,” Dawn confirms, thankful for the segue. “I’ve been working on it this whole school year, actually.” She pauses. “I think I mentioned it in my email, but I’m tracing my grandma’s life in the 1960s, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement.”

“That’s very nice.”

“Yeah.” Dawn brings her hand back up to the boatneck collar and twists her finger around its center. “Anyway, my grandma . . . she gave me the newspaper clipping of you and her in New York.” She tries not to stammer through her half-truth. “And I thought it might be nice to hear from you, you know, as one of her old friends and learn what life was like for you then. Wanted to go above and beyond. If that makes sense.”

“Oh, it does.” Beverley chuckles. “You’re like your grandma in that way. Always going the extra mile.”

Dawn wants to laugh. In reality, she’s never gone the extra mile for anything but this.

“So,” she continues, “with that in mind, would it be all right if I asked you a couple of questions?”

“Of course! Ask away.”

Dawn inhales. “You and my grandmother went to high school in New York City, right? At Beecher Preparatory School?”

“That’s right,” Beverley says, “although Audrey only went for her senior year after she immigrated from Taiwan. I was there sophomore through senior year. I’m sure your grandma explained that to you, though.”

Dawn pinches the skin between her neck and her clavicle. After all these months, Beverley Tang has casually confirmed the truth in just a few minutes: Her grandmother did not go to high school in New Hampshire. She went to New York.

“Uh-huh,” Dawn says, “yes, she mentioned that. What was Beecher like for you both?”

Beverley smiles and shakes her head, like she’s recalling a fond memory. “Fun,” she says, “and chaotic. Me, this girl Patty, and your grandma were the best of friends. We took Audrey under our wing when she moved here. She was so innocent and nervous in the beginning. She barely spoke English. But she learned quick.”

“My grandma’s English is nearly perfect now,” Dawn agrees.

“I’m sure. But I didn’t just mean her English. She learned how to be American. Well, we all did.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, we went to parties, and wore American clothes, and liked American boys. Gosh, I went through so many of them. The boys, I mean.” Beverley rolls her eyes. “I had too much fun in my day.”

Dawn remembers the parties Nai Nai talked about, the ones where she pictured her grandma wearing flouncy sixties dresses and drinking alcohol, and dancing into the night. So, they were real, and Beverley was there too.

“That sounds great.” Dawn forces a smile. “I’m trying to do that too. Er, have fun.”

“Good,” Beverley says. “This is the time for it.” She sips from her mug. “I think I went through a boy a season. Audrey dated too, though she might be too embarrassed to tell you that. She had some interesting relationships.”

“Interesting,” Dawn echoes. “In what way?”

“Oh, you know, I don’t want to gossip. It really was so long ago.”

“My grandma’s mentioned dating in school,” Dawn quickly fabricates, pulling down Delia’s top so the fabric from her earlier fussing lies straight. “I’m sure you won’t be saying anything she hasn’t told me. Or will tell me in the future.”

“Well,” Beverley says. “There was Calvin, of course. He was a difficult one, not very nice to her, frankly, and when they broke up, we all—”

“Wait,” Dawn interrupts. She doesn’t understand. “Calvin? Calvin Chin?”

“Yes.” Beverley blinks in surprise. “Your grandma told you about him, then?”

“Um.” Dawn suddenly feels winded, like she’s just run miles on the Sanborn track. “Calvin Chin is my grandfather. Or he was. I mean, he still is, but he died from cancer when I was five. So I didn’t really know him well.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that,” Beverley says. Dawn recognizes the shift in her voice. “I didn’t realize they’d gotten back together. And gotten married. I thought after Samuel . . .” She trails off. “Well, we were all young, weren’t we? People change.”

Dawn leans forward, her stomach pushing into the desk. “Samuel? He’s someone else my grandma dated, right?”

“Yes, they were together through the end of high school. And at that point, Calvin went abroad. But you should really ask your grandma about this. It’s her life.” Beverley laughs nervously. “How is she, by the way? I haven’t talked to her in ages. Her last name changed from Zheng to Liu?”

“No, no, she’s Audrey Chin. Changed from Zheng. I got confused before. And she’s fine. She, uh, works at a library.”

“Your grandma always wanted to be a librarian,” Beverley says brightly. “I’m happy to hear that.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m retired. But before that, I was an event planner. And a mother. I have a lot of children—and grandchildren. They keep me busy.”

“Uh-huh,” Dawn says, but her mind is spinning. There are so many things she wants to ask, but she doesn’t know where to begin. She doesn’t think she can fake this polite, professional facade much longer. They are talking about her grandfather. And Samuel, the boy whose letter her grandmother’s kept for all these years.

“My children,” Beverley rambles on, “they’re scattered across the country, but thankfully, they come back often—my husband and I live outside of Los Angeles. Actually, Patty—I mentioned her earlier—she visits a lot. She was also in that newspaper photo! Oh, she would love to see Audrey. We both would. Your grandma and I had a few phone calls after we graduated, but things really petered out.” Beverley sucks her teeth. “Maybe that was my fault. I know it’s been decades, but if she’s willing, I’d love to chat, and perhaps someday she could even visit—”

“What happened with Samuel?” Dawn blurts, unable to hold it in any longer. “Where did he go after high school?”

“Samuel?” Beverley repeats. She pinches the bridge of her nose. “Well, I don’t know. I think back to China. We didn’t hear from him after school ended.”

“And what about Calvin? You didn’t like him? He wasn’t nice?”

Dawn knows she shouldn’t be asking this—she’s losing it—but she can’t pull herself together. She thinks her parents would be ashamed of her. Her grandmother too. She can picture Nai Nai sitting beside her in her pilling cardigan, her face stony.

“Well, I don’t know if I’d say *that*.” Beverley laughs again and scratches the back of her neck. “Anyway, we really were quite young. And I probably shouldn’t be talking about these things.” She swivels her head to look at

someone off-screen and motions to them. “Oh, Dawn, this has been so nice, but my husband needs me out in the yard. I’m sorry to cut our visit short.”

“It’s fine,” Dawn answers in a daze. “Thanks for your time.”

“My pleasure, truly. And please, give your grandmother my email. I’d love to catch up.”

“Okay, I will.”

“All right, bye-bye, then.”

“Bye.”

Beverley Tang clicks out of the meeting, and the screen glitches into a hazy fuzz before fading to black. Dawn shuts the laptop.

OceanofPDF.com

45
Dawn Chin

Thread by thread, Dawn is trying to unravel Beverley Tang's words. Calvin Chin: difficult and not nice, despite Beverley's excuses. He and her grandmother broke up at some point in high school and then—she doesn't know when—got back together. Got married. She conjures a blurry image of Yé ye in her mind: his thinning black hair, the bald patch on the back of his head. He was quiet; she remembers his low conversations with Nai Nai in Mandarin, a language they often switched to when they were talking about something they didn't want Dawn to understand. Once, she thinks, despite being frail and sick, he insisted on tucking her into her bed and reading her a picture book—a story about a mouse maybe, and a princess. Was that real? Or did she make it up, a nice memory so she could think of him fondly all these years later? Was he actually mean and horrible?

And what happened with her grandma's former boyfriend, Samuel? They seemed like they loved each other, especially given that letter. Why did they break up? And where did he disappear to? People don't just go back to China, never to be seen again. There's always a reason. The more Dawn learns, the more questions she has. She angrily paces back and forth between her bed and her desk.

"Bullshit!" she shouts to no one.

And she realizes it's true: It is bullshit. All the lies, all the secrets, the masks her family wears, the one she puts on too, like a good show will erase the past. How can you call yourself a family when you don't know the

first thing about each other? How can you call yourself anything at all? Dawn digs her fist into the bed frame.

A knock sounds at the door and Dawn stills. It's probably one of her suitemates; she'll tell them to go away. She doesn't need Caroline or any of them dragging her to the dining hall, forcing her to talk about inconsequential things like homework and AP exams. But when she whips open the door, Pen is standing there, carefully balancing a chocolate chip cookie on a square napkin.

"Hey," she says, holding out the cookie. "I got this for you from the dining hall. Thought you might want a post-call snack." Pen grins. "How'd it go with Beverley?"

"Oh," Dawn says. She stumbles backward as Pen walks across the threshold. "It was fine."

"Really? You don't look fine." She cocks her head at Dawn. "Your face is all red."

Dawn's hands fly to her cheeks, and she rubs at them like she's trying to remove a stain. "It's just not a good time," she says, "but thanks for the cookie."

She turns to face the bay window, the sky and the trees blurring into shapeless blue and green blobs, like the view is melting. All she can think is Samuel, Calvin, Samuel. A hand touches her shoulder, and she winces.

"Dawn? What's going on? Let me help you."

"I don't need your help," Dawn says, snapping around to face Pen. "Please, go away."

Pen's lips part but she doesn't say anything. She is still holding the cookie on the napkin. She looks past Dawn, at the window, and then shakes her head.

"God," she mutters, "I told myself I wouldn't do this. But here I am again."

Dawn blinks in the sunlight. "What?"

"This." Pen's arms stretch out past her sides and whirl about, almost hitting Dawn as they swing. "You. It's like no matter what I do, you just push me away constantly."

Dawn folds her arms over her chest. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Pen snorts. "Do you remember that speech I gave you at Elsie's? I told you I wasn't going to spend my time caring about someone who doesn't

give a shit about me. But lately, that"—she jabs her finger at herself and then at Dawn—"is exactly what I'm doing. And it's honestly ridiculous."

"What do you mean?" Dawn asks. She swallows Pen's words and the lump thickening in her throat. Tightening her grip on her rib cage, she works to push everything down. "Of course I give a shit about you."

Pen shakes her head and pushes past Dawn. She reaches the desk, the laptop where Dawn and Beverley talked only minutes ago, and drops the cookie and the napkin on the table.

"Sometimes," she says, turning back to Dawn, "but most of the time, you're pushing me away. You randomly ghost me, for example. You take days to respond."

"I—" Dawn sputters.

"And," Pen interrupts, "you never let me in. You clearly hate when I talk about Fitz. And you won't let me help you with whatever is going on with Beverley and your grandma." Tears spring in her eyes and she wipes them away. "You think I don't see any of it. Or that I'll ignore it. But I know what you're doing and I'm not going to sweep it under the rug. God." She laughs bitterly. "You know I told my parents about you?"

"You did?" Dawn croaks. She can't imagine telling her parents about Pen. They'd likely disintegrate.

"Oh yeah," Pen says, tears continuing to run down her cheeks, "and they were so happy for me. Wanted to meet you and take you out for dinner and everything." She shakes her head. "All that effort for a girl who couldn't care less."

Dawn stares at the crying girl before her. She's at a loss for words. A different Dawn—a better Dawn—wants to pull Pen's body into hers and tell her she's wrong. She cares so much. Yet the present Dawn can only think about running out of her own dorm room, turning off her phone, and pretending Pen and their whole relationship never existed. Dawn doesn't do either; she just stands there, frozen.

Pen tucks her hair into her hoodie and sniffles. "I have to go," she says. "Good luck with your project."

And then Penelope Patel slams the door, leaving Dawn alone again.

OceanofPDF.com

46
Duanfang

There was a riot. It was 1911 and Duanfang was fifty years old—he had weathered half a century, and dozens of politicians that had swelled and rippled like the changing ocean tide. Washed ashore, he awakened and met the autumn chill. It was October and the people were restless. Duanfang was used to that, but this time, Emperor Puyi was nervous, and there were talks of abdication. Duanfang told his family that hyperbole was the enemy's greatest weapon. It, of course, led to fear.

But don't you recall? Duanfang was not fearful. He had survived riots and dishonor and dissenters. He jumped at the chance to help Emperor Puyi save his sacred Manchu dynasty. After all, it was Duanfang who made it what it was, with its innovations and universities, and revered antique collections. He would save it again through something much less tactical: battle.

So Duanfang marched back into the capital to subdue the rioters. Despite his family's pleas for him to linger in false retirement, he dusted off his armor and led the troops with Manchu pride.

OceanofPDF.com

47
Audrey Zheng

By midafternoon on June fourth, 1966, the day of Audrey Zheng's graduation from Beecher Preparatory High School, the temperature has risen from sixty-three degrees to ninety. Auntie Fan is in the lobby, fanning herself with a program and trying to fix the deflated top of her beehive updo. Audrey spots her, Uncle Wen, and the boys through the glass cutouts in the lobby doors as she and her classmates scurry down the block to the side of the school—a shortcut to the gymnasium.

Months ago, Audrey used this alleyway as a hiding spot, a place to disappear to as she waited out Calvin, anxious to watch him leave so she could meet Samuel at the library. Now, she and the rest of the class of 1966 parade down the pathway in their white frilly dresses and suits, contrasting against their black caps and gowns like they are penguins emerging from winter.

"I'm going to miss you both," Patty says, already blubbering.

"We have the whole summer," Beverley replies. "Well, except for Audrey. We've only got two weeks with her."

She's right: Audrey's decided to enroll in an optional, free-of-charge University of New Hampshire summer program for students who might need remedial help ahead of their freshman year. Audrey didn't want to leave her family and friends so soon, but ultimately, she jumped at the opportunity—she wanted to start off college on the right foot.

"We'll make it the best two weeks ever," promises Audrey.

“Yeah, yeah.” Beverley scoffs. She pulls out a comb from the inside of her gown (*her bra*, Audrey later surmises) and yanks it through her hair. “And when school starts, we’ll write each other every week. Right?”

“Of course. Until Patty meets cool Vassar girls and forgets all about us,” Audrey teases.

“I could never,” Patty cries, and the girls laugh.

Truth be told, Audrey doesn’t think she could have made it a whole year in America—much less New York—without Patricia Gao and Beverley Wong. They’ve been her friends from the very beginning. When she tripped and stumbled, they picked her up with unfailing patience and grace, more than Audrey might have had if the roles were reversed. She feels embarrassed just thinking about that time she dragged Patty to Fifth Avenue to find a Christmas gift for Calvin, traipsing through designer stores for hours to squint at things Audrey could never afford. With Patty dabbing at her eyes before they’ve crossed the stage, Audrey doesn’t want to pile on more sentimentality. But she will miss them all the same.

The dean of students directs the students to line up against the wall in alphabetical order, like they practiced on Thursday. Audrey finds her place at the back of the line with the rest of the *z*s, though the school had initially confused her last name for *Yi* and Audrey had to explain to the dean of students that Chinese surnames traditionally come first. She decides that in college, she will go by Audrey Zheng to make her—and everyone else’s—lives easier.

The University of New Hampshire still feels like a faraway, make-believe school, even though she’s taking the train there in fourteen days. Perhaps it is natural to think of it as make-believe since all the other college acceptances Audrey has received have been fake. (*So funny, you chose the last school you got into!* Auntie Fan had remarked.) In make-believe New Hampshire, the leaves are perpetually cantaloupe orange, and the literature classes are easy, and Samuel takes the train up from New York every weekend to see her. They haven’t talked about that, not really, and Audrey doesn’t think graduation day is a good time for a serious chat. She would rather think about the leaves that *are* changing. Across the alleyway, pollen drifts from the azalea bushes framing the outdoor bleachers. Maybe she will take up gardening in college too.

Beverley reaches her arm past Jacqueline Wright and Christopher Yates to poke Audrey’s shoulder. “Are you ready?” she asks.

“No.”

Beverley grins. “Me neither.”

In the gym, Audrey is amazed at how many people they are able to pack into one large room. She can’t find her host family in the stands anymore; lost among the hundreds of other parents, she spots them only when her name is called and Edwin squeaks out a lone cheer.

After every student has received their diploma, Principal Havemeyer says something saccharine about the specialness of the Beecher senior class, and how instrumental each will be in the fight for humanity and a better future. Audrey is simply happy she knows the word *humanity* and doesn’t have to look it up in the dictionary tonight.

She meets her host family at the corner of Seventy-Third. The heat is like an oven, and though Audrey has peeled off her gown, she is sweating through her cream qipao, the one Mama sewed and sent to her especially for graduation.

Auntie Fan yanks Audrey into a hug, kissing her damp cheek. “We are so proud of you,” she says, and then in Mandarin, “Nǐ de fùmǔ yě huì wèi nǐ jiāo’ào de.”

“I know they are proud,” Audrey replies, beaming, “and I know you are too. Thank you for everything. I couldn’t have—”

“All right.” Edwin swats her arm with his program. “If I don’t get out of this heat, I’ll faint.”

Audrey rolls her eyes. “You’re very dramatic.”

“I learned that from you,” he retorts, but he lets her ruffle his hair anyway.

Uncle Wen adjusts his tie—candy striped to match Beecher’s school colors. “Our dinner reservation is soon. We should go.”

“Yes!” Auntie Fan waves her purse in the air. “I made it for nine people at this place downtown—I assumed Beverley and Patty are coming, and Calvin too, of course.”

Audrey shoves her cap under her armpit, the sweat staining the cloth. “Oh,” she says, “Beverley and Patty can join us. But Calvin’s left already. So he won’t be coming for dinner tonight.”

They cross the street as the light changes, Auntie Fan’s heels clapping on the blistering pavement. “But I just saw him walk across the stage. That was only thirty minutes ago.”

“Yes,” Audrey says, trying to keep up, “but he’s spending time with his aunt and uncle in Westchester this evening. He’s already left.”

“I see,” Auntie Fan replies. “Well, that’s too bad.”

Audrey has no idea where Calvin is, and she hopes with their quick pace down the block, they won’t run into him. She last talked to him after commencement procession rehearsal, when they were stacking their chairs on the steel dolly. Audrey had seen him in the halls but hadn’t spoken to him since mid-April when he accosted her in the girls’ bathroom.

“Hi,” she said as she lifted her chair above her head and slammed its legs down on the pile. “How are you?”

“Fine,” Calvin replied tersely.

She’d figured he had moved on by now, found another girl to fawn over. But according to the Chinese lunch girls, he hadn’t. In fact, he hadn’t even thrown a single party since they’d broken up. He was caught in a stupor, the lunch girls concluded. Audrey had left him sticky and stale, splayed out like the stubborn globs of months-old syrup stuck to the cafeteria tables. Audrey didn’t think she was capable of ruining anyone like that, especially Calvin.

“Do you know what college you’re going to?” she asked tepidly, waiting for him to stack his chair (he did not, and instead rocked it backward on his palm).

“I’m not going to college,” Calvin said.

“Well, that’s fine.” She would not give him the satisfaction of pity, or worse, sympathy.

“Of course it is.” Calvin wrapped his fingers around the chair’s spine. “College is pointless. For idiots who don’t know what they’re doing with their lives.”

“Okay,” Audrey replied. She wanted to get out of this conversation, but there was a traffic jam by the gymnasium exit and if she excused herself to line up, she’d be standing two feet away from Calvin, awkwardly pretending he wasn’t right behind her.

“Anyway,” he continued, “I’m going to Europe after graduation. Going to travel all over, use my parents’ money the way it should be used.”

“All right.” Audrey glanced back at the crowd. “Europe sounds exciting.”

“It is. You’d have liked it—Paris in particular. They have great pastries there, and dresses, and shows. I would have taken you there if you hadn’t . . .” Calvin paused. “I’m just saying, you’d have enjoyed it.”

“Sure, I would have.” But truthfully, she doesn’t think she would. Not because of Calvin necessarily, though he was certainly a factor, but because those were things he’d *thought* she’d liked because he never asked—she’d savored the thrill of trying on outfits for her first party in his brownstone apartment, as well as the meaning behind the turquoise Pierre Cardin dress he’d chosen for her, but not the designer clothes themselves, nor the proposed pastries or the shows; after all, she’d only seen movies, and didn’t think she’d understand French operas or plays. He had always thought his choices were excellent, and she had simply agreed.

The secretary opened another exit, and the students dispersed, clearing the traffic jam. “I hope you have a great time in Europe,” Audrey remembers saying as she turned toward the moving crowd, “truly.”

Audrey approaches her aunt and uncle on the other side of the crosswalk and thinks of Calvin’s face as she left the commencement rehearsal. He’d looked wounded, as if he were a deer struck by a speeding car. She leaves the image behind and climbs into the taxi Uncle Wen has hailed to take them to dinner.

They eat at a French restaurant in Greenwich Village. Audrey has been to French restaurants before with Calvin, but not with her host family; she knows this is a treat for them. She can tell by the way the children stare up at the waiter in his expensive bow tie and vest.

They are the only nonwhite people in the restaurant. Some of the patrons glance at them and whisper behind their cloth napkins, but if Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen notice, they don’t show it. Once Beverley and Patty arrive, they order a feast: escargot and coq au vin, beef stew and champagne for the girls, who are now all eighteen. For dessert, they share a caramelized apple tart and cut up the best pieces for the graduates.

“I feel like you are all my daughters,” Auntie Fan says, her eyes watering, “and I will be so sad to see you go.”

“We *are* your daughters,” Patty affirms, squeezing Auntie Fan’s hand across the table. “Gosh, you’ve been everything to us.”

“Absolutely everything,” agrees Audrey. The caramel melts on her tongue, sweet and forgiving. In college, she hopes to get a part-time job and save enough to visit her family in New York regularly and eventually bring Mama, Baba, and Liwei to America too.

Beside her, Beverley kicks Audrey’s shin and nudges her head at her wristwatch. Audrey’s been enjoying this dinner so much, she forgot the

time.

"Uncle and Auntie," she whispers, not wanting to insult her host parents, "this has been so, so wonderful, thank you—"

"But you girls have to leave, right?" Auntie Fan raises an eyebrow. "You have a party to attend." She pats her husband's leg. "We remember what it was like to be eighteen. Go, have fun."

"But," Audrey says, "I really, I just, I can't thank—"

"We know," Uncle Wen interjects. "Now listen to your aunt and leave before the bill gives me a heart attack."

Audrey kisses her parents and squeezes her little brothers' cheeks. Auntie Fan shoos her away, and the girls at last exit the restaurant and meet the early summer night.

"I am *stuffed*," groans Patty, clutching her stomach as she balances against a lamppost.

Beverley steps over a grate and holds out her arm into the street. "Well, make some room. I hear Jeanie is bringing a hundred dou sha bao."

"A hundred?" Audrey echoes. "Wow, her uncle is very nice."

Tonight, however, they are not celebrating at the Golden Goose. Instead, all the Chinese students at Beecher and other graduates from First Chinese Fellowship have chipped in three dollars each to rent out a back room in a Brooklyn Heights bar. It was Marcia's idea—she thinks drinking tequila on a kitschy cobblestone street among seen-on-film brownstones sounds fabulous.

Beverley successfully hails a cab (the trains going to and from Brooklyn are not running this weekend), and the car flees Manhattan and jaunts across the Brooklyn Bridge, entwined with its spires and the skyscrapers floating above the island and the river. Back in September, when Audrey had first seen the bridge, she thought it otherworldly, a link between places she could never call her own. Now she leans her head against the cab window and smiles at the dark water.

The girls arrive at Grace Court Bar right at ten. On the outside, it's an unassuming, squat store wedged under terraced apartments, but inside, cherry-red walls and hooked, low-lit lamps spotlight the men in their loosened ties and unbuttoned dress shirts. Like usual, Beverley leads the way through the tangle of tipsy men to the back room behind the curtain (velvet and secure, unlike the one in the Golden Goose), where the rest of

their classmates sip cocktails and dance to music playing from the corner table jukebox.

Audrey scans the crowd but doesn't see him. He's not technically a graduate, but she wanted him here; besides, he's tutored half her friends, who think he, too, has finished high school.

"I'll be right back!" she shouts to Beverley and Patty over the music. Pulling the curtain aside and ducking past women in silk halter dresses and the hordes of men trying to woo them, Audrey makes her way back onto the street. She stands in the darkness, waiting. He said he'd come right at ten.

And then a hand grabs her wrist and whirls her to a nearby shrub, its leaves prickling her ankles.

"Samuel!" she yelps. "You scared me."

"Weren't you waiting for me?" he asks, laughing. "I figured that's why you're outside."

"Well," Audrey sputters, scrunching her nose and flinging her arms around his neck, "still. It's not nice to jump out at someone like that."

"Sorry." He holds her face in his palms, and she nests inside them. "I won't do it again."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Audrey kisses him long and hard before they return to the party.

OceanofPDF.com

48
Dawn Chin

Dawn Chin is seeing the bus ride from Vermont to New Hampshire in a new light: the gaudy bridge masquerading as New England charm, the ugly, zigzag bus seat covers, the gray, monotonous highway. They remind her in equal parts of the artificiality and the desolation of America, the way it tries to be beautiful but just appears cheap. They reach rush hour traffic, and the Greyhound slows.

She thought that leaving Sanborn for the day would help clear her head. But instead, every time she closes her eyes, she thinks of Pen. *You never let me in. You think I don't see any of it.* Again and again, the scene replays: her crumpled face and watery eyes, her confession about her parents, the chocolate chip cookie she brought that Dawn threw in the trash can after she left.

The bus jerks as the light turns green and the driver hits the gas. Dawn's eyes fling open, and she grips the armrest like she's on a roller coaster. Penelope Patel is right, isn't she? Dawn Chin is an impenetrable glass wall, just like her grandmother. A wall made of easy lies and fake smiles and fear that someone will wipe away the fog and see the real them, the terrible them.

When the bus arrives at the depot, Dawn marches down the steps and through the utopian little streets.

Nai Nai's house looks the same as always. Spring flowers line the brick steps leading up to the windowed door, homey and inviting, like they're

emblems of the person that lies inside. Dawn knows that's not true. She makes a fist and raps on the door.

Nai Nai emerges in her usual turtleneck and pilling sweater-vest.

"Hello," she says, letting Dawn in and plodding to the kitchen to make their usual cups of tea. She doesn't even notice the look on her granddaughter's face.

"I don't want tea, Nai Nai," Dawn says tightly. She stands in the kitchen's awning, her vision hazing over the refrigerator covered in all their Christmas cards from years' past. Dawn's face is multiplied six times over. She doesn't think Nai Nai had these up when she last visited. Perhaps it's another tactic, a pretend gesture of goodwill to avoid Dawn's probing at the truth.

"No tea?" Nai Nai responds, her hand resting on the kettle. "Well, I have water or coffee if you'd prefer that? I might have milk too, somewhere in here . . ."

"I don't want milk or coffee or water," Dawn snaps. She doesn't mean to sound that harsh, but it comes out anyway.

"All right." Nai Nai pauses. She turns away from the stove and looks at her granddaughter. "Are you feeling okay, Dawn?"

Dawn's sweatshirt sleeves pool past her hands and she pushes them up her forearms. "I know about Beverley," she blurts. "I talked to her."

Nai Nai's eyebrows fold together. "Beverley?"

"Seriously, Nai Nai, don't act like you've never heard of her. I know about New York, I know about Samuel, I know that apparently Yé ye was a horrible person in high school, I know all of it." Her words tumble out like heavy stones and she finds herself clutching the door frame for balance. Her body feels large and precarious, as if she might swing through the awning and topple her grandmother.

Nai Nai pulls out a glass from the cabinet and slowly fills it with water. The sink faucet rushes, and Dawn watches the water spin and bubble in the glass. Without speaking, Nai Nai sets the cup on the kitchen table. She sits down on one of the hard wooden chairs.

"So," she says at last. She points at the chair opposite her. "Let's talk about it."

"Are you going to tell me the truth this time, though?" Swaying in the awning, Dawn loosens her grip on the walls, slowly feeling gravity tug her feet to the floor. Her sleeves fall to her wrists. "All of it?"

“I thought you knew everything? As you said?”

“I know bits and pieces that don’t exactly make sense,” Dawn says. “And I know you’ve been lying to me this whole year.”

Glancing back at the kettle, Nai Nai’s eyes fixate on the handle. She looks tired in the shadow of the window, pale sun casting narrow rays on the bridge of her nose and hair. She motions to the chair again. “Sit, please.”

Dawn shakes her head. “No, I want you to promise first. Promise that you’re going to actually be honest. I’m so sick of all this.” She opens her mouth again to continue, but a strange sound emerges from her, like a baby’s curdled cry. It’s mortifying, but she can’t take it back.

She scrunches the hem of her sweatshirt in her fist. “You know, for so long, I thought you hated me. Like when you ignored me on those cruises, remember? But now, I actually don’t think you hate me. I think you’re just hiding. Which is more pathetic.” Her words spray spittle across the room, and she’s reminded of Remi in the dining hall spraying corn. She’d been thinking about Samuel then—retreating into herself, like usual. “And what’s worse is I think that I inherited that trait. I’m like *you*, Nai Nai.” Dawn stabs her sternum with her pointer finger and thinks of her own secrets, her own buried pain. “We’re exactly the same.”

She sniffles as her grandmother stares at her in silence. Unable to meet Nai Nai’s eye, Dawn turns away from the kitchen and faces the foyer. Her shoes sit in front of the door, and she resists the temptation to run to them. It’d be easy to leave.

“That might be true,” her grandmother whispers.

Dawn whirls back around. “What?”

“You say I’m hiding. I think that’s true. But I have a reason.”

“What do you mean?”

Nai Nai gestures again to the seat across from her. “Please sit,” she says again, “and I’ll tell you everything, I really will.” When Dawn doesn’t respond, she adds, “I’ll give you the whole truth. As long as you agree to something, all right?”

“What?” Dawn asks.

Nai Nai wraps her hands around the water glass. “You can’t use what I’m about to say for your history presentation. It’s between me and you, blood to blood. Deal?”

Dawn thinks about it for a moment. Wiping snot on her sweatshirt sleeve, she pulls out the chair and carefully sits.

"Fine," she says, "it's a deal. Blood to blood."

OceanofPDF.com

49
Audrey Zheng

Beecher Prep's 1966 graduation party ends like a movie montage from a film Audrey thinks she's once seen: Drunk on cocktails, the girls hug each other and sob, promising to be friends forever, even if they barely talked in high school. Boyfriends and girlfriends leave hand in hand, excited to make out for the rest of the summer, until August branches into fall and there are new people to love.

Patty and Audrey are outside the bar, leaning against the brick wall as they wait for Beverley, who's kissing Robert goodbye, and Samuel, who's caught in a game of poker. Samuel's winning because he's good at keeping a straight face and hiding his cards.

"The end of an era," Patty muses. She hardly ever smokes, but ten minutes ago, Jeanie Chun offered her a cigarette, and she accepted, rationalizing it by saying something about adulthood and how she'd have to learn to smoke to be taken seriously at Vassar. Now the smoke billows out into the lamplit street, creating twilight clouds.

"Still feeling sentimental?" Audrey teases, trying to ignore her bloated stomach. She's eaten too many of Jeanie's dou sha bao on top of all the fancy French food from dinner.

"Ugh." Patty sighs. "I'm always feeling sentimental." She takes a drag of her cigarette and coughs. "You'll say goodbye before you leave for your summer college program thing, right?"

"No, I'll leave without saying a word. You'll never hear from me again."

"I hate you," Patty grumbles.

“I hate you more.” Audrey grins.

Beverley, Samuel, and a horde of other drunk teenagers burst through Grace Court’s front door, and stumble onto the sidewalk. Audrey spots Samuel behind Beverley, his jacket pocket bulging—money from his poker winnings, Audrey guesses.

“There you are!” Beverley cries. “I didn’t know where you went.”

“We were waiting for *you*, Bev,” Patty says, stamping out her cigarette. “I told you twice.”

Beverley giggles. “Oops. I forgot.”

Audrey’s never seen Beverley this drunk before, but she likes how she’s a looser, cuddlier version of herself. Sober Beverley is all barbs and wires, but this Beverley seems ready to blubber alongside Patty.

“Anyway,” Beverley says, “Robert’s got a driver!” She pulls him out from the other boys, who scatter across the sidewalk like flies. “His father hired him to take us home.”

“He’s very happy I’m joining the military,” Robert says proudly, adjusting his suit jacket as if it’s a uniform. “Thinks I’ll get a Purple Heart one day.”

“You’d have to be pretty severely injured or dead to get a Purple Heart, Robert,” Patty replies, “which I don’t think you want.”

“What do you mean by *severely* injured?”

“Gunshot wound,” Patty says coolly, “perforated eardrum, massive bone fracture. That kind of stuff.”

Robert’s Adam’s apple bobs in the lamplight. “Well, I don’t think—”

“Honey, is that your driver?” asks Beverley.

Sure enough, a beige Ford Mustang convertible pulls up to the front of the bar, its engine thrumming. The man driving is wearing a checkered cap and a long trench coat like Robert’s father has hired him to wear a costume as well.

Samuel comes out from behind Beverley and shields his eyes from the bright headlights. “That’s quite a car,” he says, though only Audrey can detect the derision in his voice.

“Isn’t it?” Robert crows. “Come on, pile in.”

Beverley peers into the car’s open interior. “But there are only four seats. We can’t all fit.”

“That’s all right,” Audrey says, pushing her heel off the bar wall and walking toward her friends. “You, Robert, and Patty take it. Samuel and I can get a cab. And the other boys are very capable of finding their own rides.” She gestures to the boys, who are toppling onto each other as the soberest of them hails a taxi.

“Are you sure?” Beverley bites her lip, balancing her body on the car door.

“Positive,” Samuel replies. He loops his arm around Audrey, and she settles into the crook of his shoulder. He smells like gin and Albert’s cologne; he told her earlier that his roommate had insisted on Samuel wearing it for the party.

“Okay,” Patty says, hugging Audrey goodbye before nudging Beverley off the car door and cracking it open to let them in, “get home safe, you two.”

“We will. And, Robert, don’t make any bad decisions!” Audrey calls after them as the trio buckles their seat belts.

“Not me,” shouts Robert, flinging his hand toward Beverley in the back seat. “She’s the one who’s drunk.”

The car rumbles away, followed by the yellow taxi with the boys crushed inside, and as the night rolls into early morning, Audrey and Samuel are left on the empty street.

“Well,” Samuel says, kissing Audrey’s temple, “it’s just us.”

They walk along the empty cobblestone street. Marcia—despite her generally irritating disposition—was right; this place feels carved out from a film scene with its tall, leaning trees and quaint redbrick brownstones. Window boxes filled with plants spill out between the shutters, as if they’ve always been a part of the neighborhood, even though Audrey knows they were planted. She’d like to take root here with Samuel. As their walk carries them to Hicks Street, she imagines them living next to the steepled church on the corner—Samuel as an architect, her as the local librarian. They’d take their children to this church on Sundays. She is no longer a little girl, though, and she knows her dreams are simply that: dreams.

“So,” Samuel says, breaking the silence, “guess the boys got the last cab. None to be found out here.”

“Not yet anyway,” Audrey replies, though secretly, she’s happy one hasn’t passed them by. She wants this night to linger.

“Do you think there are cabs in New Hampshire?” Samuel wonders aloud. “How will I get to you?”

“I’m sure there are cabs at the bus or train stations,” Audrey says, “or maybe I’ll learn to drive. Get a car, I don’t know.”

“Big plans, I see.”

“Only for you, of course.” She doesn’t mean to sound so flirtatious, but Samuel stops walking and grabs her cheeks, kissing them seven times as she giggles.

“Samuel!” she shrieks, catapulting into his arms and kissing him on the lips. She deepens the kiss, and their tongues tease and dance, as if they are relearning a waltz. Lately, she’s been entranced by the image of them lying in the same bed, in a college dorm room, alone. She thinks she’d like that. She’d feel safe.

As they pull apart, Samuel cupping her face in his hands like he always does, she knows that they should have a discussion—a real one—about what they will do in two weeks when she leaves. But she can’t bear it. Why can’t they stay like this forever?

Audrey doesn’t say anything. Instead, she and Samuel untangle their limbs and continue their walk through Brooklyn Heights. The neighborhood is still dark and empty. The corner stores have closed, and through a lit window half-hidden behind a trash can, Audrey spots a lone bartender sweeping the floor.

“Maybe we’ll have better luck finding a taxi around the bridge,” Audrey suggests, kicking a loose stone on the sidewalk. “More traffic there? More tourists?”

She’s never seen the Brooklyn Bridge up close before, but Beverley’s walked across it with Robert. She told Audrey it’s nice seeing the river so near, the men selling ten-cent cooler water to make the early summer heat more bearable, the women with their parasols and paper fans to shield them from the sun.

“Tourists?” Samuel chuckles. “At one in the morning?”

“I don’t know. Isn’t this supposed to be the city that never sleeps?”

“I guess you have a point. Let’s try it.”

They make their way through the fruit streets—Orange, Pineapple, and Cranberry—and then onto Poplar, where the buildings turn squatter and uglier and the quaint quiet of Brooklyn Heights transforms into eerie

silence. As they approach the start of the bridge, they make out a handful of cars, but still, no taxis.

"Maybe we should just walk home," Samuel muses.

"All the way back to Chinatown?"

He shrugs, unbuttoning his sports coat. The humidity from earlier has dissolved into a balmy night, and Audrey fights a swift breeze as it catches her hair, whipping strands across her neck.

"It's, what, thirty minutes?" Samuel estimates. "I don't see how else we'll get home."

Perhaps they should have somehow squeezed into Robert's rented convertible. Then again, despite the cool weather, and the long bridge devoid of water sellers and tourists and beautiful women with their parasols, she's gotten her wish: twenty more minutes with Samuel. Twenty more minutes in their mere fourteen days together before she leaves for college.

"All right," Audrey says as Samuel drapes his coat over her shoulders to keep her warm, "let's walk."

The bridge at night reminds Audrey of Christmas on Fifth Avenue with its string lights looped across the cables. They descend from the top of the suspension towers all the way down to the street. Audrey can imagine the crush of people admiring the lights at suppertime, the men in their top hats and the women in their early summer jackets. She slides her arm into Samuel's coat sleeves. She's like a doll wearing his clothes, the fabric extending far past her arms, the jacket hem skimming her knees. At Beecher, all the girls with boyfriends wore their letterman jackets, but Audrey thinks Samuel's jacket, with its loose threads and worn elbow patches, is far superior.

"A bunch of students protested here about two years ago," Samuel says, pointing to the empty stretch of bridge ahead of them, "against school segregation."

Audrey nods. She's learned more about segregation since being with Samuel—and privately, she's decided she was foolish before for not wanting to know more, for hiding from the things that scared her or that she didn't understand.

“Nearly half the students from New York City public schools participated,” Samuel continues. “It was one of the biggest protests ever.”

“Wow,” Audrey replies, trying to picture all those students marching on such a narrow walking path. “Did you participate?”

She knows the answer as soon as the question comes out of her mouth. Of course he didn’t. “Sorry,” she says, “that was silly of me to ask. I know you . . . I know you can’t. But you must have—”

“Made posters?” Samuel finishes, grinning. “Yes, of course. It was actually one of my first protest posters. I’d come to the States just a couple months before.”

Audrey looks out at the wires and metal slats extending past the bridge’s walkway and over the car path, ending just before the water. She bets that none of the Beecher students attended that protest. They’re a private school, after all. They don’t need to desegregate.

“Was the protest successful?” she asks.

Samuel shrugs. “Depends on your definition of success.”

Audrey’s not sure what her definition of success is either.

They reach the part of the bridge where crisscrossing struts join Brooklyn with Manhattan, and Audrey realizes that in some way, they are in two places at once. As their shoes traipse down the walkway, she hears another set of footsteps several paces behind them—soft at first, and then louder, stumbling, as if the person behind them is tripping over their own feet.

“Samuel,” she says, stopping to turn around, “do you hear that?”

Squinting in the dark, she spots someone about fifteen feet away, gradually walking toward them. They have something in their hand: a fat candle—no, a beer bottle.

“Probably just a drunk person,” Samuel says, peering over his shoulder. “Don’t worry about it.”

But as they’re stopped in the center of the bridge, the person gets closer, and a face comes into view under the glinting string lights.

“Ah,” Calvin Chin hollers from paces away, “hello, hello. My favorite people.”

Audrey freezes, watching as he walks toward them.

“What are you doing here?” asks Samuel. His voice is calm, but Audrey can hear the strain underneath. She curls her body inside Samuel’s arm like a shell.

“Having a little nighttime jaunt,” Calvin says as he approaches them. “You?”

“A nighttime jaunt at this hour?” Audrey asks before she can stop herself. Under the speckled light, she examines Calvin’s rumpled dress shirt, his black pants and expensive loafers. It’s the same outfit he wore to graduation.

Calvin rolls the bottle between his palms and the last drops of beer drizzle out between his legs and onto the ground. “I could say the same for you two. What are the lovebirds doing out so late?”

Audrey ignores the way he says *lovebirds*. “We’re coming from the graduation party. I didn’t see you there.”

Calvin is now a foot away from them. “Oh yeah, I’ve been replaced.” He waves the beer bottle in the air. “So long, Calvin’s infamous parties.”

“You could have had your own,” Audrey replies.

Calvin shakes his head. “Nah.” He sighs, and Audrey tastes the alcohol on his breath, heavy and pungent. “I was going to go to the little Brooklyn Heights thing, you know, but . . .” He trails off. “Well, I found a bunch of great bars nearby. Better ones.”

“Good for you,” Samuel says. “Anyway, we should go.”

“C’mon, we’re all going to the same place,” Calvin protests. “Can’t we go together?” He reaches for Audrey’s wrist and impulsively, she stiffens, feeling his firm grasp on her skin, envisioning the red welt that will inevitably show up after he lets go. It feels like yesterday he was grabbing her in the hallway after chemistry.

“Stop it,” Samuel demands, “seriously.”

Calvin laughs. “I didn’t take you for the jealous type.”

“I’m not jealous.”

“Well, goodie.”

Audrey finds her strength and pulls, their arms in a tug-of-war until finally she wrenches her wrist from Calvin’s grasp. Samuel immediately takes her hand in his, examining the red indents from Calvin’s fingers.

“You guys are nauseating,” Calvin says, rolling his eyes. “Jeez, Audrey, were we this nauseating? ’Cause I don’t think so.”

“You’re drunk,” Audrey snaps. “Just walk away.”

Calvin steps closer, the toes of his leather loafers touching her pumps. “Look at all that attitude,” he murmurs. “You weren’t like this in the

beginning. I guess that's my doing. I made you what you are, your name and everything. And huh." He laughs. "See what I get in return."

Audrey wraps Samuel's blazer over her chest. She knows Calvin doesn't have a clue what he's talking about, but still, she hates the way he thinks he can define her. "Stop being dramatic," she tells him.

"Just being truthful." Pushing his finger into the beer bottle's opening, Calvin twirls it like a basketball. The glass rolls unsteadily, threatening to crack.

"Let's get out of here," Samuel whispers. "We only have half the bridge left."

Calvin snorts. "I can hear you, you know. You're not good at being quiet."

"Bye, Calvin. Get some sleep." Audrey interlaces her fingers with Samuel's and walks backward. They are turning and continuing toward Manhattan when Calvin calls after them.

"You think you're so smart," he slurs, "but you're really not."

"Shut up, Calvin," Samuel says, glancing over his shoulder.

Calvin pushes ahead, pacing in the couple's shadows. "I'm going to Europe in a few days. Going to travel the world." His breath blows on the back of Audrey's neck, and despite her efforts to keep moving, she pauses, goose bumps prickling her skin. "So, I don't care about the church stuff anymore, the money I borrowed, all that, blah, blah, blah. And I was thinking about that tonight, and it put an idea in my head. Tomorrow, I might go for a walk and stop by the police station. Good idea, right, Samuel? Get everything out in the open?"

Calvin is grinning when Audrey and Samuel spin back around.

She doesn't see it coming when fist meets face. Initially, her mind cannot process the disembodied arm flying toward Calvin, but then she realizes that it is not disembodied and in fact belongs to someone—Samuel.

Calvin doubles over, clutching his jaw. "What the fuck?"

"I—I'm sorry," Samuel stammers, flexing his reddened knuckles. "I wasn't—"

This time, when the arm lunges forward, Audrey knows who it belongs to. Calvin's glass beer bottle swings above Samuel's head and falls like a small yet terrifying chandelier. Just as it is about to hit, Samuel jumps backward, and the bottle shatters on the bridge floor, shrapnel scattered around their party shoes.

“Samuel!” Audrey shrieks, crunching over the shards of glass and yanking him away. “Are you okay?”

“I . . . I’m fine.”

Calvin snorts. “You didn’t ask if *I* was okay when he punched *me* in the face.”

“What’s wrong with you?!” Audrey screeches. Her voice echoes in the silence.

She tries to pull Samuel behind her, closer to the intersecting wires separating them from the cars and the water beneath them, but before she can, Calvin grabs a fistful of Samuel’s shirt, smearing it on his jaw’s raw welt.

“Hey, Samuel, you believe in equality, right?” Calvin sneers. “An eye for an eye?”

Samuel coughs and Calvin twists the shirt around his neck. Wildly, Audrey lunges toward Calvin, crashing between them as Calvin’s hand comes down again, hurtling toward Samuel, but pounding into Audrey’s temple instead.

“Stop!” Samuel croaks, finding his voice.

It’s too late. Audrey touches her head. She’s never been hit like that before. Once, Liwei accidentally knocked her with a textbook, but that was different, and it was more like a sting than a hit. It left a bruise that faded in a week. Now Audrey’s pain builds and pulses, and she thinks she’s moving through a black tunnel or a portal to another planet that spins endlessly and forgets everything. She staggers away from the edge of the bridge and flounders in its center.

When she rouses, fuzzy bodies come into focus, but they are not standing on the bridge beside her. Instead, they balance on the flat metal beams past the bridge’s tall, crisscrossing struts—the ones meant to keep people from leaving the designated walkway. Underneath the beams lies an empty car lane, and beyond that, the dark river.

There are punches and swings, like the fights she’s seen in movies, but clumsier, unchoreographed, and in danger—Audrey realizes—of real consequences.

“Get off of there!” Audrey cries as Samuel’s and Calvin’s moving frames blur before her. They dart farther and farther away as if neither of them can hear her.

In the distance, Samuel's foot wobbles on the metal beam, and his arms windmill in an attempt to keep him steady. The bridge's string lights cast a spotty glow on Samuel's face, and Audrey watches as it floods with fear.

Calvin takes the opportunity to swing.

No! Audrey wants to scream, her mouth cracked open, but nothing comes out.

Calvin's fist swipes the air, missing Samuel by inches. And suddenly, Calvin is tripping backward, caught by the force of his own punch. It happens quicker than Audrey can understand: He is on the beam, and then he is not, but he hasn't fallen into the space between the metal slats or onto the pavement car lane. No, there's a bang—he must have hit his head on something, another metal beam, or maybe the side of the bridge, but either way, he is careening off the edge, an edge Audrey cannot see as it's shrouded in darkness. At once, Calvin is falling—down, down, down into apparent nothingness. Audrey hears a splash as his body strikes the black water.

She is running as close as she can to the now-silent river, her head jutting through the wires and over the walkway's ledge when Samuel comes darting back across the bridge's beams and collapses into Audrey's arms.

"What," he sputters, "what happened? I don't—I didn't mean—he just—"

She yanks Samuel's deadweight to the center of the bridge. "It's okay. It's okay, it'll be okay." They both know it won't be.

Samuel's arms are wrapped around her middle like a child's, his head buried in her dress. "I got carried away. I didn't realize—maybe he—he can't—"

"He hit his head," Audrey says, her voice strangely calm despite feeling sick with shock. "He hit his head and fell into the water. I don't think we can . . . There's no way to get to the river."

"We need to help him," pleads Samuel. "We should call the police."

"Yes." Audrey nods. "The police. We'll find a pay phone."

She pulls Samuel up to a standing position, and he braces his hands on her forearms for balance. They are the only ones on the Brooklyn Bridge—no cars, no loiterers, no tourists. The world is empty save for them and the water and Calvin sinking into the sea.

"Samuel, we need to get off the bridge," Audrey says. "Now."

OceanofPDF.com

50
Audrey Zheng

When the Brooklyn Bridge meets Manhattan, the world no longer seems asleep. A man with shoulder-length, tangled brown hair and a corduroy jacket walks past them, sipping a coffee and holding a newspaper as if it is seven in the morning instead of one. Or maybe it is one thirty—Audrey can't keep track of time anymore. She wonders where the shoulder-length-hair man is going, and if it's difficult to keep up his hair like that, and then she wonders why she is thinking about this when she just watched a man fall into the East River and probably drown. Not a man, a boy—hers, once.

Audrey grips Samuel's hand as they hurry past city hall. Why is it that people think of the most ludicrous things when someone has died? Or is it only Audrey who has become so hideous and twisted?

Samuel is silent as they walk. He hasn't spoken since they left the bridge, but he's stopped shaking, which Audrey takes as a good sign. They haven't passed a pay phone yet, but Audrey spots one right ahead on the corner of Centre and Chambers, near the subway station.

"There," she says, pointing. They have to walk through two lanes of cars to cross the street, but there aren't many, and it's easy to scurry between the headlights like rats.

As they approach the pay phone, the image of Calvin's face burns through Audrey's brain. His alcohol-laced breath, his threats, the films they used to watch, the night he tried to have sex with her, their first kiss in Central Park, that dinner where he showed up late to Auntie Fan's, when he picked her up off the library floor and sat and ate lunch with her on the

bleachers every day last autumn. After her zǔfù died, her parents told stories about him—how good he was at cards, how helpful he was, how everyone loved him from first glance. He sounded like a saint. But the grandfather Audrey knew took naps all day and snored and spilled his tea on the cold ceramic and was often too lazy to clean it up. She remembers her grandmother on her hands and knees, patting the floor dry.

She cannot distill Calvin Chin into one glorious thing. Doing so would be easy and cheap, and it makes her angry.

Samuel tugs open the telephone booth door, and they step inside the cramped vestibule; it's not meant for two people. His heavy breath creates condensation on the metal phone. Audrey tries to think of what they'll say to the police.

He was drunk. It was an accident. He was choking Samuel. He swung when he fell. He tripped and hit his head. He's likely at the bottom of the river by now and you'll need helicopters and divers and expensive scuba equipment to pull him out. She doesn't know how this works. Then she thinks of Samuel.

"You can't call the police," she barks. She holds her hand over the coin slot as if to shield it from him. "You can't."

If they call the police, they won't only ask about Calvin, they'll ask about Samuel, and soon they'll pull apart his story. They'll find out he's here illegally and he'll be deported, or worse. Maybe they'll deport his friends too. Audrey can see the scintillating headline already: *Illegal Oriental Kills 18-Year-Old Boy in Brutal Brooklyn Bridge Fight.* They'll mention her too, as a chess piece prepared to capitulate to the game's winner.

Samuel's hand covers hers, and she flattens her palm against the slot. But he simply pats her hand gently before sliding his fingers down the rotary and the telephone, until they surrender to his side, lying limp against his wrinkled trousers.

"I know," he says, defeated. "If I did . . . it wouldn't be good."

"No, it wouldn't," Audrey insists, as if she is arguing with him even though they agree with each other.

Lifting her hand from the coin slot, she loops the phone cord around her finger, remembering when she was standing inside Auntie Fan and Uncle Wen's apartment in the middle of the night, doing the same thing as she ranted about Calvin.

Calvin Chin, always at the center of things from the moment she stepped foot in America, from the moment her mother wrote his name on that scrap of paper. Audrey stares at her distorted reflection through the metal phone's exterior. She had thought they were rid of him: he was going to leave New York and fly to Europe. Why couldn't they find a taxi at Grace Court? Why did he have to follow them to the bridge?

She yanks open the phone booth door and walks out into the night, Samuel following her.

"What are we going to do?" he asks.

"I don't know," Audrey says.

She is supposed to be thinking about college and her soon-to-be long-distance relationship, not about her ex-boyfriend engulfed in the East River's depths. She had imagined a simple life for herself: a small suburban home, children perhaps, who she'd teach to ride bicycles and take to the playground after school. She can picture Samuel waiting at the end of a leaf-strewn slide, scooping up their chunky toddler and twirling them in a giddy circle. What is the point of imagining something that can never happen? Without papers, Samuel's secret will remain a burden and a barrier—he cannot go to college, or get a real job, or have a true life with Audrey. And now, another irreversible secret hangs heavy over both their heads, a parting gift from Calvin Chin, haunting the couple in life and death.

Audrey laughs bitterly. It would be comical if it weren't so ironic, the way the quest for freedom can become a prison.

She is pacing between the phone booth and the street, encircling Samuel like one of the boys in the painting that hangs above her dresser, when the idea comes to her. Audrey stuffs her wind-struck hair into the back of Samuel's jacket.

"I have a plan," she tells him.

Samuel's head shoots up. "What is it?"

"It's not one you'll like."

"Audrey, tell me."

She feels like a porcelain doll cracked open—frilly dress torn in half, saucer-sized eyes off-kilter and possessed. "You look like him," she says. "Poor man's Calvin. That's what Robert calls you."

Samuel crosses his arms. "I don't understand. What does that have to do with anything?"

“I still have a copy of his key. We’ve both been to his apartment. We can find his passport, his birth certificate, his aunt and uncle’s address. It won’t be too difficult. We may not even need all that.”

“Audrey,” Samuel replies, “slow down.”

“It’s a good plan,” she insists. “It will solve everything. Calvin’s death will go unnoticed. You won’t have to live”—she gestures at him—“like this.” *Justice,* she thinks, *is subjective and perverse. We’ll right a wrong.*

Samuel’s face flickers with understanding and then fear. “No. That’s crazy.”

“It is,” Audrey agrees, “it is crazy. But it’ll work. We can live normally and leave this whole disaster behind.”

“So, I’ll become . . . him, and then what? Where will we go?”

“New Hampshire. I’m going to school there anyway. Maybe you can enroll too. There or somewhere else. You can become an architect.”

“We can’t,” Samuel repeats, shaking his head. “Think about it.”

“I *am* thinking about it.”

Audrey steps forward and takes Samuel’s cold hands in hers. She looks up at him, fierce and wild under the moonlit summer night. They have switched roles: she the instructor and he the student.

“You trust me, right?”

Samuel doesn’t hesitate. “Yes,” he replies, “I do.”

“Then we should go right away.” She glances at the dark subway station next to the telephone booth. “We can get to Calvin’s apartment in a half hour and be back before dawn.”

After two subway transfers, they arrive at Calvin’s brownstone, or what used to be his brownstone. Audrey digs through her purse, and underneath the grimy, leaking lip gloss, the rolled-up dollar bills, and the crinkled commencement program from earlier today is the key ring with the copies that he made for her. Audrey tries not to think about it as she pushes one key into the lock and the door jolts open.

It’s silent inside: Calvin had bragged constantly that he was going to rent the ground-floor apartment and charge them twice the going rate, but he never got around to it. The people above him on the third and fourth floors are apparently away on summer weekends—they have second homes in the

Hamptons. Even so, as she and Samuel walk up the familiar, velvet-carpeted stairs to Calvin's door, she feels like someone is following them.

They step into his parlor. She had come last for one of his parties where she'd poured vodka and whiskey into sloshing cups on his glass bar cart, and watched him fall asleep, slumped over the coats on the green ottoman. She remembers his drool dribbling down the side of his chin and pooling on the stack of coats; later that night, Kimberley complained that her new red wool coat collar was stained with his saliva. She'd thought he was pathetic then, unconscious at his own party. Now he lies dead at the bottom of the East River. Audrey marches farther into the apartment.

"Let's try his bedroom," she says.

Samuel flicks on a light as they enter: the bed unmade, books and newspapers scattered across his desk.

"I'll make it," Samuel announces, clearing his throat as he points at the rumpled sheets. "He would have made his bed if he went to Europe."

"Good idea," replies Audrey.

She starts in on Calvin's desk, thumbing through the newspapers and the school assignments, letters from his aunt and uncle. She takes an essay of his—something about the French Revolution—to copy his handwriting later. She is surprised by how methodical she is, how logical, as if this is a daily chore, like folding the laundry or getting fresh vegetables from the Chinese grocery store. She supposes that is what she'll have to pretend this is when she goes home later tonight and tucks herself back into her girlish bed and tells Auntie Fan about the graduation party tomorrow morning in a syrupy, cheerful voice.

She glances at Samuel, who is fluffing one of Calvin's decorative pillows. In the museum, when they were admiring her great-grandfather's collection, he had remarked that he hated the secrecy, the necessity for lies so he could stay in America. Is she only making it worse?

"Found his passport," Samuel says, opening Calvin's nightstand drawer, "and his birth certificate."

"Found his aunt and uncle's address," Audrey responds, holding up the envelope with their monthly letter packed inside. She also finds his most recent bank statement.

Audrey scans the room. With the homework assignment and the documents, it seems they have everything they need—their expedition was

faster than she thought. It stuns her: how full of life Calvin was mere hours ago, and how easily he is erased.

"Well," she says hesitantly, crossing over the Persian carpet to meet Samuel in the center of the room. Car lights from the window slice through his face, just like that night when she'd asked him to tutor her. She gives him the papers. "Better for you to have and stow away for now."

"Yes," Samuel agrees. He swallows. "I'll need a haircut."

"What?"

"A haircut and new clothes. To look more like his picture."

"Oh, yes," she replies. Tepidly, she moves around him to the closet and pulls out tan trousers, a cream cashmere sweater, and a belt. She places the clothes in Calvin's leather satchel—the one he always used at school—and hands the bag to Samuel. He puts the papers inside and latches the satchel.

"That's all?" she asks.

Samuel nods. "I think so."

They tiptoe out of the apartment as if their steps might wake the neighborhood. Once they are outside, Audrey tries to avoid looking back at the towering brownstone, the manicured bushes and the pink flower petals pouring down from the front stoop magnolia tree, but she can't help it. She squishes the petals under her heels.

Tomorrow, she will meet up with Samuel again and they will figure out all the details. And in thirteen days, their lives will start anew.

OceanofPDF.com

51

Have you heard about the couple from New York? They are on the run, although no one knows this but them. On the train, they are suddenly convinced that two men in the seats across from theirs are secretly American immigration patrol officers, or Chinese spies, or somehow USSR double agents sent to haul them to the Soviet Union as punishment. But the men in the seats across from them read their newspapers and light their cigarettes and leave before the couple's stop. They are safe.

The couple from New York steps off the train in Durham, New Hampshire, after a transfer in Boston and a nine-hour ride. The length of the ride reminds the girl of her first trip to America, although this, of course, is different.

Durham looks nothing like Manhattan, and they find themselves missing the scuffed concrete, the rats, and the noise. All the houses here are neat and pastel, and the Main Street thoroughfare is filled with storybook signs and scalloped awnings. The couple buys slices of pizza at the local shop, and moseys in the bookstore, pretending to fit in. There aren't many Asian couples—or people, for that matter—in Durham, New Hampshire, but no one really pays attention to them. After all, there are ice cream cones to be had, and football games to attend, and benches to sit on while admiring the trees, which will boast the most spectacular red and orange leaves come autumn—or at least that's what a brochure in the grocery store says.

When the first wire transfer lands in their bank account, the girl has already started university and is living in a dorm room with a roommate who mostly ignores her. The boy wisely picks an apartment a ten-minute

drive away and uses the money to pay for the rent and a used car, which the couple shares for back-and-forth weekend trips.

During the school day, the boy volunteers at the local shelter, and everyone remarks what a stand-up, kind gentleman he is, that Calvin Chin. The boy nods and smiles and tries to adjust to his new name. In the evenings, he takes night classes at Keene State, which is a three-hour round-trip commute from Durham, but he doesn't mind. He loves the classes. He loves to learn. He gets good grades.

To everyone back in New York, the couple has separated. The girl calls her friends and family occasionally but remains aloof and vague. The boy cuts ties with everyone. These are not choices they happily make; the girl often misses her little brothers and parents in New York, her friends in colleges of their own, but she has no choice. Being on the run has its pitfalls and sacrifices.

Eventually, like the boy, she loses touch with her connections in Manhattan. She finishes college, and she and the boy marry in a simple city hall ceremony. Two of her friends from college attend the last-minute reception dinner at the couple's favorite diner, none the wiser about who they really are.

They move to Concord, New Hampshire—an even smaller, quainter town—and use the money they've amassed over the years to buy a house. They get jobs as the local librarian and the studious architect. When the boy turns twenty-one, the monthly checks stop coming. Instead, Calvin Chin's entire trust fund is deposited in their bank account. The couple argues about what to do with it all—what is morality, they wonder, when you've crossed every moral line—but they eventually decide to save 50 percent of it and give the other 50 percent to charity every year. As a result, they are often invited to charity galas and balls and are asked to be chairpersons for this and that cause, but they always decline, saying they are too busy.

Six years later, they bring the girl's parents and younger brother from Taiwan to New Hampshire (the boy, sadly, can never see his own parents), and the family is overjoyed at the union of a couple they think they know: ostensibly, the match they planned for their daughter all those years ago. The girl's family is there for the birth of the couple's baby—a boy, healthy and plump. Months later, the girl's parents return to Taiwan, and the girl and her husband bring their baby boy to the playground, just like she imagined they would.

So they continue like this, the couple from New York, until they forget they are on the run. The real Calvin Chin is never found. Sometimes, they pretend he is not in the river or the ocean, but instead in Europe sipping cappuccinos. Of course, this is not true. Nevertheless, their secrets stay buried, emerging only in nightmares, murky and incomplete.

OceanofPDF.com

52
Dawn Chin

Dawn Chin stares at her grandmother's untouched water glass, Nai Nai's sweater-vest warped and flattened in the water's reflection. After talking for hours, Nai Nai picks up the glass and sips, and Dawn follows her grandmother's hand to her mouth, until she reaches Audrey Zheng's face.

"I wish I knew what to say."

Audrey shakes her head. "That's okay. I barely knew how to tell you." She pushes back her chair and stands up. "Tea?"

Dawn nods. At last, she does want tea.

Her grandmother returns to the kettle, and places it on the stove. Dawn watches the blue flame flicker and grow underneath the kettle's bottom. Audrey leans against the counter, her arms winged. She doesn't seem as old anymore.

"Does anyone know?" Dawn asks. "Other than me?"

"No. Not even your father. I didn't want to . . . burden him." The water in the kettle starts to stir. "Besides," she continues, "he's never been like you."

"What do you mean?"

"You're curious," Audrey says, turning her gaze to the window, "and single-minded."

Dawn isn't sure if that's a compliment or an insult.

"This whole year, you had a goal—finding out about my life—and you did everything you could to achieve it." Audrey chuckles. "I used to be like that, once."

“I didn’t mean to do that,” Dawn replies with her head hung. “I just wanted to understand. I wanted to get rid of all the, I don’t know, walls.” It sounded like such an important goal when she entered her grandmother’s house a few hours ago, but now it feels juvenile.

“I know,” Audrey replies.

Dawn pushes her thumb into the edge of the kitchen table. She should be angry and aghast at her grandparents’ choices—shouldn’t she? Isn’t that how her parents would feel if they knew? She struggles to picture her yé ye again: his thinning hair, his crinkled smile. She wishes she knew him in the sixties. She wishes they’d had more time together.

“Are you happy,” Dawn asks, “with the choice you made?”

Audrey turns back to her. Dawn is once again struck by the way her grandmother’s strong nose and thin pink lips mirror her own.

“Yes. And no. I don’t know.” She sighs, and Dawn feels the weight of a thousand thoughts inside her breath. “If I had to go back, I suppose I would still make the same choice. But that doesn’t mean I’m happy with it.”

Dawn thinks she understands this. Or she’s trying to understand: the cost of love, and the lengths her grandparents went to give that love a future.

The water starts to boil and the kettle thrums. Audrey stands up to turn off the gas. Dawn blinks at Audrey’s back, unraveling all the consequences of her grandparents’ decisions one by one: the Chin family’s American citizenship, her father’s ability to attend college, the chance meeting the second year of his UCLA master’s program, when he ran into her mother in the hallway and thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, their comfortable California home, annual cruise vacations, boarding school, and Dawn’s life at Sanborn. She realizes now that she, Dawn Chin, is the unintentional culmination of her grandparents’ choices and sacrifices, of the death of Samuel and the rebirth of Calvin Chin. Is she worth all that?

“I’ve been thinking about what you said earlier,” her grandmother says as she pours the water into the mugs.

“What did I say?” Dawn asks, embarrassed in anticipation of her grandmother’s words.

“That you and I are exactly the same.” Nai Nai dips the tea bags into the steaming water. “I don’t want you to be like that. I want you to be open—with yourself and with everyone.” As she sets the mugs on the table, the steam clears from her face. “And unafraid.” She laughs and shakes her head. “Which you are already, Dawn.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are. The way you pushed to find out the truth about everything, about your family? That’s bravery. I was like you once, and so was Yé ye. He was like that his whole life.” Audrey pauses. “The stories I could tell. Which I will, next time.”

For once, Dawn believes her grandmother.

“And I am glad,” Audrey says, meeting her granddaughter’s identical eyes, “that you did push me. For so long, I wanted to tell you the truth, despite everything.”

Dawn looks down at her cup and watches the jasmine tea leaves shudder and bloom. “Are you going to tell Dad?” she asks.

Audrey circles the rim of her cup with her finger. “I don’t know,” she admits. “Give me time to think about it?”

“Of course. Don’t worry, I won’t play detective anymore,” she jokes.

Her grandmother nods. A flower petal falls from one of the trees outside, and Dawn watches it twirl across the windowpane and fall out of sight. The pair drink their tea in silence, the late-afternoon sun cloaking their faces. Hidden in the deep orange glow, they resurface in the light.

As if released from a trance, Dawn glances at the clock on her phone. She should leave soon, or she’ll miss her bus.

“I have to go,” she says, placing her mug in the sink, “but next weekend, I’ll come and give your newspaper clipping back to you. I’m sorry again, for, er, stealing it.”

Her grandmother smirks. “You’re forgiven.”

“We can talk more Saturday?”

“Yes,” Audrey agrees. She pats Dawn’s hand as she brushes past her. “I would like that very much.”

OceanofPDF.com

53
Duanfang

He was leading his army into battle when they turned on him. They had traveled for hours on horseback, and then on foot, carrying wheelbarrows heavy with artillery that left skidding imprints down the dirt path. Though they had finally landed in Sichuan, they had not yet reached the uprising they were meant to quell. Instead, they paused in a grassy clearing—the army was tired and so was Duanfang. He thought they needed to rest, at least for a little while.

Slumped next to a tree, his weapons cast aside, Duanfang closed his eyes, dreaming of his wife's cooking and his children in the garden. He heard footsteps closing in around him. When he opened his eyes, there stood his army, guns drawn in perfect symmetry as if they were the darts and he the bull's-eye.

At first, he could not understand. These were his men; it was unfathomable they would turn against him. Hadn't he treated them kindly? Hadn't some of them fought alongside him for years, exchanged tea and pleasantries, clinked glasses of rice wine well into the night, telling stories about their families, and their mistresses, and their fathers?

He moved to pick up his helmet, but Officer Liu Yifeng stopped him. Unlike his compatriots, he'd met Duanfang only a few weeks ago. Yifeng was congenial then, but now his grip was unyielding. Duanfang could feel the rage in the officer's fingertips.

He should have expected this, the army said. After all, the riots had lasted months. The Han would stop at nothing to regain power from the

Manchus. Did Duanfang assume that simply because he was the acting governor (he'd only been appointed in September), his white-skinned Han army would not rebel against their Manchurian leader? He was ignorant, Officer Liu mocked, to expect any other outcome.

Gone were the tonsured heads and long queues, boasted the army. They would no longer submit to the whims of the monarchy. A new republic was coming. The Qing dynasty was over, and with it, their so-called Manchu governor.

Duanfang begged for his life. He pleaded; he bargained. When that did not work, he confessed. Duanfang was not Manchu—he never had been. Yes, he had adhered to the customs, he had risen in power, but his true ethnicity, his real blood, was and always would be Han. The Manchu identity was a con his great-grandfather created long before his birth. Duanfang was only following in his family's footsteps, taking power when necessary, enacting strategy like any good politician.

The army laughed. What a pathetic man he was, lying to avoid death. It did not matter how many times Duanfang insisted he was telling the truth. He could not cut open his veins and bleed out the proof.

Officer Liu Yifeng put down his gun and drew his sword. Duanfang would die the traditional way, like all the Manchus before him.

As the sword came down, Duanfang did not think of his achievements, his wife, or his children's embraces. Instead, he mourned all that he had not yet accomplished, all the lessons he still had to teach, all the half-finished plans scrawled out in journals and letters and in documents that were likely to be burned with the rest of the monarchy's records. He prayed for just one more year. A month. A week. An hour. What he could do if he had more time.

The sword fell. Duanfang's severed head rolled through the dirt and grass.

OceanofPDF.com

54
Dawn Chin

On the bus ride back to Sanborn, Dawn falls asleep, her head knocking against the window. She expected to be wide awake after everything that had happened at her grandmother's, but the weight of it all must have made her tired.

She dreams of Yé ye: Calvin Chin, Samuel. He is young, and wearing the kind of tailored, muted suit she imagines men in 1965 wore back then. He takes off his cap and his hair is mussed and frizzy underneath, like he hasn't run a comb through it in ages. The suit and the messy hair stand in contrast to each other as if a harbinger of the decades to come—equal parts order and upheaval.

She asks him how he's doing but he doesn't say anything in response. Or maybe he is speaking, it's just that his voice is muffled, like his face is smushed against a pillow that he can't remove. They are standing in a school hallway, a medieval Chinese courtyard, her house in California.

She tells her yé ye she forgives him, not that there's anything to forgive. Not that it's her place to forgive in the first place. She tells him that she's sorry.

"What do you have to be sorry about?" he asks, his voice finally clear, but it's not him anymore—it's Nai Nai at her current age. She's wearing her sweater-vest and cotton button-down, and her gray hair is neatly bobby-pinned to her head.

"I'm sorry for not making it all worth it. Your sacrifices," Dream Dawn replies.

She has made nothing of her Sanborn education. She has ruined any possibility of a real relationship with Pen. She isn't brave; she's closed off, static. A wave of shame overwhelms her—heavy and gray blue, like the Santa Barbara ocean.

Nai Nai smiles. "Don't you see? That's all we ever wanted. For you to be."

Dream Dawn does not understand. "What?" she asks. "What?"

But her grandparents have disappeared. She leans back and drops into nothingness.

The bus is several miles from campus when Dawn awakens. She moves to wipe the crust from her eyes, but quickly realizes that she's crying—hot, fat tears roll down her cheeks. They come like a sudden rainfall, and they won't stop puddling in the folds of her neck and her sweatshirt collar. Her sobs are loud, and she hiccups between them. She can tell that her face is blotchy and that her nose is running, but she doesn't care.

The middle-aged woman sitting next to her is wearing a flowery Fair Isle sweater and knitting a scarf. She pauses with her knitting needles poised between her fingers and looks at her seatmate. Then she gently places a hand on Dawn's shoulder like a kind, concerned teacher, or a mother.

"Are you all right?" the woman asks.

Other passengers across the aisle crane their necks to peer at the crying girl. Dawn sniffles and presses a hand against the window, staring at the collage of trees and highway running past her. Then she turns to the woman and half smiles through her tears.

"No," she says, shaking her head, "I'm not."

"Oh, honey," the woman replies, and Dawn has never felt such relief.

She cries all the way back to campus.

OceanofPDF.com

55
Duanfang

Death, in some ways, is better than life for Duanfang. There's a freedom to it. For he is no longer in control—of his family's reaction when the new Republic of China delivers them his severed head, of the Han government when they are restored to power. Once the chaos dies down, the new rulers surprisingly invite a few of Duanfang's old Manchu friends to join the highest branches of leadership. If only Duanfang had waited—if only he hadn't rushed to prove his worth. Then he might be back on top; then he might be more powerful than ever.

Alas. There is nothing he can do now but watch.

Indeed, he often checks in on his family from afar, as if viewing them through a telescope. Here are his sons and daughter, hearty and grown. Here is his wife, a weathered widow. Though she does not know it, he is beside her when she dies.

As for the children, they are not as wise and talented as he had hoped. The girl marries well, but the sons are dismal and disappointing. The oldest becomes addicted to opium, and what is left of the family's meager fortune is wasted on iniquity and drug-induced delirium. When the money runs out, the grandchildren are forced to sell Duanfang's prized bronze collection. A rich French curator buys the former viceroy's antiques, and the family's wealth is at least partially restored. Who cares if they are Han or Manchu anymore? For there are mouths to feed, and wars to die in.

The family flees to Taiwan. Duanfang urges them to go farther. Australia. Europe. South America. Anywhere outside of this godforsaken place.

Haven't they inherited any of his traits? Where is their sense of ambition, their sense of wonder?

Thankfully, one girl shows promise. Zheng Yi—Duanfang's great-granddaughter. He likes her. She is determined and unafraid even when she is the most scared. When she lands in New York, he is giddy (if the dead can be giddy). But she confuses him. She chooses to live in secret, much like her ancestor. But not for personal gain, or for grandiose dreams; for small, insignificant promises of hope. For something like love. Over the years, Duanfang watches guilt eat away at her. It troubles him.

If ghosts can have regrets, Duanfang thinks he'd be full of them. As he watches his descendants proliferate, he fears he may have led them astray. Here they are hiding, pretending, like he did. Here they sit meek and trembling, their heads lowered, as if they too have been taunted and killed, their corpses rolled through the city and mocked by their enemies.

He is sorry for the burdens they carry. He is sorry for caring too much about himself.

And then the girl—his favorite—now old and weary, faces the rising sun. She is terrified, but she welcomes it all the same. And at last, with great elation and pride, Duanfang watches as Dawn begins to break.

OceanofPDF.com

56
Dawn Chin

The morning of Dawn's history presentation, she makes her bed, unlatches the bay window to let the breeze flow in, and pads out to the common room in fuzzy slippers from seventh grade. Almost-summer sun warms her cheeks as she kneels to open the mini fridge stacked precariously under the microwave. Grabbing the iced coffee she clumsily made last night, she pours the coffee from the pitcher into a Santa Barbara mug her father gave her in a care package freshman year. It's a nice mug, Dawn decides—she should use it more often.

When she's finished with her iced coffee, she puts on a butter-yellow cardigan she bought at a thrift store years ago, a fresh pair of jeans, and hand-me-down loafers from her mother. She strides into Ms. Codderton's first-period US history class.

"Dawn," Ms. Codderton says, pushing off her desk to stand and smoothing out her pencil skirt, "I'm excited to hear from you today."

"Thanks," Dawn replies. She pulls up her presentation on the school computer and watches as it floods the projector, the words *Audrey in America* large and looming.

The bell rings and Ms. Codderton adjusts her plastic-rimmed glasses before walking over to Dawn. "Hello, hello. Settle down because we have another full-class presentation today, this time from Dawn Chin." Ms. Codderton waves her hands at Dawn like an awards show hostess and returns to her desk.

Dawn scans the classroom—the bored girl picking at her chipped nail polish, the boy in the front with spilled Gatorade staining his shirt, two of Fitz's rugby friends she's seen every day this year but never spoken to. In the corner, nestled between the back wall and the window, is her desk. She settles her gaze on her empty seat.

"Hi, I'm, uh, Dawn," she says, "and today, I'm going to talk about my grandmother's life in 1965 and 1966 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement."

She flips the slide to a set of black-and-white photos, the ones Nai Nai had let her take pictures of a few days ago when she went back to Concord. She and her grandmother had spent so long talking about each photo, they hadn't realized that dusk had turned into night—thick and all-consuming in the New Hampshire countryside, like heavy, dried paint. She wasn't used to the evening's isolation; at Sanborn, lamppost lights flashed every block or so.

Dawn had missed her bus, so her grandma insisted she stay with her in the guest room. She'd used it occasionally to house church visitors, but otherwise, it was untouched. As Dawn pulled her nai nai's old floral nightgown over her head and ran her fingers across the quilt's handmade stitching, she realized that she felt at home in her grandmother's room, in her grandmother's clothes. She slept soundly.

Now Dawn tries to condense everything Nai Nai told her about Taipei into a few sentences. She talks about Audrey's childhood, the Cultural Revolution, and her decision to leave her home and fly to America.

Dawn flips to the next slide. "And this is where my grandmother landed once she arrived in America." Her eyes flit to the grainy film photo of a 1960s New Hampshire street she found on Getty Images. "We don't have any pictures of her high school, but this street is somewhat representative of what the town looked like. The neighborhood my grandmother lived in was predominately white, but there was a small Chinese community . . ."

Dawn is pleasantly surprised when she reaches the last slide of her presentation thirty-five minutes later. It's not that she wasn't prepared for its occurrence (she's recited it aloud to herself many times this past week), but more that it felt like a different version of Dawn was speaking—one who was passionate and confident. Afterward, Ms. Codderton invites questions from the class. Dawn braces herself for awkward silence, but the girl picking her chipped nail polish raises her hand.

“You talked a lot about the fight for civil rights in the middle of, like, a white place. It seemed kind of stressful. So, like, no offense, but why does your grandma still live there, then? Or here, basically. Since it’s pretty much next door.”

Dawn taps her chin. “I can’t say for sure. But I would guess that it’s hard to leave the place you settled in. Even though living in New Hampshire during the sixties wasn’t exactly a walk in the park, my grandma knew the risks and the threats and all that. She was familiar with the environment and could plan accordingly. There was a predictability to the social and political dynamics around her.”

Dawn thinks about Yé ye. Nai Nai had told her he was one of two people of color to graduate in 1970 with an associate degree from Keene State, and the only Asian American. Her grandfather missed New York, its so-called melting pot. But he knew the privileges he had, or at least the ones he had created.

“You know what you know, and sometimes familiarity is better than the unknown,” she concludes. *Or*, she thinks, *a familiar home far away from everything is a safe haven when you’re hiding from your past.*

Nail polish girl shrugs. “Okay,” she says, casually accepting the answer as fact.

Two more people ask questions about statistics, and then the bell rings. Dawn’s kept her promise to her grandmother. Her yearlong project is over.

At the end of the school day, Dawn sends a text message and then makes the trek through campus: across the academic courtyard, through the quad, and into the forest, where the tall pine trees give way to reveal another old brick building with a sign sticking out from the grass that says *Asbury Hall*. She glances down at her flashing phone screen—Pen’s texted her back.

When she skates up the old, clanking elevator to Pen’s dorm on the fifth floor, she’s reminded of all the hours she’s spent collapsed on Pen’s shag rug, on her bed, and her throat clogs up. Lately, she’s been crying a lot—both in her room and in public, to the point where even Delia and Giselle are asking questions. She’s getting used to the tears.

Dawn knocks and waits. For seconds that seem to stretch into minutes, no one answers. And then the knob turns, and Pen is standing in the doorway.

Her curls are pulled back into a messy bun, and dark circles cast half-moons under her eyes.

Pen crosses her arms. “Hi.”

“Hi.” Dawn takes a deep breath. “Thank you for seeing me.”

“Yeah,” Pen says, “whatever.”

“Can I come in?”

Pen nods and opens the door wider, and tentatively, Dawn steps forward. It’s still just as neat, except the covers are pulled back, like Pen’s just woken up from a nap. If they were on better terms, Dawn would joke that they’ve reversed positions.

Dawn sits on the edge of Pen’s bed so her butt is half off the bed frame. She doesn’t want to act like she belongs here. She looks at Pen standing a few feet away, her elbow balanced on top of the shoe rack.

“I’m sorry,” Dawn says, and immediately, she feels tears prick her eyes. She lets them fall; this is apparently her new normal. “I’m sorry that I’ve been such a jerk. I don’t have an excuse. But I think I have, well, an explanation? Or at least more context.”

She’s been thinking about it constantly, ever since her grandmother told her the truth about her past. The night she slept over, she decided to finally tell Nai Nai her own terrible secret. Her grandmother had been brave, and now, so would she. After all, she reasoned, what was the point of a relationship if you couldn’t be honest—with yourself and with the people you love? It felt good to tell her grandmother. It was a relief.

Pen shifts from foot to foot like she is weighing each of Dawn’s words. Then she sighs and grabs a tissue from the desk. She hands it to Dawn and sits beside her on the edge of the bed.

“Okay,” she says, “talk.”

So Dawn does. She tells her the story that’s haunted her every night for the past year.

All summer, she and Fitz had kissed—they’d loved to kiss—but they had never done more. Dawn hadn’t wanted to do more, though Fitz pushed her and pushed her until finally, one evening in August, she caved. As she talks, the memories come to her in torn pieces: him pulling her under the rosebushes, her protests, the thick August heat, his pants undone, his boxers at his feet, her kneeling in her pajama shorts and oversize camp T-shirt. The bushes were so close to them she’d felt the roses and the thorny leaves scratching her arms and calves.

As Dawn stuck his penis in her mouth, her face and neck moving to a rhythm he conducted, she thought about the television shows she'd watched, the ones where sex and romance seemed inextricably intertwined, the women heaving and groaning in pleasure. She thought about how the roses' thorns made her bleed but didn't seem to bother Fitz at all.

"Afterward," she says, "we walked around campus, and he ended things. He didn't tell me why, though trust me, I tried to get an answer out of him. Anyway, it didn't matter. I knew why." She shrugs and wipes more tears from her eyes. "He got what he wanted."

Dawn turns to look at Pen. Her face is stricken, like she's been slapped.

"God, Dawn," she says, "I had no idea."

"Why would you?" Dawn dabs at her cheeks with the tissue Pen gave her. "It's not like I said anything. It made me feel ashamed. And so, I think . . ." She swallows. "I think that I pushed you away. I mean, I *know* I pushed you away because I didn't want to get hurt. I couldn't go through it all again. And I was terrified." Her tears taste salty on her tongue. "It was safer to pretend, to make things casual."

"It's always easier that way. And what he did to you was unspeakably awful." Pen shakes her head. "This whole relationship thing has been scary for me too. It's why I felt—feel—so strongly about not committing to someone who doesn't care about me."

Dawn leans in. "Pen, I do care about you. I really hope you believe me."

"Yeah, I think I do believe you." Pen nods, though the gesture looks like it's more for herself than for Dawn. "I mean, I'm still a little mad at you, but I believe you."

At once, she pulls Dawn into a side hug, and the force of their bodies almost topples them off the bed. Like a sinking ship, they fall sideways, and Dawn has to grip the bed frame to steady them. Together, they push their bodies back to an upright position, and as they check to make sure they're both okay, they start laughing. It feels good to laugh. Dawn's missed Pen's wide-toothed smile.

"Oops," Pen says, her arm still wrapped around Dawn, "didn't mean to do that."

"Don't worry about it." She leans her head on Pen's shoulder and watches their bellies rise and fall together. "Hey," she says, "in case you didn't know, you're the kindest, smartest, wittiest person I've ever met. You're basically the best thing to ever happen to me."

Pen narrows her eyes. “Hold that thought. I’m going to record that.”

“Record it fifty times over,” Dawn calls out as Pen gets up and snatches her phone from the desk, making a show of pulling up her voice memos.

Dawn scoots back, her legs dangling over the edge of the duvet. She wraps the unmade sheets around her hips and glances at her reflection in the mirror hanging from the back of Pen’s door. She’s tearstained and her hair is staticky, and the yellow cardigan that she put on this morning is rumpled and falling off her shoulders. She’s not faking a single thing about herself. Smiling, Dawn falls back onto the bed. She thinks she likes it this way.

OceanofPDF.com

Epilogue

The weather in Santa Barbara is perfect in early August: warm but not broiling, the sea the ideal temperature for an early-evening swim, when the sun is still out but all the tourists have left the beach for dinner. Dawn isn't outside, though—she's in her room packing. She throws a pair of cutoff shorts from ninth grade into her open suitcase while texting Pen. *Video chat tonight?* she types. *Miss you already.* She receives a prompt reply: *Yes! Miss you too.*

At the end of the school year, Dawn and Pen started a relationship—a real one, though tentative at first. They finally went to an Agoraphobes concert, and afterward, they got ice cream bars from the convenience store across the street and talked about Pen's little brother and Fitz and silly things like Pen's favorite meal (chicken Caesar salad), and whether Dawn could be convinced to go e-scootering with Pen (maybe, if bribed).

In July, when Pen went to India for a month to see her extended family, Dawn inevitably panicked, and instead of ignoring Pen, she video called her at three in the morning, and they talked about long-distance and all of Dawn's fears. She hated doing it. But talking, she realized, often worked better than running away. Nothing was ever as bad as it was inside her head.

Now they've become the kind of sickening couple Dawn used to make fun of. She still isn't sure if she's doing it right, and sometimes she worries that this is just a glitch in the matrix. Maybe she's not meant to be this content. But Nai Nai tells her to enjoy it, to try to savor it—however fleeting.

Last week, Pen flew from Maryland to visit Dawn in Santa Barbara. She left yesterday. Dawn was worried about how Pen and her parents would get along—she'd chewed her cuticles until they bled just thinking about it.

At the beginning of the summer, fresh off the plane from Sanborn, she decided to tell David and Bettina Chin about everything (except her grandmother, of course): Fitz (at least the broad strokes), her mediocre grades (so long, Berkeley), and her burgeoning relationship with Pen (yes, she reminded them that she was still bisexual). At first, when Dawn initiated the conversation on their living room couch, her father literally tried to turn on a documentary.

"There's a new great one about technology's impact on the youth," he said just as she opened her mouth. "I think that you'll—"

"Dad," Dawn had interrupted, "I actually need to talk to you about something. It's kind of important."

She'd written what she wanted to say on a Delta napkin, and now she pulled it out of her pocket and smoothed out its folded corners.

"I feel like you don't really know a lot about me," she began, clearing her throat, "and it's a little weird." Dawn remembers boring her eyes into the ink-stained napkin, refusing to look at her parents on the other end of the couch.

Dawn wasn't sure if she rambled for ten minutes or an hour after that. She'd never said so many words to her parents at once. She lacked transitions—as her junior year English teacher would critique—and flew from one topic to the next: school, Fitz, Pen, her extreme dislike for anything related to STEM (she would never, she declared, become a data scientist or an engineer).

Her parents sat in silence. And when she finally glanced up at them, they seemed slightly traumatized, like they didn't recognize their daughter. That, she understood. She was not the same Dawn from last summer, or even from this past Christmas.

"I'm sorry this happened to you, Dawn," her mother said at last, clearing her throat.

"Yes," her father agreed, "thank you for telling us."

"So," her mother murmured, "no Berkeley, huh?"

They asked a few follow-up questions, offered to pay for therapy (a shocker since Dawn didn't think her parents knew what therapy was), and

then her father flicked on the television, and they settled in to watch the documentary about technology's impact on the youth.

That night, as Dawn traipsed upstairs in her ice cream cone pajamas, her dad stopped her on the landing and awkwardly kissed the top of her head.

"I love you, Dawn," he told her.

"I love you too, Dad." She stood there as he squeezed her shoulder before walking to his bedroom.

As expected, they didn't talk about any of Dawn's confessions or revelations until months later, when they finally met Pen. Dawn was dreading it. But she was pleasantly shocked at how congenial Bettina and David Chin were; the evening of Pen's arrival, her dad had even cooked one of his specialties—crispy fried dòufu with peanut noodles and a hefty helping of snow peas. Pen had wiped her plate clean. For a week, they watched movies, and took trips to the beach and the pier, and didn't blink when Pen walked into Dawn's bedroom every night to sleep.

"I'm happy you're happy," Dawn's mom told her yesterday, after they dropped Pen off at the airport and were driving back home.

"Thanks, Mom," Dawn replied. She clumsily patted her mom's hand on the steering wheel. "I, uh, really like her."

"Good," her mom said, her eyes trained on the road. "That's really wonderful, Dawn."

As they pulled into the driveway, Dawn decided that maybe her parents could surprise her too. Maybe—with great coaxing—the Chin family could grow together.

Now Dawn examines the mountain of clothes stacked high in her suitcase. It leans to the left, threatening to topple. She's never been great at packing and this time, she only has a carry-on.

There's a knock at her door. "Come in!" Dawn shouts, cocking her head at the shorts cresting at the peak of the mountain. Does she really need a fourth pair of shorts?

Bettina Chin walks in with her cell phone pressed to her neck. "Oh my. I see you've disassembled your wardrobe."

"Something like that," Dawn says, looping a strand of hair around her pinky. She waits for a lecture on the state of her room, but it doesn't come.

Instead, her mother says: "Your nai nai's on the phone. She wants to talk to you." She holds out her cell and Dawn takes it.

"Thanks, Mom."

“And when you’re done packing, come down for an early dinner. Dad’s making spaghetti and meatballs.”

“Okay.” Dawn nods. “Sounds good.”

Her mother opens her mouth, and Dawn braces herself, but Bettina Chin turns away and walks back down the stairs.

“Hi, Nai Nai,” Dawn says into the receiver as she collapses onto the bed. “How are you?”

“Oh, I’m fine. Same old, same old.”

Even though she and her grandmother talk nearly every day, Dawn finds it funny that Nai Nai still speaks in the same blunt way she did so many months ago. She wonders if it’s an English language barrier, or just her grandma.

“Grace Blevins started dating someone,” Nai Nai offers.

“For real?” Dawn sits up on the bed. “When? Who is he?”

“They met at church last year but didn’t start a relationship until a few weeks ago. He’s another widower in the congregation. I think they are both in the choir.”

“Aww, a choir romance. That’s too cute. Do you like him?”

“Mmm.” She can picture her grandmother pursing her lips on the other end of the phone. “Grace is great. I think she can do better.”

“High expectations, as per usual,” Dawn says, laughing. She hopes her grandmother will like Pen when she meets her; she’s planning on taking Pen to Nai Nai’s when the school year starts up again in September.

“And what about you?” Nai Nai asks. “I hear your flight is tomorrow morning?”

“Yup. Boarding starts at eight, but Dad wants to leave for the airport at, like, five a.m.”

“Tell him that’s too early. A girl needs her beauty rest.”

Dawn drops back onto the bed, her head between the decorative PB Teen pillows she picked out in fifth grade. She toys with a turquoise tassel. “Don’t really think he understands that concept.”

“We’ll teach him.”

“Sure.”

“You’ll like NYU,” her grandmother says wistfully. “Of course, I didn’t go there. But I’ve heard good things.”

“It’s not like I’m going there for real, though, Nai Nai. Just a summer history program.”

“I know. Still, you’ll be staying in a dorm in the middle of New York. It will be exciting.”

It’s all Dawn can think about since she made her decision: living like her grandmother in 1966, eating dim sum in Chinatown; visiting Audrey’s old apartment building where she lived with Auntie Fan, Uncle Wen, and the boys (demolished in favor of a swanky 2000s high-rise, according to the internet); riding the grimy, frenzied subway; and arriving in various boroughs from the gilded Upper East Side to trendy, gentrified Williamsburg to the bagel havens near Prospect Park. How will she feel when she reaches the Brooklyn Bridge? Will she cry or gasp, alarming the other NYU summer students? Or will standing where her grandfather became her grandfather, where generations of fictitious Chins began, not bother her at all? Will she simply smile at the trinket and water bottle sellers, and wish she’d brought a fan or a hat to shield her face from the hot sun? She can’t be sure.

She hopes to learn more about her ancestor Duanfang, who Nai Nai told her has art on display in the Met. It’s weird to her that she’s never been to one of the most famous museums in the country when her family’s heirlooms have been sitting there for decades.

Dawn chuckles to herself. Ms. Codderton would be pleased: it seems her year-long project has led to an actual interest in history—or at least her own family history. Who knows what else she’ll explore?

“I’m looking forward to going,” Dawn says.

“Maybe afterward, you’ll want to apply to NYU. Have your parents taken you on any college tours yet?”

“Just a couple.” She can’t believe senior year begins next month. “A few California schools, though we didn’t see Berkeley.”

“And they didn’t have a meltdown about that?”

“Nope. At least, not yet.”

“Well, I’m happy to talk to my son and bring him back down to Earth whenever you want.”

“Thanks, Nai Nai.” The smell of garlic and red sauce wafts into Dawn’s room from the kitchen downstairs, and her stomach involuntarily grumbles. “I think dinner is ready, so I probably have to go.”

“All right, no problem.”

“Can I call you again tomorrow?” she asks. “Maybe when I land in New York?”

“Yes,” her grandma replies. “And, Dawn, you never have to ask. I’m always here.”

“Thanks, Nai Nai. Me too.” Dawn hangs up her mom’s phone and examines the cutoff shorts still propped on the top of her tilting clothes mountain. As she opens her door and hurries down the stairs, she decides that she’ll keep the shorts in her suitcase. She can never have too many options.

After talking to her granddaughter, Audrey Zheng places the cell phone her son insisted she have on the kitchen counter and grabs her sweater hanging on the back of the chair. Even though it’s nearing eight p.m. in New Hampshire, she vows to complete her daily walk around the neighborhood; she wants to leave before the sun truly sets.

The air outside is warm, but the cut of an early fall breeze wedges its wrist between August’s sweaty knees. Concord—even in summer—can’t avoid the cold.

Audrey walks carefully down the sidewalk, stepping over the cracks and crevices she’s memorized, the small slope at the end of the street, and the bumpy turn into the cul-de-sac. Most of the houses in the neighborhood are dark; in an unofficial retirement village, everyone goes to bed early.

When she and Samuel first moved here, the neighborhood was livelier. A new developer had recently built these mid-priced, cookie-cutter homes so young families like theirs could pour in with their screaming toddlers and strewn bicycles and strung-up basketball courts in the driveway. Audrey was never particularly close with the women in town, but they were congenial enough that she could ask for a cup of sugar in a pinch or drop David off to play at Laura’s or Melissa’s when she needed to run an errand after work.

Samuel was a lot closer with the neighbors. He coached David’s local intramural baseball team from first to fourth grade, and after every game, the fathers and sons would get pizza and ice cream at the local diner. On those nights, Audrey stayed home. She’d tell her husband that it was such a relief to have an evening to herself, but in reality, she’d pretend-read a book on the living room couch until the garage door opened and her family trudged back through the mudroom.

Now she thinks that she should have gone to those baseball dinners. Sometimes, when she can't sleep, she worries that she ruined David with the distance she unconsciously placed between them—she hadn't meant to, but she did it anyway. Samuel was better at pretending, at emulating Calvin Chin and simultaneously creating a new man: a father, an activist, a churchgoer, an architect, a husband. This whole decision was Audrey's idea, but she was never good at lying and living with it.

That is partly why she told her granddaughter the truth, she rationalizes. Maybe one day, Audrey will write a confessional and dramatically gift it to Dawn in her will, enabling her granddaughter to spill all of Audrey's secrets to the world—to Beverley and Patty, the friends she hasn't talked to in decades. Perhaps in death, she'll let the shame of her choices go.

She misses Samuel all the time. It comes to her in sharp, unexpected whiffs: When she's at the grocery store and the man next to her in the vegetable aisle has used the same Pantene hair spray as Samuel and she instinctively teleports back to their bathroom in the mornings before work, when he'd kiss her goodbye, the sour aerosol settling into her clothes. When she's scooping ice cream at church banquets and it reminds her of the divot on Samuel's nose—they were hiking to the Acropolis when he tripped and fell face-first. He'd bled and then laughed. After all, it was their ten-year-delayed honeymoon, he joked. They had no time for pity parties.

He had refused to go to the dinky Greek hospital. He was often irritating and stubborn like that. Then again, so was she. They often fought over little things like the dishwasher—she used it as a storage container, but he wanted to use it to actually clean their dishes; he was constantly trying to convince her that running it properly would save them both ample time. He's dead, and she still doesn't use the dishwasher.

There was that autumn when David desperately wanted a Nintendo Game Boy, so Audrey decided to buy it for him for Christmas. Her son needed to learn the merits of patience. But Samuel, of course, thought differently: she came home from the library one October evening to find David on the carpet, clicking away on his brand-new Game Boy. She was so mad at her husband for buying it ahead of Christmas that she didn't talk to him for the entire subsequent day. But the next evening, watching from across the living room as David and his father played with their new toy, she caved, joining them on the carpet to learn too. She always caved.

If he were alive and walking through the cul-de-sac with Audrey—as he often did before he got too sick—Samuel would protest this portrayal of their marriage. It was *he* who always caved. Audrey rolls her eyes on the street, even though no one else is there. The two of them were bulls in a ring: butting heads when they were tired or hungry or had bad days at work. But—Audrey recalls—the next morning without fail, they'd wake up and talk about their silly arguments over coffee, and then someone would do a little gesture for the other, like make their favorite meal for dinner, or fold the laundry, or turn on their Wednesday-evening television show without asking because they knew their routines and desires by heart.

Even at the end, when Samuel's cancer consumed him and he was frail and unrecognizable, and she had to help him on the toilet, and in the shower, and see parts of Samuel neither could bear, they loved each other. That was—and forever would be—the truth.

The sky is beginning to darken, milky and indigo above the shingled roofs. Audrey makes a loop around the cul-de-sac and begins her return home. She stops on the sidewalk where it's smooth, where she knows there are no traps for her to trip, and looks up at the trees lining the street. The leaves are green now, but soon, they will change, and wither, and fall. She expects this, of course. It's the change she can count on.

The next day, Dawn Chin's family leaves for the airport at 5:03 a.m., exactly as she expected. In the black umbrage of early morning, her father hauls her overweight suitcase into the SUV's trunk and her mother sticks extra snacks—shrimp chips and granola bars—into Dawn's backpack, the one they'd bought especially for this trip. Dawn may be almost eighteen, but she is still a child. As she presses her nose against the back seat window, watching the silhouettes of palm trees flirt with the wind, she's momentarily glad for her youth. She doesn't want to grow up too fast.

They say goodbye at the roundabout in front of the Santa Barbara Airport because it would be too complicated and expensive to pay for parking.

"I'll see you in three weeks," Dawn says. "It's not that long."

"No, it's not," agrees her mother. She hesitates before getting out of the car and kissing her daughter on the cheek. "We'll miss you."

"I'll call you as soon as I land," Dawn promises.

She puts on her backpack and wrenches the too-heavy carry-on from the trunk, lugging it down the sidewalk and through the airport's automatic glass doors. It's hard to look back, but she twists her neck and her shoulder as much as she can, and waves as the SUV drives away.

The trip is a long one—twelve hours in total, with one layover and a connecting flight. Dawn makes it to her gate far before boarding time, so she putters around with her luggage, eating an overpriced muffin and sipping an iced green tea (Pen's clearly influenced her diet) at the airport kiosk. As the sun begins to rise and more people start filing into the airport, Dawn flicks through the many emails she's received from NYU. She was able to choose her courses for the summer, which include a media and arts seminar, an introduction to sociology, and a triweekly small group discussion about politics and power. She hopes the classes are interesting. She hopes she likes her classmates.

It's strange going to school when she doesn't have to. She might qualify as a Sanborn nerd. But it's not the college credits she's excited about, or the fancy institution. She just wants to learn more—about her history and what came before. The more she discovers about the past, the more okay she is with the uncertainty of both the present and the future. She is trying to simply be.

On the first leg from Santa Barbara to Chicago, Dawn watches bad romantic comedies and falls asleep halfway through the second one. She doesn't dream about anything except gray watercolor waves, interrupted by the plane engine's steady thrum.

She's never been to Illinois before, and when she arrives, she wonders what it's like outside the airport's tired walls. Has her grandmother been to Chicago? Dawn will ask her later tonight—she knows that this time, Nai Nai will be honest.

Truth is a funny thing, she muses as she eats her lunch—another overpriced airport sandwich. It is true that she loves her grandparents. It is true that Yé ye was good to her, even when he was very sick. It is true that as a child, she knew him as a falsehood, a person he was not. She's made peace with that, though it is not her peace to make.

On the second leg of her journey, Dawn does not sleep at all. She does not watch a movie or a TV show either. Instead, she stares at the screen in front of her that charts the plane's flight path. Like it's a video game, the

pixelated plane inches slowly across state lines, getting closer and closer to its destination. Her seatmate probably thinks she's a psychopath.

Dawn becomes giddy when the pixelated plane on the screen—and the real airplane—begins its descent. A bubbling spring seems to churn inside her, and she can feel it surge in her lungs and gush from her ears. She sits up straight in her seat, bruised purple sky rushing past her as the plane hits the runway.

A voice crackles over the loudspeaker. "Good evening," it says, "this is your captain speaking. Please remain seated until the plane comes to a full stop. The local time is 8:05 p.m." It pauses before resuming. "Welcome to New York City. Enjoy your stay."

Dawn leans back into the headrest and closes her eyes. There is so much that is unknown, and with it, so much to discover. She can't wait.

OceanofPDF.com

Author's Note

This book began with a lie about my great-great-great-grandfather Duanfang. For years, my family told me stories about his life as well as his vast bronze collection. But it wasn't until my senior year of college, during my Chinese history professor's office hours, that I learned about Duanfang's lies about his family's—our family's—heritage and his subsequent death. Around that same time, I discovered a lie my grandfather had told decades earlier; while different and far less dramatic than the lies in *Foreigners*, it got me thinking. What is the cost of our lies, both big and small?

Ultimately, this story took on a life of its own and became much more fiction than fact. But it would not have been possible without the help of history and historians who shaped Duanfang's, Audrey's, and Dawn's worlds. I encourage you to explore the following:

Further Reading

"'The Heart of Chinatown,' 70 Mulberry Street" by Pauline Toole and Kenneth Cobb

The Making of Asian America: A History by Erika Lee

"Segregation Has Been the Story of New York City's Schools for 50 Years" by Eliza Shapiro, *New York Times*

“Spider Manchu: Duanfang as networker and spindoctor of the late Qing New Policies, 1901–1911” by Elya Zhang

Video

“American Nostalgia: The 1960s Thrifty Wife” by Documentary Tube on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3qPnpwkWe4&t=1s)

Artifacts

Mao Gong ding, Western Zhou Dynasty, National Palace Museum, *bought by Duanfang in the Xuantong era*

Shang Dynasty Altar Set, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *sold by Duanfang’s family in 1924*

See more of Duanfang’s collection at the National Museum of Asian Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the Penn Museum.

OceanofPDF.com

Acknowledgments

When I first figured out the major plot twist in *Foreigners*, I rolled around in bed, giddy. It was a high I wish I could bottle up. I took that high and shared it with so many people who helped bring this story to life.

Jen Ung, thank you for your wisdom, your guidance, and your belief in me and this book. *Foreigners* would not be in existence without you. Marietta Zacker, thank you for being the sharpshooter that you are—I am so grateful to have you as my advocate and cheerleader. Thank you to everyone at HarperCollins: my fabulous marketer, Lisa Calcasola, and my amazing publicist, Jenny Lu, as well as Rosemary Brosnan, Carter Wilken, Rich Thomas, Liate Stehlik, Page Edmunds, Mikayla Lawrence, Christine Ma, Jessica White, and the entire Quill Tree team.

Chris Kwon and Manshen Lo, thank you for such a dynamic and stunning cover. And Christina Li, thank you for your thoughtful read and advice.

Elya Zhang, I so appreciate the first conversation we had about Duanfang and this book; thank you for sharing your expertise on my ancestor and your academic first love.

Thank you, Emily Ritter and Claire McLaughlin, for ensuring that anyone who is anyone knows about my book.

Where would I be without the fabulous and talented Cassie Vu? Thank you for your endless help behind the scenes, and for your friendship, always.

To my family: Grandma Winnie, Grandpa Robert, and Grandpa Joseph, you have shaped this book in more ways than you know. I hope you are

eating good food and telling tall tales up there. Grandma Margaret, thank you so much for letting me interview you for hours and hours; those recordings are deeply valuable to me and generations of Lees to come. I love you so much and am proud to be your granddaughter.

Mom and Diana, you are my rocks. I have a hard time putting into words how much you mean to me. Jack, how I love doing laundry and taxes with you. Our life together is exceptionally beautiful and joyful, and I wouldn't change a thing. You and me, forever.

And finally, thank you, Dad. I love you, I miss you, I hope I've made you proud.

OceanofPDF.com

About the Author

E. L. SHEN is the author of *The Queens of New York*, which was a New York Public Library Best Book of the Year and a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults pick. Her debut novel, *The Comeback*, was praised in the *New York Times* for its fast-paced prose, authentic dialogue, and big emotions. Her most recent novel, *Maybe It's a Sign*, was a Junior Library Guild Selection and a Bank Street Best Book of the Year. She currently lives in Connecticut with her husband.

Learn more at elshenwrites.com.

Discover great authors, exclusive offers, and more at hc.com.

OceanofPDF.com

Books by E. L. Shen

The Queens of New York

Foreigners

OceanofPDF.com

Back Ad



DISCOVER
your next favorite read

MEET
new authors to love

WIN
free books

SHARE
infographics, playlists, quizzes, and more

WATCH

the latest videos

www.epicreads.com

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright

Quill Tree Books is an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Foreigners. Copyright © 2026 by E. L. Shen. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the nonexclusive, nontransferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse-engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereafter invented, without the express written permission of HarperCollins e-books.

Without limiting the exclusive rights of any author, contributor, or the publisher of this publication, any unauthorized use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. HarperCollins also exercise their rights under Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790 and expressly reserves this publication from the text and data mining exception.

www.epicreads.com

Cover art © 2026 by Manshen Lo
Cover design by Chris Kwon

Library of Congress Control Number: TK

Digital Edition SEPTEMBER 2026 ISBN: 978-0-06-323802-2
Print Edition ISBN: 978-0-06-323800-8

FIRST EDITION

OceanofPDF.com

About the Publisher

Australia
HarperCollins Publishers Australia Pty. Ltd.
Level 13, 201 Elizabeth Street
Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia
www.harpercollins.com.au

Canada
HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.
Harlequin Enterprises ULC
www.harlequin.com
Bay Adelaide Centre, East Tower
22 Adelaide Street West, 41st Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M5H 4E3
www.harpercollins.ca

India
HarperCollins Publishers India
4th Floor, Tower A, Building No. 10, DLF Cyber City,
DLF Phase II, Gurugram, Haryana – 122002
www.harpercollins.co.in

Ireland
HarperCollins Publishers
Macken House,
39/40 Mayor Street Upper,
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland
www.harpercollins.co.uk

New Zealand
HarperCollins Publishers New Zealand

Unit D1, 63 Apollo Drive
Rosedale 0632
Auckland, New Zealand
www.harpercollins.co.nz

United Kingdom

HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF, UK
www.harpercollins.co.uk

United States

HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
195 Broadway
New York, NY 10007
www.harpercollins.com

OceanofPDF.com