

Tomorrow

Part 1. Nan's printing shop

The whistle screamed hysterically, warning its master that the beer was readily warmed. Its owner, also the owner of the printing shop, slowly woke up from a half-remembered dream. Nan walked to the table, silencing the sound, walking back to her cold, wooden armchair, slouching in its hardness, and sleeping again. In the freezing weather of Eastern China, the large world was dismissed in the vast whiteness.

When the time was good, Nan could earn as much as 40 yuan a day. When it was bad, she closed the printing shop early and went home.

Printing shops were frequently seen along Xiguan Street. One could find the street by the characteristic smell along. The warm, sweet and choking smell of ink.

Nan kept this small shop operating for almost two years, but she still couldn't develop any interest in this place. This filthy, dark, damp, cramped place. She thought.

This "cramped" place occupied most of Nan's social life, which was, alas, as small as the shop itself. She did not have many friends. The actual numbers were easily counted with her ten fingers.

The shop was inherited from Yue, her closest friend (not one of her closest friends!). The word "inherited" initially came to her mind and she disliked this description. Now she was used to it. Because the shop matched all those features of something "inherited": the original owner was dead, the beneficiary didn't have much faith in the heritage.

The shop became a burden to her. The burden, existed anyway, had been simply transferred from Yue to Nan. The filthy smell transferred. The crampedness transferred. The darkness of corners tinged with ink and soot transferred.

Nan was a pious Buddhist, but her piety was a long time ago. Now her piety was simply transferred. To a routine chore of weekly prayers.

Yue, as Nan remembered, had kept this shop clean, and bright. But as Yue passed away, the worms of laziness came out of the new owner. Laziness bred filthiness and even more laziness. But a heritage was a strange thing: if one did not have it, it was perfectly fine. But if one had it, it would be extremely difficult to give it up.

So Nan kept the shop operating.

Her memories about Yue were diminishing, like decomposing leaves gradually losing shapes and smells, like broken mirror becoming jagged glasses. Shapeless. Soundless.

Today, it was a bad day. She boiled some beer, sipping the bitterness at her own comfort and laziness. "Ming tian," she uttered, with her mouth full of beer bubbles, to herself.

Ming tian. Tomorrow.

She looked forward to another day of daydreaming, another day of filthiness, in her life of seemingly unending routine.

But could she?

Tomorrow

Part 2. Ming's monologue

I can hope. I can imagine. I can put my old coat on and walk down the streets, drifting around for any aimless aim.

I can't wish. I can't inquire. I can't walk to the printing shop where my hat got lost.

The hat cost me 10yuan. A rather worthless piece. No more than a worn rag. No more than an oily piece of cloth. But that was given by Yue. Wait. I bought that hat, not Yue! But, it doesn't really matter, 'cos anyway I lost it. Somewhere, somehow, near the printing shop.

The "Evil Sister", as everyone else called her, owned that shop. Her real name was forgotten by most of the people. I saw her name tag once, which was put on the stove she used to warm sour beer. Strange thing, isn't it? I noticed her strangeness and jotted them down: 1. She drinks sour beer. Sometimes she warms it. 2. Her name is Nan (as shown on the name tag), but the shop's name is "Tomorrow Printing Shop". 3. She never speaks to anyone. She just receives your coins, print your papers, and sit back to her armchair where she can reach out her long arms to get her sour beer on the stove easily.

She just prints, and prints. There's ink trapped in her untrimmed fingernails, dark as dirt. Someone said that it's caked blood down there, but this story remains just a miracle. Anyway, there are already a lot stories here in Xiguan Street.

She's around 25, but I'm not sure. A deep-rooted notion, reinforced by people in the neighborhood, goes that she's a devil trapped in a young body.

"Her body grows older. Her soul unchanged." Dan, my best friend in school, once said.

"Her soul grows older. And she simply finds younger body!" Shan, another friend of mine, exclaimed an alternative opinion.

"Just ignore Dan and Shan," Tian said to me, "they're mean and ignorant! Don't make friends with them!"

So I ignored Dan and Shan's theories, partially, and still visited Nan's shop frequently to get my school papers printed, under her Dark-red fingernails.

"Tian's being a good friend to me, and a kind soul even to the Evil Sister." I thought, as I was watching Nan put down her sour beer on the stove, lifted the cover of the printing machine, received my coins, printed my papers and uttered something.

The hairs on my neck stood up, not because of the words she said but because of her voice. She spoke to me. I snatched my papers and ran out of the shop. Maybe it's rude, and my own coward behaviors mocked me. So I stopped at the corner of the street and looked back at the shop.

Nothing.

But this nothingness frightened me, for obviously unspeakable reason.

Tomorrow

Part 3.A letter to ?

Dear _____:

I keep on forgetting to get my books back. But it's ok to let you keep them for me. If you like,you can pick one or two.

I am writing this letter to inform you that my printing shop has been reassigned under Ms Nan. She's been nice to me,though I know few people like her. But she's nice. It's just that she can't get over her feelings for Hao,though she can barely remember who Hao really is. If I don't give this shop to her,she might probably end up in mental hospital. I can't imagine that place,full of insane people,though Nan indeed had some problems.

But I insist that her problems are just trauma,not insanity! I hope you can understand my decision,no matter to whom I am writing to(that's why I left the recipient blank).I know you can read it,somewhat somewhere sometime. Though I can't wish that. I'm losing control,too easy struck by emotions.

All the best for your school exams. I hope to listen to you,if possible.

Yours,

Yue

Part 4.A note to Ming

Didn't I tell you NOT to bother with your hat? Didn't I tell you not to visit that shop? Why can't you listen to me? I'll leave this note on the table.I know you will see it. Nan's having a serious problem.You're NOT to traumatize her like that.She thought she's dying and wrote a letter to you.I read it,and burnt it. Don't be angry. You really should think for her. She's gaining control. Soon Yue will be gone! Maybe that's better for her,at least Nan won't remember any trace of Yue. Listen! I don't want any of this to happen! But she doesn't have enough time.But you do! You must choose,you or me.Maybe that's better for her.For God's sake,save her! Don't jot down any stupid notes,and even more stupid to put the notes in your hat! I took the hat from you. And,don't be angry. I'm leaving soon with Yue. Don't take this too seriously,kid. You see her less,she sees you less,you both be better! That'll be the end. See you around.

Tian

Tomorrow

Part 5.

“Any progress, Doc?”

“It’s done. I gonna change my previous diagnosis.”

“Like what? Some neighbors came to my office this morning, claiming that the kid is innocent.”

“It’s better if he’s innocent. Look, Ju gave me an analysis of the red thing this morning. Yes, those under the fingernails. They’re dried blood from that kid Ming.”

“So, he really killed his sister?”

“Sadly, yes. But that’s not the whole story. I searched the archive from the local mental hospital. Ming and Yue’s family had histories of schizophrenia...”

“Interesting. A family of insane people! But that’s not gonna to be an excuse to exonerate that kid!”

“Please. Mind your words, lieutenant. I’m speaking from my analysis and research results. Right, remember that letter with no recipient added? She’s writing to Ming, but Tian read it, making it an order that misled Ming to kill Nan, the personality that was hated by Ming...”

“But Doc...”

“Don’t interrupt, please! The personality Ming, like Nan, is “subservient”, to Tian and Yue respectively, from the documents I found from the local metal hospital. Curious thing is that these two subservient personalities finally gained control over the dominant ones. And yes, they’re out of control...”

“But Doc...”

“What!”

“Why? Why this...these...personalities occur in the first place? Why he hated her so much?”

“...Only he himself knows.”

“But he’s nearly killed by a truck after he ran from the crime scene! I’m not sure when will he regain consciousness, and probably never!...”

“He’s awake now, Lieutenant, but...”

“Really?! Can he answer questions? I’ll send my men over now!”

“...You may send some here. But he probably can’t answer your questions. He’s totally insane. That’s what I mean, an schizophrenic can’t be charged in this suit! “

“What d’you mean by totally insane?”

Tomorrow

“He’s entering a half-conscious state. He’s traumatized by unspeakable sorrows, but he cannot understand anything. You saw people like this before, right? Lieutenant. His symptom...well...just repeating two words.”

“What are they?”

“*Ming Tian.*”

“*Ming Tian? Tomorrow?* The names of the boy’s two personalities? Any meaning can be inferred from this, Doc?”

“Nay. Maybe...Somewhere deep in their...his mind...he’s imagining that tomorrow anything will be better.”