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# UMBRELLA COUPLES

## Author's Note

This is the story of Occupy 2014. I saw part of it with my own eyes, part on television and online, and part I've read about or heard about. Except for Joshua Wong's, all the characters are invented and their participation imagined. The story centres on the experience of six fresher Hong Kong University students who took part, to name one reason, because their peers on campus under the aegis of the Hong Kong Federation of Students were doing so.

Cantonese is the language of Guangdong and Hong Kong but having only a few words of it I must tell this story in English.

I am writing as a foreigner but I believe a well-informed one. Being British, Hong Kong meant something to me before I arrived and then I had six years living and working there. Occupy came towards the end of this, I shared in the wild enthusiasm and I left with a firm intention to re-explore those seventy-nine days of Hong Kong's political history at leisure some day while the memories were still fresh.

## ONE

Before the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami reached the coast of Thailand the sea drew back exposing corrals and sands to the curious, who waded out to take advantage of an odd opportunity. In Hong Kong, something similar was happening on a Monday morning in September 2014.

The six-lane carriageway of Queensway, a canyon between international office towers, was uncannily abandoned, no trams, buses or taxis sweeping past as normally they did on a Monday morning. Guests from the Shangri La, the Conrad and the Marriott hotels overlooking Queensway from the escarpment of the Pacific Place complex, having seen the news at breakfast, came down. The heat was sweltering and the sky blue. Now was the time to see in person the road blocked at both ends by barricades. In well-shod feet guests stepped gingerly between the tram lines and among tyre husk fragments and burls of rubber flung aside by the traffic, took photographs, then hurried out of the heat back to their hotels.

The outlandish barricades, built overnight, were made of Mills Barriers, wooden pallets, bamboo scaffolding poles, shopping trolleys with lumps of concrete in them, all tied up together with plastic ties and wire.

Office workers joined each other at the windows of their towers, some delayed in their journeys to work by the disruption to bus routes. There was no trace of conflict on view. A few wilted young men were having breakfast on the lip of a pavement—noodle soup. Beyond the barriers a few tired knots of police stood around waiting to be relieved.

On the corner of Queensway and Cotton Tree Drive at the foot of the Lippo Tower, a young woman stood beside a stack of water bottles: trays of twelve in shrink wrapping with a few already pulled out from the top row. She was a local Chinese Hong Kong woman in her late twenties and she looked tired and slightly ill. She had a mask and goggles around her neck and was in boots, trousers and a long-sleeved shirt. A young man came up the steps from the MTR, took his rucksack off, lent it against the wall and puffed. He was a foreigner with brown eyes and brown hair. His name was Matt and he was twenty-six. Slightly dizzy in

the heat, he took a notebook out of his pocket, raised a smile and turned towards the motionless Chinese girl.

‘You all right, bab? I’m Matt,’ he said, speaking in a Brummie accent whose tones are impossible to replicate in print.

‘I beg my pardon?’

‘Don’t you find it hot standing here?’

‘Yes. Have some water.’ She ripped out a bottle and offered it politely to him with both hands and he took it.

‘So what’s the situation?’

‘Police fired tear gas last night so we cannot breathe. I still have acid taste.’

‘You look a bit off-colour. Are you alone here?’

‘Not alone, just quiet time here now after night.’ Then she said with some determination, ‘We have to finish our mission, fight China!’

There were some young men on the flyover. Matt put his rucksack on again and climbed a concrete staircase. In the blazing sun was another empty carriageway, Cotton Tree Road, running inland between oblique-faced Bank of China and rectilinear Citibank Tower. Where the road began to ascend the hill a group of police vehicles were parked behind a barricade of orange and white blocks. In the sky, kites wheeled around Citibank Tower and over the Botanical and Zoological Gardens. The four teenagers manning this section had been up all night and were doubly drugged by exhaustion and the oppressive heat. They were on look-out and in touch with the main group by phone. Two were starting degrees in Physical Exercise, one in Maths and one in Geography at university on the Kowloon-side. They suggested he follow the curve of the flyover in the other direction towards the waterfront where he’d find the main body on Connaught Road.

Some hours later, when it was morning in the UK, Matt’s girlfriend, Sarah, found herself sitting as usual at her desk at the Health and Safety Bi-Annual Review. She was looking out of the window at the stinging rain falling over the business park in which her office was situated. Matt had gone to Hong Kong to make his name as a reporter and here she was left with her dull copy-editor job. They had met a year earlier on a Journalism MA at Cardiff. They had bought a car together. She could see it in the car park now, a red Mini Cooper. The rain was

pelting it in a most uncomfortable way. She felt broody and the car was the closest thing to their baby. The telephone rang - Matt.

‘Hello, Sarah, how are you?’

‘Oh hello, Matt. Everything ok?’

‘I spoke to a few people already but it’s so hot I want to tear my clothes off.’

‘Oh, Matt, don’t do that, you’ll get arrested.’

‘No, I won’t, babs.’ He laughed.

‘I don’t expect you’d better waste time talking to me.’

‘Just checking in. Everything ok?’

‘Yes, except it’s been raining all day so me and Red Mini are on the verge of depression.’

At nightfall sixty thousand Hong Kongers gathered on Connaught Road in the Admiralty district. They belonged chiefly among three organisations, Scholarism, Occupy Central with Peace and Love and Hong Kong Federation of Students. A mushroom field of small adventure tents now covered the road, which was a six-lane highway like Queensway, and which passed right by the Legislative Council (LegCo) complex. At the turn in onto Tim Mei Avenue, more tents were outside the two main entrances to the government buildings. Rolling down one flyover and then up another with LegCo and Tim Mei Avenue in the dip, Connaught Road suited its new purpose as a mass rallying point, and for everyone occupying the road the effect was that of a banked arena or a monster-sized skateboard park. Then there were slip roads and footbridges, concrete upon concrete, all in the Occupy Zone; at a bus stop a single stranded double-decker stood garlanded with protest regalia, the only vehicle in sight.

From a particularly orderly row of tents, newcomers were being handed goggles and bottled water against possible tear gas or pepper spray attack. As the sunlight dwindled the road lit with sodium street lamps and stood in the glow of surrounding office towers which would remain lit all night. Welcome coolness replaced the stifling heat. A Mexican Wave began, flowing down one flyover, across and up the other. The central portion of the crowd took up a chant, three syllables of Cantonese, CY LEUNG OUT. From the footbridge a very large banner was unfurled to much cheering. Figures important and unimportant lined up to give speeches at platforms, aided by loudhailers. There was a pen of television crews on the fast lane, cameras trained left and right.

A band of students came out with flowers for the police. Beyond the Connaught Road barriers was a no-man's-land and then further down the twinkling lights of the diverted city traffic. The police were there, well back, behind their own barriers, in long weary lines.

Matt found a pub. He had been very excited by what he had witnessed but too exhausted to behave like a journalist. He sat at the bar tended by two Filipina bar staff who had nothing to say about what was going on a few blocks away. He returned to Occupy slightly drunk and pitched his Lidl Economy Rambler tent somewhere on Tim Mei Avenue. The movement of his neighbours inside their tent resembled an Asiatic puppet show. Succumbing to East-West location confusion, Matt fell into jet-lagged sleep.

## TWO

In the morning the tents of Occupy became as hot as ovens. In one lay three freshers of Hong Kong University. Two were doing their best to sleep on the ground-sheet over solid tarmac, bags pushed down to their knees, the other one, Reggie, was lying on his back, jacket rolled up for a pillow, reading a black-and-white Japanese Manga comic because his phone was out of battery, and he was waiting for the others to wake up. In neat, short-clipped hair and a rigid posture - even lying down - there was something of the police academy or parade ground about Reggie. As a Kung-Fu black belt used to a hard regime of training, the solid floor and hot-box interior taxed him but little, though he was using his magazine to shade his eyes from the glowing tent fabric. His young face was taut and expressionless. Outside he heard footsteps and passing voices. The camp had long been up and he was feeling impatient.

At last Henry opened his eyes and felt for his spectacles.

‘Did you sleep?’ said Reggie.

‘A little.’

They had all been up some of the night keeping watch at the north end of Tim Mei Avenue. No one knew when the police would try to move in. From one barricade to another, contact was kept through messaging and it had been a quiet night, the police in small groups threatening nothing. Kelvin, the third of them, had passed the time making up nicknames and then suggested they all go to bed and they had done so.

‘I must be awake, even bad dreams aren’t this uncomfortable,’ said Henry. ‘I think we’re sleeping on top of a road marking.’

‘An army sleeps where it can,’ said Reggie.

‘Is that what we are, an army?’

Kelvin rolled over and joined the conversation. ‘The Commander is awake,’ he said. ‘Good morning, Black Monk and Groaning Lieutenant.’

‘We should get a cover over this tent, it’s shining like a glow-worm’s butt,’ said Reggie.

‘Leave that to me,’ said Henry, who excelled in anything practical.



Term had begun a few weeks ago and they had been allotted the same hall corridor, sharing it with three girls. Campus in those first weeks had been dominated by one topic, the need for activism against the administration. The Hong Kong Federation of Students urged participation and when Occupy began on Sunday afternoon the three of them had followed their leaders and peers down into the action. The first hours had been chaotic and life-changing, standing up to the police who attempted to clear Connaught Road, tear gas driving them back. Then a new push in stronger numbers, the police this time falling back, and those on the street then spending the whole of Sunday night holding their ground, building barricades, bringing in materials to bolster their foothold. And it had all lead to this, this new tent-existence in the middle of the road in the most expensive commercial land in Hong Kong.

‘Boys!’ Hands were shaking their tent, those of the three girls with whom they had been sharing the hall corridor, freshers like themselves. The girls were sleeping in a separate tent. They had already stood in line for the public wash-room and washed their faces, a line which rippled with chatter reminiscent of the enrolment queues at campus.

‘Come on, boys, we want breakfast.’ The voice was Bettie’s. She was distinctly pretty, compact, athletic, a Hong Konger dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. She had come up like the others through Hong Kong’s schooling system and by dint of hard-work and intelligence got her place at HKU, the top university in the territory.

Once the boys were out there was some dithering. They were still new to each other and new to being undergraduates. For high school students the natural choice would have been a *dai pai dong* cafe for noodle soup or congee, but were not the eating habits of undergraduates expected to be more sophisticated? Ping decided it, the one mainlander among them, demanding coffee, and the others fell in readily with that and they set off out of camp.

Ping was from Shanghai, enrolled like the others as a fresher and she was doing her best with circumstances very contrary to her - so needed her coffee. For one, she found herself taking part in civil disobedience not only intolerable to the mainland but directed against Beijing itself. Then, sleeping in a tent was far from what she was used to, as was washing in public facilities. The temptation to bolt to the nearest five-star hotel was frequently felt. But as a relative foreigner she had

persuaded herself she must try and go with the flow. She had a soft, fine-boned, symmetrical face and always wore make-up. She had no casual clothes to speak of, only designer pieces that risked ridicule in camp. She knew her way of speaking said ‘mainlander’ to some and for her part she suspected Hong Kong men, despite the stubborn commitment of the last twenty-four hours, of being essentially white-blooded and puny.

Manhattan Coffee, a few blocks outside the camp perimeter, was already packed with camp members. Devices were being charged at the wall at a corral-like growth of extension boxes and reedy wiring. By luck a sofa came free. Red and plush, it was Bettie who sprang on it first. She fingered the vermilion velvet pile and knew she wanted hot chocolate and a Danish Pastry, suddenly and unexpectedly in possession of one of those clear memories, almost visionary in nature, that sometimes arrive in life.

Her memory concerned a school camping trip in Sai Kung in conditions much the same as now: hard ground, few toilet facilities, routine all new. At the end of the weekend she and her fellow Girl Guides had marched out of the dirty campsite, out of the woods, stopping at an old roadside store in a remote village. There was an outside vending machine and a row of ramshackle seating. Here she’d collapsed on a clean plastic-moulded chair with a can of perfectly chilled coca cola, overcome with pleasure, realising intensely how simple she was. Let her basic physical wants be satisfied and she was happy. The same conviction now returned to her in Manhattan Coffee. Let her have hot chocolate and Danish, that was all that was required and let the others talk politics. It was a positively guilty epiphany, lacking high ethics or responsibility, but so it was. ‘Cryingly soft,’ she murmured, stroking the arm of the sofa that was the agent of her memory.

‘Good. Enjoy it.’ The nick-name specialist, Kelvin, said this. The look he gave her was one of definite interest. She was glad. His tallness, fine hands, quiet manner had made an impression on her from the first day of term, especially as underneath there was definitely something of the wolf there, she thought.

All the boys now began to act strangely. None would sit. They were newly minted soldiers all of a sudden, indifferent to comfort, morphed into the military. Only the girls were still natural.

‘I hope this will all end today,’ said Ping, next to join Bettie on the sofa.

‘Yes, if CY Leung resigns,’ said Henry.

‘What about nicknames for us girls, since you all have them?’ said Bettie, who wanted Kelvin to say more to her.

‘You can have one,’ said Kelvin, ‘choose your own.’

‘I can’t think of my own nickname. I’m too simple. Can’t you choose one for me?’

‘I will,’ he said, ‘but I’ll have to think.’

The last of the girls and so far the quietest, was Angela, who had only come into camp late the previous night, having volunteer work at the Lutheran Hospice in Kowloon which she was sticking to. In jeans and a T-shirt, she listened attentively and shyly to everyone else, laughed at anything funny and blushed easily.

### THREE

The Honourable Albert Yu, as he was correctly addressed because he held the Domestic Infrastructure seat, the seat of a functional constituency, came down the sunlight-filled concourse somewhere inside LegCo looking for his aides. He was of medium height, in his mid-sixties and he wore a grey suit. He was a congenial man and his wife said he had a comfortable face, but his body had been far from comfortable lately. There were aches and pains only he knew of, a bit of gout in his wrist and indigestion if he over-ate as all lawmakers tended to. Sometimes he had a definite sense of being unwell. He found the aides already mustered waiting for him, ready to leave for the weekly sub-committee meeting at the Liaison Office, there to report on the latest progress of the Macau-Hong Kong Bridge.

Yesterday, as civil servants had to brave the besieged entrance gates, a feeling of profound shock and, in some quarters, fear, had gripped LegCo, despite the fact Occupy Central with Peace and Love had been openly planned by a HKU law professor a full year beforehand. Today, having withstood the first twenty-four hours, tensions were somewhat relaxed. Albert, along with other ministers, had just sat with CY Leung, the Chief Executive, for a closed-door morning briefing. CY Leung had stood before his ministers spry and fearless. 'We'll let the gossamer-haired kids express their feelings for a while,' he told them. 'No more tear gas.' And he instructed his ministers to continue explaining the government position as best they could, that their hands were tied because it would be illegal for the government to try to circumvent the provisions of the Basic Law.

Earlier in the year, reform in the means of electing future Chief Executives to involve a popular, territory-wide ballot, had reached the political calendar. This reform was intended to bring to fruition the very old Article 45 of the Basic Law, which was drafted in 1990 by Beijing in accordance with the then recently signed Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong. As the reform and consultation process began it was popularly believed a meaningful democratic methodology would now be instituted, since both Beijing and successive Hong Kong administrations had been promising it for years. After all, Article 45 provided for 'selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage'. But the devil

was in the detail because the same article provided for ‘nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee’ - a rather more Chinese arrangement. If it was hoped that the power of the nominating committee would somehow be nullified when the final details of the reforms were announced, that proved far from the case. Instead, following CY Leung’s report of local conditions in Hong Kong to the Standing Committee of the People’s Republic of China, Beijing announced the final requirements of the reform and it became clear Hong Kong would not be getting democracy in any meaningful sense, but staged democracy, puppet-show democracy, in a set up where the nominating committee would always control the selection of candidates to stringent Beijing requirements weeding out local populist candidates. This was the reason for the present action on the streets.

At that morning briefing, CY Leung told his ministers he would continue to do his best to explain that no promises were being broken. He told them he had instructed the Chief Justice to write an article for the popular newspapers explaining to the people what was legally possible and what was not, making it clear that the people’s desire for civil nomination of candidates without a nominating committee would not be within the law.

Impressed with the nerve of his Chief Executive, Albert now had his own waiting subordinates to settle. He was ten minutes late and they had all been standing patiently. ‘Well, business as usual,’ he said cheerfully, ‘let’s go.’ One of the aides opened a side-door and they all went into the innards of the building, bound for the basement car-park where a pool car and chauffeur were waiting for them.

The most senior of the three aides had graduated from an American university and he wore a narrow little tie and Oxford brogues. He was good humoured and kept his distance from controversy. He considered himself alike to his boss, Albert Yu, whom he never challenged. To him, their passage along a close staircase, their feet echoing on a concrete floor, was something of a game, although he kept a serious face. On they went to a place of heavy concrete walls, an intensifying smell of clutch oil and the hum of electricity from lateral computer stacks.

The second aide, short and wearing a waistcoat beneath his suit vest, was a sharp-tongued, cynical, middle-rank civil servant. In the last few days he had dug

up the original spiel of the architect's brochure for the design of the LegCo Complex completed only a few years earlier on reclaimed land at the waterfront and found good material for snide remarks. This brochure promised connectivity with the people, green carpet lawns, a symbolic door-always-open configuration in the way one building was an inverted L under which people could walk. And glass frontages at the visitor's entrance would demonstrate the transparency and democratic nature of the administration inside. 'Look where the vision has got us,' he had been saying. 'We've certainly got connectivity with the people. The feng shui may be all right but we're an open target for siege.'

Up the rear came the youngest of the group, clutching the pile of copies of the report he'd mainly had to compile and still smarting because his mother had insisted on cutting his hair that morning so he should not be mistaken for one of the protestors.

A black car was waiting for them, flashed its lights to show its presence and the four climbed aboard, Albert up front. The car moved along the ramp, the barrier pinged up, the fortified gate slid aside and the vehicle sailed out onto a quiet back road, dazzling white in the morning sunlight. Albert was considered a kindly, paternal sort of boss by his aides, not at all formal, and the first aide couldn't help shouting out, 'Sputnik is a launch!'

The Kennedy Town district is an old commercial district of dried-goods shophouses. Once commanding the waterfront in the sixties, now it is obscured behind several phases of land reclamation. Here rises the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government among the old mercantile properties, a monolithic skyscraper with a weather-ball-like object at its summit. Though officially a news and media department whose aim is to 'enhance cooperation with Hong Kong in the exchange of information', the Liaison Office is actually Beijing's parallel government here. It was not far in the car. Albert lead is team in through the front, through revolving entrance doors, past the burly commissionaire, on into the large under-lit foyer with its distinctive scrubbed smell and he felt, not for the first time, the uncanny sensation of having left liberal Hong Kong for something more sober and peculiarly of the mainland.

It was a complicated relationship, Albert always said that. China could be like a dictatorial father or condescending older brother, but it was also kin, sharing large areas of cultural and philosophical consanguinity. Beijing's representatives

in Hong Kong could be no less conflicted. There were times when the Liaison Office and LegCo dined together socially, events regularly organised by one side or the other. Only the other day, at a LegCo-hosted banquet to taste a range of imported wines, the Liaison Office Chief, far from sober after sampling a good twenty vintages, had made a joke. Picking out one of the astonished pro-democrat members from amongst the Hong Kong lawmakers present, he had clapped him on the back and heartily confided the following information: ‘The fact that you are allowed to stay alive already shows Beijing’s leniency!’

They were now conducted to the fifth floor by three stiff-collared security men and left in the usual meeting room. As usual the room was empty and they were left to stew, a picture of Xi Jinping staring at them alongside his State Council of thirty-five members, while on the opposite wall hung a photograph of the Central Committee, two hundred in number.

The meeting chairman now came in with his aides. Xan Ho-Janquing was fifty-five and kept himself fit in the gym on the thirtieth floor. He wore his hair as Xi Jinping did, parted to the left, a jet black helmet helped along with dye. These meetings always began with a stern formality befitting the might of imperial China, but today’s was particularly cold and stiff from the beginning, as if infused by Beijing’s displeasure at the turmoil in the streets.

The meeting was concerned with progress on the bridge. Albert presented the report prepared by his aides. Part of the financing came from China’s Central Government, well-versed in mega projects - the Yangtze dam, the Qingdao bridge – who demanded weekly accounts of every rivet placed and seam welded. It would all be written up and sent to Beijing. As the meeting finished, Xan took Albert aside.

‘And there’s nothing that can disrupt our bridge? The Central Party will not tolerate any interference with the construction.’

‘Nothing at all,’ said Albert.

‘Hong Kong is offered unlimited support, as always. But Beijing must be consulted and indeed it may be that Beijing must take the lead.’

‘About the bridge?’

‘Yes, certainly about the bridge.’

When they were out of the building in Des Voeux Road the youngest aide let out a sigh of relief and they all laughed. Now it was time for lunch and Albert

always treated them to a meal at a nearby Sichuan Restaurant that did very good boiled fish. Crossing the street, the young aide said, 'We are sorry, Mr Xan Ho-Janquing, that our students are giving you such a headache.'

'Did we put them out?' said the first aide.

'What was that?' said Albert, always ready to enter any merriment.

'Boss, we'll put something together, give them everything they want for next week's report, don't you worry,' said the second aide.

In the restaurant, a waitress whose long tight scaly skirt suggested a mermaid's tail conducted them to a table.

'What did Mr Xan Ho-Janquing say to you, boss?' asked the first aide.

'Eh, he's a cold fish sometimes, isn't he?' said Albert.

He ordered for the table the mapo tofu, the twice-cooked pork and the Sichuan boiled fish.



## FOUR

From the beginning of Occupy, Scholarism had been installed in the car park of the Visitor's Entrance to LegCo, just off Tim Mei Avenue, itself crammed with tents. This car-park area was half open and half beneath LegCo. The open-air part was enclosed on two sides by walls which were ramparts to the new lawns which bordered the waterfront; the remaining area was under a concrete ceiling between concrete pillars. In another city in another time this car-park, gloomy and urban, might have been a hang-out for skateboard kids and graffiti artists. As it was, military ranks of tents now stood among the pillars and the administration Scholarism opposed was directly, heavily, above them.

The founder of Scholarism was Joshua Wong, now seventeen, an ordinary Hong Konger. It was he who had galvanised his generation to take part in political protest in such numbers. Two years ago CY Leung had announced a new Beijing-sponsored national curriculum for primary schools, a curriculum, it was quickly clear, which sanitised Chinese History and sought to inculcate unthinking patriotism here. Hong Kongers did not like the idea of being brain-washed like mainland children. Wong, fifteen years old at the time, founded Scholarism to fight it. He was then and remained a typical Hong Kong schoolboy with regulation black hair, regulation spectacles, regulation everything, a geeky kid next-door, but, as he began to appear on television and on the internet, Hong Kong began to know his precocious gift for straight talking. In interviews and clashes with figures in the administration he excelled. For instance, in one televised open-air discussion forum, he listened to a lady teacher arguing in support of the national curriculum then took to the microphone. 'Saying the Chinese Communist Party is a progressive, selfless, united, ruling party is very problematic,' he began by telling her. Then he asked what her political ambitions were. Wasn't she intending to stand for political office on the pro-Beijing side, thus betraying the students for her own advancement, was the unsaid question. Furiously the lady teacher banged the table before her. 'That is a question for a future time, ask me at the elections,' she roared. Wong, unabashed, quickly replied, 'I hope the teacher isn't scolding me by banging the table. We're respectful here in this forum. We don't smack

tables.’ Wong organised mass vigils around LegCo, packing its waterfront lawns with what seemed every young person in Hong Kong, until in mid-summer a surprised CY Leung came to the podium before the press, blinked in the sun, his face twitched and he announced that the national curriculum would not after all be compulsory.

Now, in the car park, it was nearing the end of the day. A group had gone to buy a large number of orders of pork and rice at Cafe de Corral; Wong and others were sitting in a circle on the car-park floor. Because of the size and scale of Occupy it was difficult not to be permanently on edge, but for the moments things seemed on track. On Connaught Road another big rally was coming together and that was heartening. Occupy might have no leader in common but there was unity in so many people taking part in civil disobedience, prepared for violent arrest and a permanent black-mark against their names.

Wong was playing a Nintendo game against another guy, taking turns with the console, their clear young faces side by side. His opponent was winning, delighted in the game, Wong’s energy was turned off. From how badly he was playing he seemed stupid. He had had exhausting interviews and press-conferences all day as well as steering meeting with the three other factions. ‘Wah, you’re always so bad,’ said his opponent, his face full of mock pity for Wong, as his avatar killed off Wong’s.

The food arrived, individual polystyrene boxes held down with elastic bands. Wong balanced his food box on one leg, his tablet on the other, toggling between news pages, emails and social media apps. News agencies the world over wanted to talk to Wong and renew their acquaintance with this unlikely force in Hong Kong politics. He finished eating, burped, and headed off for the wash-room.

The public wash-room was in the street-level ramparts of LegCo at the head of Tim Mei Avenue. The particular genius of Occupy was in evidence in the way large stocks of donated toothpaste, shampoo, razors and tissues were laid on, making the wash-rooms unlike any anyone had ever experienced. In the Gentlemen’s, after peeing, Wong went to a basin, carefully put his spectacles on the counter before him and washed first his hands and then his face thoroughly and quickly. A foreigner was washing at the next basin - it was Matt.

Matt had put his notebook on the spotless counter in front of the washbasins too. 'Journalist's Notebook' it proclaimed in gold embossed letters on a faux-leather cover. He and Sarah had learnt shorthand on the Cardiff course and it was a birthday gift from Sarah. A slightly goofy choice he had thought, but he had brought the notebook with him to Hong Kong all the same. He recognised Wong immediately.

'You're Joshua Wong aren't you. I'm Matt.'

Wong jumped. 'Wah, no one talks in the bathroom, not in Hong Kong.'

'I'm with you there. Wouldn't want anyone jumping to the wrong conclusion.'

'Wah, no, no.'

Up to then it had been a bad day for Matt. He had been walking around the camp, groggy in the heat, feeling too shy to be a journalist and to talk to Chinese strangers. Instead he'd gone to a cafe and read the South China Morning Post and the Hong Kong Standard (on whose front cover was a picture of Joshua Wong), recharged his phone, all with a bemused feeling he was going to fail. Sarah, from her desk at the Health and Safety Review, had compiled and sent him a short-list of alumni from Cardiff working in journalism who might prove useful contacts. At noon he had gone to Mongkok, also an Occupy site and the scene, according to the newspapers, of violent struggles overnight. This was a closer, older Hong Kong, a rusting, cemented, neon-signed, blue-collar area. The traffic was blocked and it was the protestors who seemed besieged, hemmed in on all sides by their own barricades, fighting continual scuffles with police, angry local tradesman, taxi drivers, government agents and paid troublemakers.

Once Wong had his spectacles back on he was very friendly to Matt and invited him to drop in on Scholarism. Outside the wash-rooms, Matt watched Wong walk away through the Connaught Road crowd where he was quickly recognised. Impromptu cheers of 'G-phone' went up and many stopped Wong to embrace him. Greatly encouraged, Matt made his way through the crowd himself to have a celebratory pint at that bar with those two Filipina barmaids of the day before.

At nine a tropical rain-storm arrived and sent people running for cover. Quickly, all that was left of the rally was the wet buffeted tents up and down Connaught Road.

Squalls ran wild. Campers stood huddled under the lee of buildings like Antarctic penguins, watching as tents broke free and ballooned airborne.

The squalls ran their course and the rain eased. The rain-washed air rang to laughter. It grew warm and dry again.

Matt's tent hung from an empty flower basket halfway up a street lamp and there he found it when he returned from the pub. He was aware of a happy mood among his neighbours, as if surviving the rain-storm was the next chapter in Occupy, after the police charges of earlier and the tear gas, justifying the same elation at survival.

Bettie and Kelvin had stood out the storm under Citic Tower nearby. Kelvin had been tagging along with Bettie all day. When Bettie saw the lone foreigner prodding the lamp-post she felt sorry for him and went to help. Reggie and Henry were also around, catching some sleep when the storm broke, having to run for cover and Reggie was still in a grumpy mood which Henry, who had the gift of a good nature, had been trying to shift. Between them all, they brought down the tent.

Reggie looked at Matt coolly. 'So you've come to witness the fighting?'

'I'm a journalist really, that's the plan.' Reggie nodded sourly.

The rain started again and the more friendly Henry invited Matt into the boys' tent. It smelled of footwear. Text books in physics, computer programming and statistics stood in small piles and a few comics were strewn among the bedclothes. Henry began to explain to Matt that they were HKU freshers. 'We follow the student union,' he said, 'but we agree anyway. The government and Beijing want to break the promise on democratic reform.'

'I need to read a few myself,' said Matt, meaning some books.

'We are pushed only a few centimetres from the mainland now,' said Bettie, listening at the door, 'but really we are like Singapore.'

Their English was very good.

'Maybe we think different, our generation,' said Henry, 'not in the traditional Chinese way – harmony, obey elders. We are criticised for that but we are all likely to get jobs abroad, whatever happens in Hong Kong.'

Bettie crawled in. 'We all worked very hard. Our dream of an easy life arrives, and wah, look! Twenty-four hour political occupation. No easy romantic time finding new boyfriend.'

‘Twenty-four hour protest still leaves time for love,’ Kelvin pointed out, crawling in after her.

‘Well, it’s nice to talk to someone Chinese,’ said Matt.

‘Hong Kong,’ corrected Reggie.

They gave him a tent and Matt went to bed. It was cooler than last night after the rain and the road outside damp. Footsteps passed, Reggie, Henry and Kelvin going out for picket duty. Finding no sleep, Matt got up to walk around. He couldn’t find them. He stood under Citic Tower and looked at the myriad towers of International Banking that stood along the road, beautiful at night with their layer on layer of office lights, passive and in their modernity surely ultimately on the side of Democracy and Western Values. He was vaguely amazed at it and spent some time thinking why in a sober journalistic mode, jotting down phrases in his notebook: that this spaghetti roadway system on the flanks of LegCo had been ceded to a protest camp; that a mercantile entrepôt, synonymous with Singapore, had become a political arena; that a sharp needle of insurrection was being jabbed at China by these smart young people.

## FIVE

The next day, 1st October, was National Day, the sixty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, a public holiday across all Chinese territories including Hong Kong, the date chosen by the activists to coincide with the beginning of Occupy.

Because of Occupy CY Leung's office cancelled the evening's waterfront fireworks. His only public engagement was to be an early morning flag raising ceremony at Golden Bauhanian Square outside the Wanchai Conference Centre and here he found Joshua Wong and his followers, raised arms in yellow arm-bands, calling for his resignation.

On Connaught Road the campsite came awake again. Occupiers crawled out of tents and stood up to stretch and groan after the uncomfortable night. They retrieved their clothes from the highway railings put out to dry after the storm. What would the day bring? Police stocks of new weapons and lacrymators had been seen carried into LegCo but were the police likely to make a big move on a public holiday. It seemed not.

In fact this was the day working people who had not yet seen the camp with their own eyes came and brought their families with them. By mid-morning, in strong sunlight, Connaught Road was packed. Two slow thick knots of visitors moved in counter streams, one each side of the central reservation, through alleys of tents and stands. Parents pushed their children in stroller buggies up and down, the malls left empty for once, and submitted to the students who pinned the new emblem, a yellow ribbon, on lapels. Hong Kong's new democratic village was on show.

Kelvin and Bettie were on station at adjacent HKU canopy tents, she in a team doling out bottles of mineral water, he among those spraying the hot passageway between tents with clouds of cooling water vapour using laboratory bottles. Three-way tension existed. Bettie's boyish magnetism was the focus of Kelvin's entire attention. Next to him, another fresher, a student on the athletics team by appearance, was also acting up for Bettie's attention. This gave Kelvin deep pain. Bettie was aware of the two vying for her attention and was enjoying

herself. For Kelvin it was unbearable and he body-checked the jock with his shoulder who gave ground slightly. Kelvin was flushed and felt like a dumpling in hot fat, squeezing off a cloud of mist into his own face making Bettie smile.

For two days he had been thinking of little but her. He had both a horrible feeling that she could see straight through him and an instinct that, energetic and perfect though she was, she might yet be drawn to his laziness and sloth.

Kelvin had worked as hard as anyone to pass the HKU entrance exams, but he was lazy and liked to be lazy. He had no intention of doing much more of that sort of toil in his life. And he wouldn't need to as his father wanted him to join the family business, a leather goods manufacturing concern, and he had promised to do so after graduation. It was an easy option that would suit him. His father would still be there to run things, he wanted to marry early and have a family. His target was to be just like his grandfather, the founder of the company, an easy-going happy old man in retirement whom Kelvin envied. He wanted to lay up in a grandfather's chair too as soon as possible and this was part of the source of his inferiority before Bettie. Could he really hope that she wanted him?

During yesterday's pursuit, he, Bettie, Henry and Angela, had gone to Fairwood's, a canteen restaurant across the road in the Admiralty Centre, a pleasant room with benches and tables under big windows which showed Connaught Road.

Bettie was well-mannered and ate gracefully. She was the eldest among three, with two younger brothers. Kelvin, an only child, was jealous of these two younger brothers. How he would have loved to have had a sister like her.

It seemed now every meal was the forum for a political discussion. The other two were the most talkative and Kelvin realised there was sexual chemistry as well as social politics on the menu. Angela, scarily virtuous on account of her volunteer work, likeably sincere too, was being both shy and high-spirited. Henry, detached for once from Reggie, was by comparison solid, reliable, geeky, but he too was unnaturally animated. When Angela asked him, 'Don't you think there should be more provision for social care in Hong Kong for the elderly? In such a rich city it was wrong that old people have to survive by dragging cardboard to collection points,' Henry agreed eagerly, 'Yes, CY Leung's eyes are looking up at Beijing not down on Hong Kong's poor, that's the trouble.' This struck Kelvin as not the way Henry normally talked.

Kelvin found his own foot tapping involuntarily under the table. He was keeping his opinion to himself. If a family had a dynasty it wouldn't need to rely on social care. Yes, he came from a two-generation family business, soon to become three, and no doubt his views followed. His father always said politicians were welcome to whatever social theories they liked as long as they didn't screw up the economy.

Kelvin noticed Bettie was impressed by Angela, listening to her every word. 'Kelvin and I are the fish out of water,' she said suddenly, giving Kelvin a profound look. It was good she put them in the same category and he felt better, if a little put out.

So today his nerves were on edge. This was the girl he was going to marry – if he could win her. She was unsettled, an unquantifiable man badness in him casting a magnetic drag on her female goodness. She felt weakened and dizzy. 'Any nickname for me yet?' she said across the tent alley. 'No, not yet,' he replied. She wondered what he was thinking.

Angela was standing outside Exit A of the Admiralty MTR waiting for her boyfriend. She had finished her volunteer shift and had promised herself a look at 'The People's Wall'. She felt slightly run down and arriving at Occupy cheered her up, as did the daylight after the corridors of the night hospice.

She had an eighteen-year-old's life. Her mother was a virago, her father a battered husband, both of them primary school teachers in a small Christian school. Angela did social work to get a sense of self-worth she did not get from her mother. Her hard-fought place at HKU was another way to dodge her mother and go her own way. Brought up a church-goer, she thought of her mother as a That's-My-Pew-You're-Sitting-In type, un-Christian before, during and after mass. For Angela, an ardent need for love was channelled into a love for Jesus Christ. Everyone in her generation had been born after the 1997 Handover, when foreign administration ended, but the Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist churches remained. She was a proud Chinese Christian. She wanted to break out, loose her shyness, talk and talk, open and friendly and loving. Occupy was the best thing that had ever happened to her and she was ready to burst with love.

William, her boyfriend, had a few virtues, punctuality being one of them. He was a newly fledged dentist already accumulating the professional habits of an old man. One of her mother's favourite's as a primary school pupil, he was still in her



mother's power, rather too servile. He was big, already balding, already growing a paunch, but still Angela had a soft spot for him. She felt she could run rings around him if she chose, when she was free of her mother and had him out of her influence – then she'd make him pay.

Meeting here on the edge of Occupy was at her insistence. He was not friendly to the movement, already pompous in his views. She wanted him to see the protest village and end to his sneering. He was particularly patronising to HKU - a sore point, he had graduated from somewhere inferior.

He arrived and took her by the hand in a proprietorial way. He did understand about her hospice shift and asked her kindly how it had been, while frowning because she was in jeans and a T-shirt and he liked her in a print dress. Patience over, he delivered a message from her mother. 'She wants you to know you can't mix with these people. As you know, I agree with her.'

'Oh yes, it's all too inharmonious for you, of course,' said Angela, quick to anger this morning, 'so un-Chinese.'

'At least let's agree it's too hot,' he said. 'Wouldn't you like to be in a cool mall?'

'Not really. I prefer democratic striving to consumerist slumping.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Oh, never mind.'

Angela pulled on William's hand. It was she who was taking him to The People's Wall, in charge, and she knew the direction. She gathered up all the affection she felt for him, hoping he'd be impressed, excited herself. They encountered the first thick stream of people among the tents. The layout had something of a trade fair about it, except this one was in the middle of a highway. The central reservation defied being crossed. In once place helpers were hauling people over. William waved them away and clambered across by himself. Then, in the next tent alley, a tall student beat a cardboard fan over his head and William yanked Angela on, the devil in his eyes. 'That was no help at all. Absurd!' he expostulated.

'But you must feel the spirit, the love? Hong Kong loves Hong Kong.'

'Not at all. Chicken-feathered students. Chicken-shit. No!'

She pulled him on again, struggling with tears.

The People's Wall was on the corner of Tim Mei Avenue and Connaught Road, near the wash-rooms, on the rounded flank of the LegCo complex, a ziggurat winding staircase leading down from the walkway level. The concrete face had become papered with Post-it notes, cartoons, political bills. At the feet, a little bed of flowers had lately been planted by someone in a triangle of soil. One cartoon showed a little boy in a Hong Kong T-shirt standing before a crate marked 'China'. As the lid opened Darth Vader walked out announcing, 'I am your father'.

'Don't be taken in,' said William, 'the mainland is not Darth Vader. We are all of us Chinese. Hong Kong *is* China.'

Angela felt the spirit of Jesus in all the notes on the wall. She wanted to savour them without William's objections.

William, looking at one note after another, became increasingly angry.

'You see how many messages are written in English by foreigners, not Chinese. It's cultural imperialism.'

'Yes, of course, because that's what your biased newspapers say,' said Angela.

'And foreign powers give students ideas in other newspapers. This is all illegal. The police and army should act. Don't be led by foreign ideas not suited to us. Punishment will follow.'

'What isn't suited to us? Peace. Love. Democracy – which?' she screamed.

'Oh, shut up.'

'You shut up. Don't say another word.'

'What you should worry about is that I shall leave you.'

'William, stop for once. Can't you really appreciate anything here? Isn't your dentist arrogance – I'm sorry – softened at all?'

He was reading a banner, *You might say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one*. 'He was the one shot dead in the street wasn't he?' William said coldly.

Now, equally coldly, Angela said, 'William, you have turned into a DAB member. Why can't you admit to sharing the hopes of the students and the public housing estates. You came from a housing estate yourself. Don't turn your back now you have your great professional security, the great dentist.'

He wagged his finger at her, ready to explode then thinking better of it. Pushing people aside he blundered off under the bright sun, like a buffalo bitten in a paddi by a snake.

Angela dried her eyes. She forgot about William. She read the notices and her heart soared.

‘Universal Suffrage without Civil Nomination is bullshit!’ proclaimed one.

Meanwhile, Henry and Reggie had left camp. Seeing the difficulty people were having getting across the carriageway divider, Henry had a plan to get some timber from his father and construct a handrail. This would be a contribution to a problem already seizing others’ ingenuity. A couple of pallets had already been placed to offer a climbing place. Reggie had agreed to come along and help carry the wood.

They took the MTR. In a way, Henry would rather not be returning home so soon, a fortnight after enrolment, un-transfigured so far by university, no different than before, but he was bringing Reggie with him who had a certain gravitas, and then of course there was the boast of being part of Occupy, the chief thing glueing eyes to televisions in the territory. Discouragingly, once in the MTR network, life appeared the same as ever, the carriage passengers wrapped up in the same diurnal existences as before, impossible to guess a revolution of love was going on above ground.

Tsing Yi, the place where Henry’s parents lived, is an island between Kowloon and Lantau connected both ways by rail and road bridges. The MTR stop is integrated with a large modern mall. Green minibuses venture out through the flat acres of the island on pleasant carriageways lined by paper-bark trees, through various housing estates, some public some private. On the bus Henry and Reggie had to listen to a conversation in Mandarin between two passengers, residents from Shenzhen on the mainland placed here in social housing. Once, Mandarin would rarely have been heard in Tsing Yi, now it was heard all the time, all part of the squeeze on Hong Kong from the mainland. For a moment Henry tried to see the familiar housing estates through Reggie’s eyes then realised Reggie probably lived in circumstances very similar: tiled rectilinear high-rises with small windows and external AC boxes, eight or so towers to an estate, little gardens below with baseball courts.

In Cheung Hong House, one of these towers, the lift brought them up to the fifteenth floor. The concrete landing, painted green, went off in two directions down wide corridors. Daylight came through interstices in the lattice brickwork wall next to the lift shaft. Reggie poked his nose in and looked at the territory below, dazzling and white. He followed Henry. Front doors along the corridors were modest, some fortified with cages.

Henry's parents' apartment comprised one large room. To the right of the front door were two decks of bedding where all the family slept. The middle of the room was gloomy and dominated by a long glassed-in cabinet of his mother's bric a brac, a TV and some easy chairs. At the far wall, kitchen units stood under ancient windowing and piping for gas, water and waste. The family were at the kitchen table here just finishing lunch. They rose, making a great fuss at Henry's arrival. Henry's dad was a cheerful-looking man, sun-tanned in shirt-sleeves, his mother white as milk, a slim sensible-looking woman who wore ovoid spectacles.

'You're not staying the night are you, elder brother?' said one of Henry's two brothers, disillusioned because he had just inherited Henry's bed-place, having spent his earlier life squashed beside his dad and mum in the shelf below.

Henry introduced Reggie, conscious of the martial air Reggie's khaki trousers introduced.

'Dressed for business,' said Henry's father. 'Very good.' He was obviously delighted at their arrival.

'Sit down both of you,' said Henry's mother. She was a clerk in a government office and equally pleased and flustered by their arrival.

'Put on the TV then, in case there's any news,' said Henry grandly.

'Sit on the sofa where you can see it,' said his mother.

'We can't hang here for long.'

'I'm sure they can spare you.'

Henry used the channel changer to explore the news channels. He liked the feeling of being personally involved in events on the television. Pearl TV was showing a report on CY Leung's flag-raising making light of the protest from Joshua Wong. ATV had the tail-end of a piece on the bad-tempered scuffles and pushing in Mongkok. Gangs organised among the shop-owners and road hauliers aided by Triads had unsuccessfully tried to shift the suffragists. A channel

dedicated to live events had its cameras trained on the Admiralty site, the picture showing something as orderly as a recruitment fair.

‘It’s quiet, but something could happen at any moment,’ said Henry.

‘That’s true,’ said Reggie. ‘We have to return.’

‘Even if the police move in we want to clear our stuff,’ Henry said. ‘Otherwise they will destroy everything.’

‘Will they use real bullets, and the gas again?’ asked the second younger brother.

‘We don’t know.’

‘But why do you have to be there,’ said his mother, afraid for her son.

‘Because our student union says so.’

‘That’s not a reason. Civil disobedience is all we hear. Does it know what it’s doing, that union of yours. That’s what I want to know?’

‘We just follow our social peer group. That’s how we are.’

‘Quite right,’ said Henry’s dad. ‘No time to be afraid. Just do the right thing.’

‘Well, your social group is run by a seventeen-year-old,’ his mother said in high emotion.

‘No, that’s not us, that’s Joshua Wong’s Scholarism,’ said Reggie gently.

‘Grandma, come out of the bathroom, have some noodles, Henry’s here,’ said the first younger brother.

Grandma came out, enquiry on her withered face, somehow funny. Everyone laughed. She was short enough to sleep on the two-seater sofa. That was a blessing.

‘Is my soap on yet?’ she said and everyone laughed a second time.

‘Mum, come and have some noodles,’ Henry’s mother said.

Henry grabbed his father’s arm. ‘Let’s go to your workshop, dad.’

Out in the corridor a girl drifted in front of them. She was dressed in the cute Japanese style. Her family was up the corridor. She and Henry had been to the mall together on occasion. Henry had always been self-conscious before girls, not expecting much success in that area but nursing a dogged hope that good grades at school and hard-work might lead to reward later. He had always found this girls’ apathy trying, the way she latched on to him. Now Henry instantly compared her with Angela and she came out unfavourably in the comparison.

‘Are you going to take me to the mall?’ she asked, apparently not prepared to believe that Henry had gone to HKU. ‘Not now.’ ‘Go in and have some noodles. They’re on the table,’ said Henry’s dad kindly. She did so.

In the lift, Henry’s dad filled the silence, ‘There are one or two new things in the workshop I’d like your opinion on, son. I’ve been waiting for your help.’

‘Not now, dad, we’ve no time,’ said Henry. Then, realising he’d been too grand, he corrected himself, ‘Sure, show me, dad, I’d like to see, if Reggie has time.’

‘Sure,’ said Reggie.

The workshop was outside the estate in an old shop-house down the road. Lots were occupied by car mechanics, piping suppliers and tyre suppliers, all shut for National Day. While Henry went in with his father Reggie stayed outside and sat on a tin box in the shade. There were some motionless sweated-out old men also sitting out next to the building and three mongrel dogs, each lying apart from one another, in the dust track. Across the track were banana groves and a fringe of palms before a wetland field. The sky was big and blue and there was no traffic to make a noise, only the buzz of insects.

A transistor radio was playing, tuned to the afternoon Cantonese Opera performance in Sha Tin. The shrill feminine recitative, the clanging cymbals, the two-stringed fiddle and all the other instruments sounded to Reggie like an orchestra falling down the stairs, yet somehow also lovely, belonging to grandfathers and grandmothers, to alleyways, to superseded decades and quarter centuries, to old times in China. Reggie smoked a cigarette and looked at his boots.

After a while Henry came out with some lengths of square cut timber. They said goodbye to Henry’s dad and started to walk along the track to the bus stop.

‘Your father is a kind man. Mine is nothing like that,’ said Reggie.

‘What’s yours like?’

‘Don’t ask.’

‘All right, I won’t.’

Henry was grateful to have Reggie as a new friend. Henry was a cheerful human being like his father. They made the reverse journey back to Occupy.

Ping was handing out towlettes from an ice box inside a HKU canopy tent, not far from where Bettie and Kelvin were. She was fed up and fraught and

wanted to go up to campus to cool off, wash and lie down. She had been doing this chore just about as long as she could bear. The students with her were handing out the towlettes using both hands with a particular courtesy. Ping understood that well enough: everyone was a fellow citizen considerate to each other, the whole morning an exhibition of Hong Kong loves Hong Kong. Ping could not bring herself to follow their lead though, and had been handing out the towlettes offhandedly, roughly, knowing she was acting like a spoilt teenager. Her father was a high official in Shanghai and she had grown up in a mansion-sized apartment over three floors of a high-rise, waited on by three maids and a chauffeur downstairs, all of whom knew their place. Ping found it singular that Occupy had not been crushed by the Chinese People's Liberation Army garrison down the road, or by the Hong Kong Police not seen for dust today.

At the next tent, speaking through a bullhorn, a plain-looking middle-aged woman began addressing the crowd in Cantonese and Ping was forced to listen. 'We are good, hard-working people,' the woman began. 'We deserve the consideration of politicians. Visitors here won't hear any bad words. This is a movement of peace and love, of peaceful civil disobedience. Hong Kong cannot share the same path as China. We are ready for, and must have, democracy to international standards.'

Ping got up and quit.

The traffic was five minutes walk away. It could not get from one side of Admiralty to the other except along Lung Wu Road, or by climbing the hill and taking Kennedy Road. Taxi drivers, delivery vehicles, buses, were all affected and resentful. Ping picked up a taxi, an old red Toyota Comfort. The driver was angry at the congestion, his cab reeked of stale cigarette smoke. Ping didn't care to follow his slang Cantonese and kept silent. The taxi went along Bonham Road, on the left colonial walling intermeshed with the roots of banyan trees, sunlight on the ground through the leaves.

The HKU campus is in Pokfulam, a ten minute journey, and the taxi pulled up before the modest frontage of the university at the Bonham Road entrance, buildings distinguished as belonging to the university by light sandstone construction while local apartments were in steel and glass or in brick. A group of television journalists stood on the pavement and the taxi pulled up just beyond them. Ping paid and got out, failing to notice a woman with a microphone

creeping up behind her, waddling slightly in a tight below-the-knee dress, followed by a full TV crew.

It was a mainland TV channel. The TV journalist had a deeply pressed look in her eyes, elegantly dressed though she was. It was one mainlander recognising another, for Ping no escape. In a sweet voice the TV journalist said to Ping in Mandarin, ‘You are a student, aren’t you? What are your thoughts about the illegal activity in Admiralty?’

Ping went cold. Of course she must agree, yes, this student group in Admiralty was a wilful, destructive element acting under the influence of foreign powers. But somehow the words wouldn’t form. Instead she blustered bravely. ‘The what?’ pretending not to understand.

‘The civil disobedience . . . but maybe you have only been out shopping!’ The television reporter had to be quick to change tack. ‘How nice to meet a sensible young woman who knows Hong Kong for its shops.’ It was true Ping was wearing a belt whose white-gold buckle was in the distinctive H of Hermes, and she wore it on trousers very expensive too, now her camping trousers.

‘No, I didn’t shop. I cannot talk to you about anything, I’m only a fresher student,’ said Ping. She brushed the microphone away and darted up into the campus.

The campus adheres to the Mid-Levels slope. In a hollow between campus buildings is a quiet garden with a lily pond, a flowering tree and an ornamental boulder, home to a bronze of Sun Yat Sen. Although he was usually seen in European cut suits, here he wears a long plain robe and has a gnarled walking stick in hand. Every year, freshers being shown around campus stop at the bronze and the volunteer student giving the tour tells them that Sun Yat Sen was a student here near the time it was established who came back, after the Republic of China had been founded in 1920, to call Hong Kong and HKU his intellectual birthplaces.

Sun Yat Sen, a world travelling Chinese patriot and fund-raiser, believed China must throw out the Manchu regime, modernise and take up democracy to compete with foreign powers. At that time, in the 1900s, China had fallen behind the West in technological and military might and its coast was being divvied up among foreign powers: Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan. The Manchu Dynasty did come to an end but it was Communism that succeeded it not



Capitalism. Mao wrote in the *Little Red Book*, 'Capitalism is like a dying person who is sinking fast, like the sun setting beyond the western hills. Communism is full of youth and vitality sweeping the world with the momentum of an avalanche and the force of a thunderbolt.'

Ping, feeling she was being pursued though she was not, made her way quickly up to her hall of residence. Inside, the corridors were quiet. In the communal kitchen four mainland students were eating together. They wanted nothing to do with Occupy and were making a lot of noise. The kitchen behind them was filthy after their cooking. On the table was a large plate of fried beef in onion and ginger, a rice cooker with the top open and a plate of Chinese cabbage in soy sauce. They were all screaming with laughter, although only talking about China, thinking of their own homes, a little homesick. They knew Hong Kongers considered them loud and uncouth and they didn't care now they had the kitchen to themselves. Ping went in. The food smelled great. 'Eat with us,' they cried. Ping sat down. It was almost like being back in Shanghai among her friends. But she ate only a little before she excused herself to take a shower.

She, Bettie and Angela shared a room. There were three desks, three beds and three cupboards. In the first week of term they had all worn pyjamas, lounged in each other's company, told funny or sad stories about their prior love-lives and discussed boys. Now the room seemed bare without them. Ping took a long shower, washed two pairs of knickers in the sink and changed into her pyjamas.

In Shanghai, Ping's mother was giving a servant a dressing down for breaking a cup. Before them, through the twenty-fourth floor kitchen wall-window was the cityscape of Shanghai. Ping's father was out playing golf. Ping rang home and her mother answered the phone.

'Mum, why am I in Hong Kong?' Ping complained.

'Don't be involved, darling,' her mother said. 'Hong Kong is a spoiled brat. It should be more patriotic.'

Her mother's opinion sounded canned, straight from the state broadcaster's shelves. Ping decided couldn't have this conversation and hung up. She texted her father on the golf course, *Bully*, then called her grandmother in another quarter of Shanghai. 'I miss you. Hong Kong is crazy.'

'Whatever anyone tells you, Hong Kong is important to China. That's one reason your father sent you.'

‘But I don’t want to be here.’

*What’s up, princess?* A reply from her father.

囧, her reply

She talked to her grandmother, then watched her favourite soap opera online, unable to concentrate on it. She lay on the clean sheets, the mattress soft, the air-conditioning cool and sweet, and sleep came with difficulty. Every time she opened her eyes she thought of returning to Admiralty where Bettie and Angela were.

The fall of dusk was met by Occupy with gratitude. The stream of visitors had abated and up and down Connaught Road the change of light was enjoyed. Not any more the indoor life of air-conditioned apartments and malls which nullified many of the sensations of the season. No, the campers had learnt already that dusk was a rich moment, a natural slowing down, a cessation, as the sunlight ceased to batter but stroked and the sharp light gave way to pastel colour.

In this languor of sundown, Matt sat on the ground next to the tied-back door-flap of his tent, which was back up with the others, enjoying this natural licence to ease up and breathe. He felt he had been camping for a hundred years. Like a lizard on a rock he watched the scene around him, nodding to his neighbours who were washed in the same soft light as he was.

The time reading in cafes or on the hard floor of a tent, constantly smelling his own armpits, had almost come to an end. He had booked a room for a week. It was cheap but it meant going to a place called Lamma Island, twenty-five minutes on the ferry. So tomorrow air-con, a bed, a desk, a shower. In that comparative luxury he would synthesise the material he had assembled over the last three days and write some journalism. He rang Sarah. ‘Come out ‘ere and write with me, why don’t you, it’s great.’

‘I can’t. By the way, I sent my mother a copy of the Bi-Annual Review and guess what she said? The pages smell of embalming fluid.’

‘She’s right.’

‘Yes, she’s right.’

‘How’s the car?’

‘We’re both all right. Are you a stinky goat?’

‘Yes. Are you powdered and pretty?’

‘Yes, a little.’

Later, dating games. Tables were cleared at embryonic Study Corner. Freshers took seats on benches for five-minute exchanges in a din of laughter and chatter. Kelvin wanted to take Bettie away from male competition, especially that jock’s, and took her out for a walk. They walked down the silent flank of the government buildings onto the silvery lawns. The waterfront was balmy and romantic.

‘I can’t give you a nickname,’ said Kelvin in a whisper, leaning on the rail overlooking the water.

‘Why not?’

‘People like you don’t have nicknames.’

‘I did have a nickname at school but I didn’t like it. Oddhead.’

‘That’s exactly the sort of nickname you would have. Not the truth. There’s nothing out of shape about you so they called you Oddhead.’

‘I want a new nickname to make me forget Oddhead.’

‘Miss Congeniality? No, that’s too long and English’

‘Don’t tease me . . . or do, I don’t mind.’

‘What else don’t you mind?’

She was pleased he was playful, so she didn’t have to admit too soon that she liked him. Her friends had all been reading a book by an American entitled *Seven Dates before Intimacy*.

‘Let me give you a warning. Girls are holding back until the seventh date now.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s in an American book.’

‘That’s crazy. How far are we?’

‘No more than two.’

‘Oh, Mother! Seven’s a prime number, so’s three and five, what’s wrong with them? Can’t we at least say five?’

‘I like seven better, it’s in the book.’

‘Oh, Mother!’

## SIX

That night the students again kept watch over their perimeters, the policemen all but withdrawn in favour of surveillance by CCTV. The next morning, commuter traffic flowed around the camp at a distance, along its slower, at times heavily-congested, secondary routes.

Kelvin spent part of the night contemplating this man-managing how-to book of questionable credentials that Bettie insisted on following. At breakfast he sat on a wall with Henry and Reggie and they consumed crackers and warm coke. Then he went to invite Bettie to come and meet his mother. Bettie, who had been thinking about Kelvin overnight and had some misgivings about her how-to book, accepted.

The foot of Garden Road was one of those in the closed Occupy zone but taxis could still ply Lockhard Road in Wanchai. Kelvin's home was a five-year-old building cut into the green flank of the hill on salubrious Kennedy Road. After paying for the taxi he used his own key to let them in on the sixth floor. The apartment was open and modern, the hall giving onto the kitchen, the kitchen the sitting room, the sitting room the balcony, all clean and tidy thanks to Mary-Ann, the Filipina domestic helper.

Mary-Ann, who had been with the family since before Kelvin was born, was at the kitchen sink cleaning vegetables for a lunch stir-fry, her long raven hair falling down the back of her polo shirt between strong shoulders. Kelvin's mother was talking to her, leaning on the kitchen island and thumbing through a horoscope, dressed in a track-suit because she was about to take Lucky, her West Highland Terrier, out for a walk. The dog skidded over the parquet floor to greet Kelvin. Mary-Ann opened her arms hoping for a hug before turning back to the sink muttering a few stagey comments about remembering Kelvin in nappies. Kelvin introduced Bettie matter-of-a-factly to his mother and Bettie wondered how many girls Kelvin had brought home over the years. Kelvin's mother had a symmetrical young face, her Cantonese a Guangzhou twang to it and her blingy track suit was just a point off from what an average Hong Kong Chinese woman

might wear. Bettie at once saw in her the origin of Kelvin's own slightly soft looks.

Kelvin gave Bettie a trusting look then deserted her to go and take a shower.

'My younger brother has been thrown out by his wife,' said Kelvin's mother to Bettie. She had just been on the phone with her sister-in-law, fanning herself to indicate to Mary-Ann at the sink the fiery language she was being subjected to. This brother, Hex, was married and living in Guangzhou across the border where the family originated from. She had come to live in Hong Kong only by marriage.

'An uncle of mine is exactly the same,' said Bettie, and mentioned her safe Seven-Date Plan.

'We'd better have Hex here and he can commute to GZ,' Kelvin's mother told Mary-Ann.

'I'll make my black bean chicken then,' Mary-Ann replied, 'as he always tells me he loves it.'

Kelvin did not abandon Bettie for long, returning with wet tousled hair. She found this attractive, just as he liked her centrally-parted lustrous hair. Taking her by the hand, he led her to the other end of the room, the living room, and showed her a silk thread picture done at great cost of time by his mother. 'She plays the zimmer in costume sometimes too, if you can convince her to,' he said

His mother came to sit on the sofa with them. Bettie could see mother and son were easy with each other, somehow less than a generation apart.

Kelvin's instinct was to dominate the conversation and try to make the ladies laugh so he told them a funny story about Occupy. Yesterday a drone thought to be operated from the mainland had become so annoying that a group of boys had dropped their pants to it, sending the machine backing up into the heavens. His mother laughed. 'I'd like to see that. But I couldn't do all the political talk.'

'We can't either. Just being there is enough,' said Bettie.

'Let's see what his father says.'

Kelvin grimaced.

It was Bettie's turn for a shower. Kelvin's mother fetched her a towel. Bettie shuddered on finding a few wiry pubes in the tub, Kelvin's or his father's. Men always left such traces behind and a lot of water on the floor. She missed her own washing things and kept her hair dry. Then they took a taxi back. In the taxi Bettie

clammed up, suddenly having cold feet, afraid of falling and being hurt, glad of her protective seven-date buffer.

## PART TWO

Lamma Island is a densely jungled island of snakes and spiders ten miles from Hong Kong Island. By day, when the ferries are running, it feels close to Hong Kong, as people come in for the beaches, trekking and seafood and as others commute out. After the last ferry has run the atmosphere changes, the island reclaimed in its villages linked by silent paths hard to the jungle, by locals who live outside tourism, by fishermen and by the expats for whom Lamma has become their permanent home.

Matt had been living in the village of Yung Shu Wan for three days. He woke and without having to get out of bed reached for his PC on the breakfast bar. It was bright outside, beyond a windowed door at the foot of the bed which gave onto a concrete patio of sorts. He opened his emails, hoping for a reply from *The Guardian*, as he had submitted his first piece overnight.

His piece, written in the Queen's English in the style in which he'd had a year of professional training, drew on his three days living in the Occupy village: trying to pitch a tent on the road, queuing for washrooms, sweltering in heat from early morning on, looking for the next place to charge your equipment, and nights under the moonlight manning the barricades between the canyons of the international offices. It described the restless Joshua Wong and quoted from Matt's other student neighbours who had rescued his tent from the lamp post, freshers who expected to work abroad, who were looking for romance, who were super-studiers yet now rallying to the cause of their student union. He recaptured the uncanny atmosphere in the streets of Admiralty that first morning when Hong Kong awoke to a re-structured city with a protest zone, and to the football stadium atmosphere as night fell and tens of thousands celebrated, and to the students laying flowers at the feet of the policemen.

In the signalling words of the left wing press he wrote of the post-colonial narrative, the contingency of the Fifty Year Agreement and the enactment of struggle. Having just consumed a history book on China at his chair on the concrete patio in which Hong Kong was not mentioned once, he quoted reportage

that no sympathetic democratic insurgency was being observed on the mainland to suggest Hong Kong didn't have the weight to spark it. He noted that Britain's years in Hong Kong were part of an invalidated colonial era and wrote that Occupy was being seen by many as the last throes of foreign influence, as an inevitable final conflict between an international liberal city profoundly shaped by a hundred and fifty years of British influence and the mainland.

Someone from *The Guardian*, a John Lister, had written back:

*Matt,*

*Thanks for this, you are clearly well-positioned. Might be able to take something from you. Give Michelle Gupta, our Asia head, a ring on Monday. She's covering things out there and you two should meet.*

*JL*

Matt was delighted with the response, although annoyed he might have made a mistake underestimating the support Occupy had among *Guardian* readers. He should have included perhaps the remark that Occupy was first of all a fight against the elite and their vested interests. Pinging a quick email to Sarah, he left his room for breakfast. Wearing shorts, a T-shirt and the pair of flip flops belonging to the room, he walked through the village. The bright sun on his skin, the sultry morning sky overhead, island life on a Saturday morning, they all combined to suddenly make him feel distinctly turned on.

*Lamma Lamma*, one of the row of restaurants and bars built over where the village beach used to be, opened for breakfast. Kathy, proprietor and manager, was there for the morning shift. She lived in an attractive cottage above a small sand beach along the coast reached by pathway. She had just dropped her two children off at the school. Doing her best not to vexed, she was watching Belle, daughter of a friend, making two cappuccinos very slowly at the machine. When Matt walk through the bar on his way to the outside tables at the back, Kathy followed him with a menu.

She stood back from the outside table while Matt looked at the menu. He was slim, tall, young, the stubble on his face attractive, sweat on his forehead. Something in the burned nose tip, sharp white bars across shoulders, some actual



bronzing, made her recognise a compatriot. Only someone new to the tropics would choose to sit in the open sun as he was. He ordered the English Breakfast. She took in his West Midlands accent. She herself was from Birmingham but had long ago discarded hers. The thought of going to bed with him came into her mind.

After he had eaten, Kathy went out to clear his place, first checking her hair in the mirror outside the kitchen. 'You're not local are you?' she said. 'Where are you staying?'

'Just a place among the houses, a studio which is decorated like a twelve-year-old girl's bedroom.'

'*Hello Kitty?* Hong Kong girls love it. I'm not sure what the boys think.'

'It's odd because there's a junk yard outside.'

They exchanged names and remarked on both being from Birmingham. Matt looked around approvingly: old dinghies moored along a stone landing, haze beyond the bay in the open sea where a freighter lay at anchor. He told her she did a good breakfast. He looked at her. She wore a print dress. There was cleavage and the glimpse of white lace bra. It was almost on his lips to invite her for a swim.

As he prepared to go out for a swim he could think of nothing but Kathy from *Lamma Lamma*. From his room he took his rucksack and put in a towel and trunks, a comb and a book. He bought a baguette and some cheese at the Deli. The beach was reached along a coastal path. It was a good walk and Matt intended to walk almost the length of the island. The path traversed the limbs of hills, in and out above small coves. Other walkers were on the path and occasionally there was an ancestor shrine beside the path in the dry yellow grass. At one place the path climbed high and gave a view of the transparent coastal water where chartered pleasure-craft were at anchor, guests splashing about in the appealing water. When he reached the beach he found he was alone. There were fruit-laden trees behind the sand. He rolled out his towel on the sand, stepped into the water and swam towards the diving platform. The water was warm and deeper drafts of cold water touched his feet. Climbing up the metal steps he lay on the rough carpet of the platform. He lay there drying out, salty, beginning to sweat. The island appeared uninhabited. He felt as free as Robinson Crusoe. All he could think of was Kathy's white lace bra. He deeply wanted to know her, this Brummie who

had an adult life here, who had dropped her accent and reinvented herself. Something about her tapped deep into him, to a gap in his youth which had been lived without anyone quite like her.

Back in his room he took a nap, the air-con trundling away above the bed. Sarah called and he answered sleepily. Yesterday she had helped draft the article. She said the response from *The Guardian* was a good sign. 'Maybe they will give you a blog,' she said, 'or an Occupy Diary.'

'I hope so.'

'What's Lamma like today?'

'It's Saturday. Gotta be good.'

'Here it feels as if the North Sea has moved over Lincolnshire. Grey. Dreary. Cold.'

'Come out.'

'No, I'll survive. I'll have a long hot bath, do the Saturday crossword then I suppose go to Sainsbury.'

'Or take the car out,' said Matt. 'Go see your folks.'

'I might, but it's such a drive. I don't want to tax our little car.'

'Our little car has done a hundred thousand miles. A few more won't hurt.'

'Yes, I suppose. You'd better go and watch the sunset or whatever. I'll put another bar on the heater.'

'Poor rabbit.'

'Yes, poor me. I feel a martyr to something.'

Matt showered, opened a beer, sat on the chair on the concrete patio looked at the flowering tree among the household rubbish. The studio was the ground-floor partition of a house facing the backs of various other nondescript Chinese Village houses. He put on a collared shirt, brushed his hair, locked up. He was going to eat at *Lamma Lamma*, but first a drink.

A small noisy beer bar stands a few doors from *Lamma Lamma*, open-fronted and at odds with the Chinese market stalls that otherwise lined the lane. As Matt arrived ten or so people were talking loudly inside standing their ground among each other. On the wall was an expensive flat-screen TV. Heineken and Boddingtons were on offer at the taps. The barmaid was a pretty Filipina in a black dress, her hair lustrous, her skin a warm brown. 'What do you want to drink, handsome man?' the Filipina said. 'I'll have a lager.' She drew a pint. 'Every time

you walk past I see you but you never see me.’ ‘Sorry. A lot on my mind probably. Have one yourself,’ said Matt.

A Russian came in with his own beer – a can of strong brew. He was handsome – blonde hair, clear skin, blue eyes - and very drunk. ‘What is this accent?’ he immediately said to Matt, hearing him talk.

‘Brummie they call it.’

The Russian rolled his eyes and seemed ready to pass out. He was sweating alcohol. ‘I never heard that one. I dislike these accents - Scottish, Welsh, Irish. You know, I was married to a strong negress, she was a mamesan in Chungking Mansions. You listen to her speak English, she was like your Queen Elizabeth only much, much louder. Hello Scottish man,’ he said to someone else.

‘Hello, Ivan’

‘Everybody on Lamma.’ He turned back to Matt. ‘Everyone on Lamma, is either a drinker, like me, an Asian womaniser, out of work, mad, or an unsuccessful writer or musician.’

‘Have another drink, Ivan,’ said the Scot.

‘Yes, I will.’

Matt had two beers here then moved on.

Inside *Lamma Lamma* a revival jupe box was playing 80s music. Several tables were occupied by couples having dinner. Kathy was tending bar and two men were hunched forward on their bar stools talking to her. She was waiting for Matt to walk in. Her kids were sleeping over with friends, her husband was on business in Dubai. She too had been troubled by desire during the sweltering day. From the door Matt looked for her and they saw each other. As their eyes met Matt relaxed: he knew Kathy now, she was not a stranger. He felt great. He smiled at her and went through again to the rear tables outside beyond the kitchen. Kathy also relaxed and felt great.

Matt ordered a rack of ribs and chips from a new waiter and red wine to have with it. The harbour water was still and asleep. A fan was working planted on the ground beyond the tables.

Sarah called. Matt didn’t really want to take it.

‘I’m at the supermarket. I’ve decided I will drive to my parents after all.’

‘Good idea. They’ll be pleased to see you all.’

‘You sound distant.’

‘Only a few thousand miles.’

‘I mean removed.’

‘Sorry love, tired that’s all.’

‘All right then.’

Kathy didn’t come out until *Lamma Lamma* was closed. He was alone in the back area watching the bay. She locked the back door and sat down with him.

‘Can I walk you home?’ said Matt.

‘I’ve known boys like you in my past life.’

‘In Birmingham, babs?’

‘No one has called me babs for a while. My husband never. But let’s not talk about him.’

‘He’s away, is he?’

‘Yes, don’t worry.’ She laughed.

Among his Birmingham friends she would have been too old, the type in a leery group of women they wouldn’t touch with a barge pole, except to be polite, if one woman was very frisky. In the tropical night here, halfway across the world, a married woman running a business, she had substance and poise.

‘I bet you were something?’ said Matt.

‘Oh yes, I was, when I was seventeen, before I went to London.’

The village was all but asleep, the lane empty, food stalls brought in, just the quiet glow of lamplight. A good easy temperature, no chill even in a T-shirt. They climbed the steps up the hill at the back of the village, between pretty Mediterranean-like cottages with terraced gardens dark now under the starlight, and over the brow, beyond the last houses, was a coastal path cut into the slope of thick vegetation, real darkness between the spaced-out lamps. They stopped and kissed. Kathy pulled a torch out of her bag to shine ahead. He took her free hand. He was a little drunk. After a bit they turned in through a garden gate, up through a small garden to a cottage. There were children’s things on the living room floor but the house was silent. She led him upstairs. She unbuttoned the top of her dress, unhooked her bra and arms by her sides allowed him to disrobe her. Matt partially unbuttoned his shirt and it was her turn to undress him a little. Then into the pillows and bed linen, pot pourri smells, lavender.

‘Can I stay?’

‘If you go early. My friend will bring the children back at seven.’

Deep post-midnight island silence.

‘So this is what starting an affair is like,’ said Kathy.

## TWO

The HKU students split their time between Occupy and the university campus. Occupy was ever maturing: insouciant students had carried at least one sofa among the tents on the fly-over; at People's Corner there was now Umbrella Man crafted in *papier mache*; and Study Corner was roofed-in and supplied with electricity. At campus, lectures every day.

On Wednesday mornings, Professor Hong took mathematics at ten o'clock and beforehand students massed in the corridor in front of the locked doors of the lecture hall.

Henry and Reggie were first up from camp, Henry talking about site developments, the next step for Study Corner, making the roof sturdier against heavy rain. They joined the gathering knots of students in the nondescript corridor chattering thirteen to the dozen.

Bettie and Angela came along from their shared hall room, Ping running late having trouble with her PC. Bettie and Angela had become friends. They could talk politics softly together away from the boys. Bettie admired how Angela was dialled-in to inner city and social service issues and she wanted to volunteer at the Lutheran Hospice as well. They also shared in the fun of following 'Alexter' - Alex Chow and Lester Shum - on social media, two stars of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, whose every smile and frown was being captured and discussed by a hoard of girl-fans.

Kelvin came up alone. He didn't join Bettie but loosely attached himself to Reggie and Henry while giving her an intense, shy look. Their relationship was in a limbo somewhere beyond two and seven dates. He was over-run by sexual longings and doing his best to be patient and cool. She wanted to sleep with him but was constrained by her book, much of which made sense. Kelvin noticed that same jock from National Day in the corridor nosing in Bettie's direction but felt powerless to intervene.

Ping arrived. 'Wah, my laptop is out of charge. Can you help me?' she said to Reggie.

Reggie, short tempered, offered her pen and paper.

‘Old-fashioned guy, slow thinker,’ Ping said.

‘Take his heart instead,’ said Bettie, and she and Angela giggled, in on a joke.

‘Old fashioned, old fashioned,’ insisted Ping. ‘Seventies martial arts guy.’ Huffily she took the pen and paper. Reggie said nothing.

The jock was now leaning in towards Bettie, elbow against the corridor wall and hand in hair. ‘Eigen equations, Eigen Vectors, Eigen space, Eigen decomposition,’ he said to her with a groan.

‘Yes, it won’t help you throw a ball or kick a ball, will it?’ Bettie replied primly.

‘Don’t break my balls,’ he said. ‘Help me get through the next two hours and sit next to me, won’t you?’

‘What’s in it for me?’

Just then the double doors were opened by the attendant and everyone began to pour in. Bettie felt the jock put a hand across her shoulders. She submitted to it, allowing him to guide her to a seat.

Professor Hong stood at the bottom of the twenty tiers of desk seating ready to begin. Behind him were three blackboards set into wooden panelling. He began without procrastination to chalk up in a careful slow hand the first line of a mathematical derivation.

Professor Hong was old and tired of his job. He had long realised he couldn’t serve his students’ education if he was their friend. Indeed, he was not there to amuse them and was aware of having a reputation as a stiff dry old mathematician. The classes were so large it was difficult to learn names anyway. Some of his colleagues taught using printed handouts. Professor Hong did circulate such handouts at the end of the lecture but he believed it was best for his students to see the derivations being worked out line by line on the board and be prompted to follow suit, scribbling or typing out each step for themselves. After two boards of equations Hong stopped to let the lecture room catch up, saying conversationally, ‘So how’s that?’ Students one by one looked up as they finished.

‘Eigen a kill myself,’ said a young tortured voice in English. It was the jock, sitting beside Bettie, hoping to make her laugh.

Professor Hong nodded. He replied in his own stiff English, 'I think you should. Two boards to go for the rest of us.' He turned to the third board and went on with the derivation.

After the lecture the class congregated in the canteen, filling up benches along long tables. Carried among people little known to him, Kelvin found himself twenty places away from Bettie, who was still with the jock. He sat down in a funk and hardly heard what was being said around him.

There was ear-splitting conversation. Who was majoring, who taking a double minor? What about the Capstone requirements, what were they? Was maths a foundational course or a core course?

Bettie had had enough of the jock. She climbed out of her seat, went to the forlorn seated figure of Kelvin and tapped him on the shoulder. 'Want to meet my family?' she said.

'Yes,' said Kelvin.

Together, leaving the campus behind, they walked down Western Street from its high end to sea level. The temperature was neutral, the sweating months nearly over. The walk was spacious and quiet, with a colonial building on one corner, a park on another, and down ahead, beyond the busy commercial district, barges and ferries in the sea.

Then they went down into the MTR system, caught a train and sat side by side in a carriage. Kelvin was as quiet as Bettie had been in the taxi after her visit to his home and he was keeping his nerve. Bettie was looking forward to being home, to a shower, to cooking for her family, and she had no doubt Kelvin would fit in fine. He would see that she lived in an older, denser apartment building than he did.

Arriving at Quarry Bay, they went in for groceries at the ParknShop. Coming out, they held hands and a shopping bag each. Bettie led the way through blocks of estates rising fifty floors, twenty or thirty years old. Bettie's home was a boxy fifth-floor apartment. It was late afternoon. The apartment was empty and in semi-darkness. Bettie turned on the hall light, put the shopping bags in the kitchen and said she would take a shower.

Kelvin remained in the hallway. He could hear Bettie showering and smell soap and steam. She had left her clothes in the bedroom on the lower tier of a bunk bed. He went in the bedroom then out again and stood in the hall. He had



seen her entire childhood there, ordinary, cosy, orderly. No nanny, her place at HKU the huge effort of a gifted child. He saw himself as the son of a second-generation business owner.

He went into the living room. The apartment buildings outside were like ocean liners, outer landings illuminated decks. On the concrete at ground level people were making their way home, taking routes between play-areas, sitting-out areas, paths which went under one building to get to another behind it. Every bollard and bench must be something in Bettie's childhood, he figured. He heard Bettie come out of the bathroom and he waited for her to dress.

She came in.

'This is a good place,' he said.

She was dressed. Her wet hair was fanned out down the back of her T-shirt and she was slowly re-brushing it, long and straight, while looking at him.

'My parents want us to move somewhere better,' she said, 'to Chai Wan, but we can't afford it.'

Kelvin looked out of the window again. 'Hong Kong's criticised for the way apartments are built shoulder to shoulder, but in a place like this it feels good, like everyone's living in the same big ants' nest, you know, everyone's a community.'

'I guess,' she said, 'but if you lived here you wouldn't say that. I'll get you a coke. I have to start cooking.'

One by one the family came home. First a seven-year-old character by the name of Russell. 'What are you cooking, Bettie? I want Canadian sauce,' he told her. He sat down beside Kelvin and played with a model airplane involved in a desperate rescue mission over the sea. Then Kiki arrived, fourteen years old, in a secondary school uniform with a school rucksack on her back. She also had instructions for the kitchen. 'Don't forget the spring rolls grandma made, they're in the fridge.' She stopped once at the threshold to look shyly at Kelvin in the living room without saying anything then went to the bedroom.

Bettie's mum, a teacher, came next. 'What rice are you cooking, Bettie?'

'The round-grain Japanese.'

'That's fine.'

Last of all, Bettie's dad. 'Pour me some rice wine, Bettie - not a small glass. How about you, young man?'

'No thank you, sir.'

‘Quite right.’

Later, at the playground outside the apartment building, Kelvin took Bettie by the upper arms and pressed her to the bars of the climbing frame. She looked at him calmly. He kissed her, a little roughly, not to be thwarted.

‘Your lips are so sweet,’ he said, in a passion of kissing.

‘You’re holding me too tight, wolf man.’

He took her hand and they walked on without saying anything. At the road he stopped a taxi and told the driver to take them to Causeway Bay. ‘Don’t say no. You can’t say no,’ he told Bettie in the taxi. He took her to a short-time hotel on the second floor of a musty commercial building. In the corridor next to the lift was a caged window. Kelvin paid and the pale old man behind the grill handed over a key. Kelvin was acting the man, in charge of every move and Bettie wanted to laugh at everything. In the room there was a queen-sized mattress on the floor with a fitted sheet, at the window, through bars and a nylon fixed curtain, a neon street sign on a gantry casting seedy yellow light.

‘Listen,’ she said. There was whispering and laughing in the next room, the creak of bedding.

‘Go on then, you can undress me,’ she said.

Kelvin began to, with feverish hands, whispering, ‘Oh blue and green deities, Bixia and silken immortal goddesses, oh compassionate heaven,’ as his fingers fumbled.

‘I’m not a virgin,’ said Bettie.

‘That’s ok, nor am I.’

They lowered themselves to the mattress in a clinch

After the deed she sat up on the mattress and folded her hands over her breasts. ‘Was I any good?’

‘Very good.’

‘You came in me.’

‘Should I have used a condom?’

‘No, my cycle only just started.’

She looked at him gravely. ‘You don’t want to do anything else to me?’

‘What else is there?’

‘Wah, I don’t know. Boys find things.’

Kelvin gave an enormous sigh. 'I'm happier than a million Manchu emperors.'

### THREE

The Excelsior Hotel in Causeway Bay is a long-standing five star hotel. The square lobby has white marble pillars supporting the balconies of a mezzanine floor. The traffic flows outside and beyond is the yacht basin. The male staff wear black trousers and white shirts, the female staff, black skirts and white blouses. After lectures, Ping and Reggie arrived here by taxi. Ping went up to the desk, Reggie stood back.

Their affair had begun a few days before, when Ping was drunk in Lan Kwai Fong. She called Reggie and asked him to collect her. She was drunk but she was logical. She could have called Henry but she foresaw quite clearly that he and Angela would get together at some point. Kelvin was taken by Bettie so the only boy left was Reggie. Reggie came in a taxi and there she kissed him. She had been clubbing with rich boys, some from the mainland some from Hong Kong. There was a scene akin to the Shanghai party scene. Boys were vain and had lots of money and conversation ignored. She hadn't liked the people she was with so it was old-fashioned, martial-arts guy Reggie who got lucky. They drove to a short-time room. She was drunk. She took her cloths off, knelt down, lowered her head and shoulders to the mattress and raised her bum, looking back at Reggie with out and out confidence in what would happen next. He was both aroused and put off. She was complicated, he said to himself afterwards. She was a capricious headstrong mainland rich girl with no real identity or self-confidence, a teenaged cracked glass. Here was the equivalence because he was cracked glass himself.

Now Ping was insisting on a five-star hotel. The lady behind the reception desk was not for offering Ping a room before two o'clock, not for these teenagers without luggage, but thought better of it seeing Ping was a mainlander capable of becoming very loud and difficult. Ping got a key after paying full price.

The corridors were plushly carpeted, the walls of fine walnut panelling. Paintings and vases of flowers were placed here and there. It was the sort of place Ping liked, a place where guests could wear good clothes and jewellery with ease. What sexual liaisons went on in such hotels, she wondered as they made their way

along a corridor. She thought suspiciously of her father. Did men like him have pretty little escorts to take to bed on their business trips?

In their room a wall window showed the yacht basin. Construction was going on, in total silence behind the thick glass, plates of iron driven into the mud, cranes and pile drivers at work.

Ping knelt on the floor, on a Wilton rug at the foot of the bed, resting her head against the bedstead. She opened her mouth and Reggie saw all the way into the soft red interior, down to her tonsils. She pulled his dick out of his clothing and took it in her mouth. He gripped her head, used her mouth and orgasmed.

Ping lay on the unused bed restlessly, going through the twenty channels on the TV. She took the menu from the bedside table and ordered food on the phone.

‘Can you get me a new PC lead?’ she said.

Her figetiness was annoying him. He was at the window watching the work gang at the yacht basin. They were workers like his father, who was a gang master at Lai Hi Kok Container Port. He couldn’t break his eyes away from watching them from this five star hotel room.

She was annoyed. ‘What are you looking at?’

He didn’t reply. He wouldn’t give her ammunition to mock him, tell her he had a brutal father who had done nothing for his education. He’d done it all himself, self-financed and he’d learnt Kung Fu to defend himself.

‘What do you want to do now? Do you want me to take a shower then fuck me?’ she said.

‘You ordered food. Let’s wait for it.’

‘Who can I pay to do this maths assignment,’ she said, rolling over on the bed and looking up moodily at the ceiling. He didn’t answer. ‘Are you going to Mongkok tonight, to the fighting?’ she said. ‘Take me.’

When the food came up, on a trolley in silver chafing dishes, they sat at the end of the bed and the waiter turned the trolley into a round table, laying a white table cloth which he got from a compartment underneath. Reggie took a Sprite from the minibar for himself, a Coca Cola for her. He gave the waiter a tip and shut the door behind him. They ate Singapore fried rice and Japanese fish tempura.

Ping showered. They fucked in a regular way but he pulled her hair a little hard as she bade him to. They lay together.

‘I wanted to go Peking University,’ Ping said, beginning to cry. ‘My father tricked me here with good shopping.’

‘You don’t need to go to Occupy any more,’ said Reggie.

‘I might move out of hall altogether. I’ve a musty old aunt in Stanley. I may live with her.’

## FOUR

Kelvin took Bettie home for Saturday lunch. These Saturday lunches were big family gatherings. His grandparents and his father both wanted to meet Bettie. Mary-Ann cooked many dishes including, for Hex, his favourite black bean chicken. The dishes were laid out on the table which was between the kitchen and the living room. When Kelvin and Bettie arrived, lunch was already under way.

Grandfather Lee and Grandmother Lee lived in Kowloon Bay. He had founded Lee & Man Co. Ltd. in the 1960s, when mainland China was under the supreme leadership of Chairman Mao and Hong Kong still had memories of occupation by the Japanese during the Second World War. In those days ordinary trading people had little to do with the British, did not speak English and to this day Grandfather Lee did not speak English. His business partner, Man, went on to sell up to Lee but the business kept its name. Goods were sold in Hong Kong and on the mainland and Grandfather Lee had been the one to design the initial range of handbags and leather-wear. Having trouble with gout and heart disease, he had handed over the company to his eldest son, Kelvin's father, some years ago. On retirement he took feverish interest in mercantile newspapers, allow nothing to slip by, watching affairs like a statesman, until further enfeeblement forced him to slip out of the flow completely. Now he took a great interest in his grandchildren. He was the slow, easy grandfather Kelvin admired, who said little but always spoke to the point. And Grandfather Lee was interested in the tall, straight-backed English-fluent Kelvin. Grandmother Lee was in better health than her husband. She had lived metaphorically a step behind him, propping him up. They were listening to Kelvin's father who was doing the talking. Kelvin and Bettie slipped into seats at table.

Kelvin's father, Gordon Lee, CEO of Lee Man, sprawled comfortably at the head of the table, his face flushed and sweating, in a suit that looked in need of dry cleaning, tie askew, smoking a cigarette. To his employees and counterparts in business both in Hong Kong and on the mainland, he was a proprietor who carried the destiny of a medium-sized company on his shoulders through bold decision-making and who always spoke his mind. To Kelvin, he was a father completely

absorbed in the business, a business Kelvin had got to know early in childhood, often being taken to the workshops in Chung Wan.

‘So, Dad, what about the latest Hang Seng accumulators?’ Kelvin’s father was asking Grandfather Lee.

‘A punt from time to time does no harm,’ Grandfather Lee replied. ‘As long as you don’t lose in a day what you’ve spent a lifetime building.’

Kelvin’s dad laughed at the idea. ‘We Lees are too smart for that. I tell the HSBC salesgirls who pester me, don’t ring me, I already know how to make money, not unless you have a really good tip.’

So far at lunch, neither of the two entrepreneurs had had time for a comment on the Umbrella Revolution.

Kelvin’s father rubbed his face, lit another cigarette, eyed his son and smiled at Bettie. Kelvin’s mother had her dog on her lap. Bettie fielded some friendly questions from Grandmother Lee about her own family.

Mary-Ann didn’t eat with the family and was still cooking, bringing new dishes to the table. She wore a scowl because Hex had yet to compliment her on her plum sauce. If he didn’t she wouldn’t allow him to touch her, not a single caress, she had said to herself in front of the cooker.

Hex knew very well what Mary-Ann’s scowl was about. He was teasing her and would kiss her later. He wore light coloured trousers, shirt-sleeves and had a worn-out handsomeness about him, with discoloured teeth and a balding head. He held a small administrative role in the civil service at the Ministry of Works in Guangzhou, had two children of his own, and was still not welcome in his apartment by his wife, after carrying on with the filing clerk on the second floor of his work building.

Guangzhou is a city of fusty dried-goods shophouses, blue-glass towers, university campuses and endless housing estates and small business premises. Not one of the world’s great cities but it has its place in China’s history. Once it was the sole trading point for foreigners in the whole of the Middle Kingdom, as the cantonments traded with the thirteen hongts. Junks on the Pearl River brought goods to and from Hong Kong and Macau. And Guangzhou, or GZ, had been important at the end of the nineteenth century, in Sun Yat Sen’s campaigns, starting points for fizzled out attempts to install democracy which had ended in



executions and flight. Its distance from Beijing meant it had always been self-administered, to a point.

Hex, the hemmed in husband, took his square foot of enjoyment out of life, in a department more or less powerless to the million problems of a city growing too fast which would have to sort themselves out while he took a female colleague for a good lunch. They heard little about Occupy in GZ and Hex was the one to ask his nephew about it. 'Well, Kelvin, what's this student uproar all about?'

Before Kelvin could answer, Mary-Ann was at Hex's shoulder with her own opinions. 'I wish someone would occupy Manila,' she said, putting some devilled chicken-wings on the table and brushing Hex's shoulder. She and other maids, who shared their Sunday together in The Botanical Park, shared the same opinion. Employers on the mainland and in Hong Kong were much the same, but if you had to pick where to work it would be Hong Kong, harsher in its rules yes, but reliable and fair, while the Philippines was a total write off.

Possibly because he had sex on the brain, Kelvin borrowed something from the web to answer his uncle. 'The trouble is, China wants to *gang rape* Hong Kong,' he said. *Gang rape* was an English verb for which there was no Chinese parallel.

'What is *gang rape*?' asked Grandmother Lee uncomprehendingly, handling the English phrase awkwardly on her tongue. No one was ready to answer her.

Hex said, 'Your joke reflects the Western thinking inherent in the movement. And I don't think Hong Kong is a *virgin*. Either way, you're richer than ever – Hong Kong is.'

'The sooner the students give up the better,' said Kelvin's father. 'The kids will have learnt to expect nothing from politicians. That will be a good lesson.'

'Yes, let them fight a little,' said Grandfather Lee. 'Their ideas may be good. As long as they leave some time for studying.'

'The media say we are the destruction camp,' said Kelvin, 'yes, influenced from overseas, Uncle Hex, but it's not true, our leaders think for themselves. But even Alexter more or less admit we can't win against Beijing.'

'Alexter, yes,' said Kelvin's mother, 'I know them. Two sweet boys.'

In a different room, Hex had Mary-Ann alone for a moment. 'Your sauce, delicious,' he said in thick English.

'About time.'

He kissed her and slid a hand into one of the cups of her large foam brassiere. She touched the crotch of his cotton trousers and said, ‘Oh my!’

‘You can *gang rape* me,’ said Bettie to Kelvin as they went away in a taxi.

In their one-hour room the light was different in daytime, natural light working in down between buildings, in through the smeared window, through nylon curtains – but not much of it. There were daytime street sounds. A restaurant air extractor somewhere was pouring out oily fumes.

‘What is Canada sauce by the way?’ said Kelvin as they lay side by side.

‘It’s just brown sauce on the tables in Vancouver, that’s why my brother calls it Canada sauce.’

‘What do you like about me?’

‘You’re tall, that’s one thing. You’re neither extrovert nor blocked like past ex-boyfriends, more middle of the road.’

‘I’m disappointed. I thought I was rampant and dynastic.’

‘Oh, you are, darling.’

‘What about Occupy?’

‘It’s bigger than us, darling, and I’m a bit scared sometimes.’

They lay side by side on the mattress in the tawdry room, listening to the click of pipes, the roar of buses, the lady next door making orgasm.

### PART III

Albert Yu once again went to meet his aides in the concourse of modernist LegCo, for the fortnightly reporting at the Liaison Office, and once again he had spent time with CY Leung and the executive cabinet at the morning briefing.

A couple of things had taken place in his life. A few days before he had walked unrecognised and with great curiosity around the protest camp and found much to admire in the cheerful, orderly scene. Occupy had left a wide path for LegCo civil servants to leave and enter their buildings. A young woman, the very same age as his own daughter, presumably seeing him as an elderly old gentlemen had offered him a bottle of water and respite from the heat on a camp chair in the shade. At home, his actual daughter, who was studying at The Baptist University and who, in an act of forbearance, was not taking part in Occupy as she wanted to do, lost her temper at the dinner table. 'Why can't CY Leung fight Beijing? Why does he have to be their puppet?' she had almost screamed at her parents. Taken aback, Yu had answered, lamely he now felt, 'As you get older you have to learn to be a realist.' 'Wahhh!' his daughter had expostulated and stormed out of the apartment and still they weren't on speaking terms.

At the morning meeting CY Leung told Yu and the rest of the inner circle that a meeting had been agreed between the Occupy leaders of the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Carrie Lam, Chief Secretary for the Administration, assisted by a government panel. However this had immediately been put on hold because Joshua Wong, excluded from the talks for which he didn't qualify, was calling separately for escalation on the ground. Yu came out of the meeting with weary feet. Hong Kong's problems seemed so heavy.

His aides were collected as before in the lobby waiting for him.

The first aide, whom Yu considered most like himself, had spent the last fortnight getting along quietly, believing that people like him had simply to continue to do their tasks in the chaos.

The second aide, the cynical man who had made jokes about LegCo's architectural ethos and the failure to forecast that the openness of the decade would ultimately give way to mainland totalitarianism, had been attracting

attention all around the complex. His easy mastery of political jargon, his youth which enabled him to give a credible explanation of the students' thinking to the bemused older members, suggested that by the end of the crisis, whatever the outcome, his career would take a leap forward.

The third aide, the young man whose hair had been cut by his mother so he wouldn't be mistaken for a protestor, had been spending his nights in Occupy, his head in a sock. He had taken longer than normal to put together the first draft of the report and Yu read on his face now discontentment.

The chauffeured black limo again sailed out of the basement carpark into the sunlight. With hardly time for the passengers to blink, it was again outside the Liaison Office of the People's Republic of China. And again Yu felt the brooding presence inside this institution of The Middle Kingdom where things were done the mainland way.

The committee meeting on the fifteen floor took place as usual for a tedious hour. Then Xan broke early. Refreshments came in and ash trays. Xan began to smoke and took Albert to the window, leaving the two sets of aides to mingle and take tea.

'Congratulations on the spirit of the students,' Xan said unexpectedly. 'We all want to see this end well.'

'Yes, we certainly do.'

'Hong Kong's troubles remind us of the many Chinese living outside the ambit of the mainland, in every corner of the world, in different political climates. Students leave to study abroad and then come back, bringing a part of the Western world with them.'

'Hong Kong has grown its own way of doing things, certainly.'

'It has. We see that. We are pleased there has been no bloodshed.'

Yu understood that Xan was making a comparison with Tiananmen. 'Our police have learnt it is sometimes wiser to stand off,' he said. 'They have been playing *xiangqi* chess with Joshua Wong for two years.'

'And these talks?'

'Perhaps we have student leaders who can articulate the ideas of Occupy, speaking for the majority of those involved. It's right, isn't it, that they be formally listened to, so long as they remain respectful and are committed to a course of non-violence?'

‘Yes, why not? Of course, for Beijing, this is a straightforward local affair with none of the complexities of Central Government. Still, although we hardly comprehend the stasis in which things now stand, we are not blind to the fact there has been no unpleasant escalation.’

Yu nodded.

In the restaurant he again treated his aides to lunch. ‘Our Hong Kong administration has gained some face with Beijing,’ he told them.

The second aide replied. ‘Let’s not forget this little entrepôt jewel of ours is where mainland officials have been sending suitcases of money for decades. They’ve been buying property and businesses. They like this stable little tax haven, this playground for Asia’s rich. They don’t want to spoil it too quickly.’

‘Yes, there’s something in that,’ said Yu. ‘Have some more fish,’ he added, and served out portions to the second aide and to his other subordinates.

## TWO

On Sunday, the Lutheran church at Kowloon held its regular morning service and Joshua Wong joined his parents there. He was turning eighteen the next day.

The church, small and unobtrusive among countless rectilinear tower blocks, is a place of peace and congregational singing. Like others in Hong Kong it has many tales to tell about China. A plaque in the nave commemorates the five hundred Lutheran Chinese martyred alongside the Europeans during the 1900 Boxer Uprising, which was a grassroots attempt to rid China of foreigners. And during the Cultural Revolution this church, like others in Hong Kong, had been a refuge for the traumatised Christians fleeing China with terrible stories of suffering and persecution.

At their favourite pew in the church, in whispers, his parents and sister wished Joshua a happy birthday now as they would not see him the next day. Joshua smiled at his family and whispered endearments to them. During the service he knelt and prayed as the liturgy of the mass was celebrated, his head bowed, hands together, eyes closed. Believing in God and Jesus Christ, how could Wong not believe he was engaged in a crusade for good and that God was with him. How could he not think that his precocious gift for embarrassing politicians with pure truth was a divine one. As he prayed, how could he not surrender himself up to God's will, if he could but understand it, shed tears at his own terror at what he was attempting, pray for strength to go on as a humble agent of God. And how could his parents and sister beside him not pray with equal intensity for his safety and success.

After mass the family and relatives gave Wong a birthday lunch at a specially picked restaurant. Having much on his mind. Joshua ate quickly and got away as soon as he decently could.

He returned to camp in a subdued mood and was let be by his friends. No one disturbed him. It was late Sunday afternoon and even now there was a constant stream of visitors: writers and journalists on the Chinese circuit, NGO people. An hour ago there had had a government infiltrator. Recognising the man

as such, everyone in the car-park had chanted, ‘What are you doing here? What are you doing here?’ until the spy left in disarray.

Wong went quietly to his tent, to his text-books. He was enrolled as a fresher at the Open University of Hong Kong, beginning a degree course in Social Sciences and Psychology. Dyslexia had held back his grades at High School so he had no chance for HKU.

Later, Sunday Night Meeting was called. The inner group sat in a circle on cement blocks under the car-park structure.

Wong was uneasy. Occupy was becoming protracted and was in jeopardy of losing momentum. Waiting for talks would only lead to a slow slide. There was a need for escalation, robust action, forcing the government’s hand. It was not happening, although numbers living by tent on the street remained high in each of the three separate protest zones, here, in Mongkok and in Causeway Bay.

Everyone at the meeting, his dedicated friends and followers, felt the stress of the fight against the government. They felt bad that, for all the support, no concessions had yet been won. Instead, Carrie Lam, Chief Secretary for the Administration, had repeated on Friday the latest government line: no talks while the students occupied the streets. But there was some good news from the barricades. The police had come forward and tried to dismantle the barricade on Queensway the night before. Occupy was able to retaliate forcefully, reassembling the barricade stronger than ever. Someone even managed to bring in concrete mix and set the legs. This detail about the setting concrete prompted many guffaws and laughs at the meeting. Wong laughed to tears. Everyone wanted to hear about the whole operation of the concrete in the finest detail. They keenly appreciated the matter. ‘It’s useful having engineers in our demonstration, not just radicals,’ someone said. Everyone was very happy about this on that Sunday night. As for the week ahead, no one was so happy.

In the morning, Matt arrived to interview Wong.

Wong had already taken a meeting with an NGO representative and given an interview to a journalist from the Philippines. The interview was conducted at the same place, sitting on concrete breeze blocks in the shade. Wong, notorious multitasker that he was, fresh-faced, thick glossy black hair combed down almost to the level of his spectacles, had a laptop on his knees throughout the interview.

There was a young woman present, a high schooler in shorts, and another young man not dissimilar to Joshua Wong but without spectacles.

Matt had no interview experience except the mock interviews they'd done at Cardiff and those for the online student newspaper but he managed to arrive very professionally in a shirt and tie. Who's in charge, was his first question.

'We all discuss,' said Wong, 'Everyone says their opinion, somehow we form a consensus.'

'How about the leaders of other groups?'

'We try to meet daily.'

'Do you like the name Umbrella Revolution that is being used by the media?'

'It's ok. Not a revolution. If we don't fight China they will make Hong Kong the same as the mainland, that's all.'

'What would you call it?'

'Occupy. We occupied the lawns two years ago. Now it's the streets. This is not one piece of the fight, like the National Curriculum, this is the whole fight.'

'Will you win?'

'We hope so.'

'Are you all Christians?'

'I'm not,' said the girl in shorts.

'Are there many Christians in Hong Kong?' said Matt.

'Some,' said Wong. 'Lutheran. Anglican. Baptist.'

'Is the lack of religion what's wrong with China?'

'CY Leung is very cunning, motivated by money and power. The problem with China is the Communist Party.'

'Are Hong Kong Chinese different from mainland Chinese?'

'We're all Chinese. But China is China. Hong Kong is Hong Kong.'

'How far will you go?'

'We have a duty to each other, to ordinary citizens of Hong Kong not to give up. It's time Hong Kong used its wealth for the good of all, not for a club of the rich. We should have a tax and social security system like the UK or the US.'

'Is Jesus welcome here? I read that over your parents' front door are the words *Christ lives here*.'

'Yes, very welcome. I hope he's already here.'



‘Do you realise that the world is afraid for your safety because of Tiananmen Square.’

‘Don’t worry, we’ll protect Joshua,’ said the girl.

‘What’s next?’ said Matt.

‘If CY Leung resigns we will stop,’ said Wong. ‘Carrie Lam will take over and there will be a new election in six month’s time. If that doesn’t happen more pressure. Always more pressure. They put pressure on us, we put pressure on them, until something breaks.’

‘Or just everyone gets tired. They wait for you to get tired,’ said the other boy.

‘Yes. We have to escalate before that happens,’ said Wong.

‘What’s your prediction?’ said Matt.

‘You answer. We don’t know.’

‘If this was the UK, I think CY Leung would have resigned by now,’ said Matt.

They were all pleased by this idea and smiled.

‘In the UK you had a Scottish Referendum,’ said Wong. ‘We watched that. We have no referendum for independence from China. Your politicians are good compared to ours. Here we have no vote. We didn’t vote CY Leung in, we can’t vote him out. All we can do is push for political reform.’

The interview ended. The girl walked Matt around the camp. Away from Wong she became tired and disconsolate. Matt took photographs. Some tents were being used for stores. One contained a pile of concrete bricks. She gave him some pages of their literature.

‘Do you feel the proximity of the police, the pepper spray, the CS gas?’ he asked.

‘Yes. After all, the whole weight of the China-backed administration is directly over our heads.’

### THREE

While Matt went on from Joshua Wong to his meeting with Michelle Gupta of *The Guardian*, Queensway came under attack again by police. A special force of police armed with wire cutters and chainsaws, surged in to tear down the barricades. These were the barricades contested earlier, when students had used setting concrete, so cheering Joshua Wong and his followers. This time the defenders were overwhelmed and had to fall back. By afternoon Queensway was open again to traffic, the first occasion in eighteen days. Trams clanked again on the lines, scrubbing off the film of rust that had grown there.

During this battle the whole Occupy perimeter had been on high alert. With no clear chain of command, barricade leaders had to judge the situation for themselves. At the Western Connaught Road barricade some went to render assistance on Queensway while others stayed put. Henry and Reggie spent the whole day there. They had a place to sit under the fly-over on a built-up stone kerb. Henry fiddled nervously with a broken circuit board, Reggie just sat. Behind them was a dusty island of leafy greenery, philodendron and palm.

After the Queensway defeat those who'd lost their sector placed themselves here and there at other part of the perimeter. The reversal was felt keenly and everybody was weary. Then, around dusk, whispers started up about a bold counter-move after dark.

Angela finished her shift at the Lutheran Hospice and arrived in Admiralty just as it was getting dark. She had become a member of a small prayer group which met every evening at dusk in the small municipal park abutting Connaught Road. First she went to greet Kelvin and Bettie. They were at the First Aid Station fifty yards inside the barricade that Henry and Reggie were defending, having become regular helpers there.

When Henry noticed Angela's arrival he nodded to Reggie and slid off the cement pier. Though he was not a Christian he had been meaning to join her at one of these prayer groups simply to be beside her. Chatty and smiling as she talked to Bettie, her very appearance was to him a tonic after what had been a long, terrifying shift. For some days he had felt a brand of strength in her, derived

clearly from her religion, which had inundated his thoughts. Now, possibly over-serious and practically buckling with suppressed desire and a whole book of love-speeches, he came over to her. 'Great,' she said, full of curiosity and surprise, when he butted in and told her he was going to join.

Angela was not indifferent to Henry by any means. He would be about a fifty times improvement on her dentist boyfriend, William. He was clearly geeky and dependable. Not the stolid respectability of the dentist but a more high-flying, high-tech-software-engineer sort of reliability and comforting dullness.

The prayer group gathered just inside the park on the pathway. It was always a gathering of pleasant intimacy, enclosed by tropical trees, the pathway lights lit, the ambient illumination of the city towers beetling over the trees. Angela liked nothing better than this group. After the taxing work of the hospice, her nerves could ease and she could be again the cheerful optimist she was, here among fellow people who wanted to be good and who believed in the good in others. As the two of them arrived they found things just starting. Without a priest, the group usually settled on singing and an assortment of prayers. Someone always said a few words too. A young man taking religious orders could be relied on for a little leadership.

They joined the circle. Angela wondered if Henry thought her a good person. If only he knew her wild imagination and her fury sometimes. She had avoided both William and her mother since National Day. Really she practically hated them both. And then all her sexual energy. Sometimes she thought herself the most unloving and selfish of all, capable of loving only her silent father. And even her passion for studies was guilty ambition, escape.

After a prayer and a song it was the turn of the night's speaker. A young man moved uneasily to the centre. 'I just want to say, Jesus told us to turn the other cheek and we have to do that, but try telling that to my parents. We Chinese, we are too proud, too closed. I think we have to worry less about harmony and more about honesty. That's all I want to say.' He stepped back into the circle and the others absorbed his thoughts for a moment as the leaves and branches of the night trees moved in the night thermals.

'Oh God, give us Queensway back,' someone said less seriously.

'And Jesus, please make this city a less crazy place,' someone else said.

'Lord, give us strength tonight, be with us.'

Each member making the sign of the cross the group broke up. Some friends came to talk to Angela but she was interested in talking to Henry. They walked through the park together. He was embarrassed. In the end all religion was pretty suspect: House Gods and joss sticks and spirit worlds, all that sort of old people stuff and he said so.

‘Oh no,’ said Angela. ‘We’re principally about love for one another.’

‘Oh, well, in that case,’ he said, blushing, and she giggled.

Then she was embarrassed as she had something to ask him. She wanted to join him and Reggie for the night’s picket duty.

‘Sure,’ said Henry. ‘Don’t worry if Reggie is less than friendly at first, he’s all right.’

Back at the barricade Reggie was unfriendly, sceptical of Angela as a new recruit, until she took her kit out: goggles, PVC rain suit, hood. He was so equipped himself and looked at her as a fellow soldier with a less unfriendly eye.

They waited. It grew into a particularly dark night. People were tight-lipped, occasionally consulting phones for incoming information. Then, at about ten pm, quietly, individuals begin to leave, until it was clear something was beginning. Personnel moved down Tim Mei Avenue, along the side of LegCo towards the waterfront. Reggie, Henry and Angela followed the others.

The black-and-white traffic camera on the roundabout at the end of Tim Mei Avenue recorded a knot of people arriving lugging Mills Barriers. In short order Lung Wo Road was blocked in both directions by these barriers. Faces were masked by hoods, laboratory glasses, bandit handkerchiefs and caps. Taxi’s coming up out of the underpass tunnel honked and braked to a halt. Drivers left their cars briefly to gesticulate at these masked figures, then made a U-turn and drove back into the orange sodium tunnel. Vehicles coming from the other direction saw the blockage and continued around the roundabout. There were no police at the roundabout.

The masked protestors carried the barriers down into the tunnel and other protestors streamed in after them, more arriving all the time. People were carrying drainage covers and concrete blocks, anything solid and heavy, to the centre of the tunnel to build a road-block. The tunnel was a short underpass between one side of the LegCo waterfront lawns and the other. Crouched figures began tying one block to the next with plastic ties. Quickly and busily people worked in the tunnel,

coming and going. Policemen at the far end of the tunnel called in the situation to their station. There was much high spirited shouting and posturing among the protestors towards the policeman ousted from the tunnel.

After an hour a reinforced police contingent made an advance, coming down in a straight front across the tunnel. The discipline was admirable, the officers uniformed in high-vis vests over blue or white shirts depending on seniority, and white gloves, the unit displaying unmistakable pride of cadre. Those in front carried circular Plexiglass shields in one hand, canisters of pepper spray in the other. Ahead of the line came officers carrying large placards with orders for calm. The protestors, lined up behind the road-block in the centre of the tunnel, unfurled umbrellas and brandished them at the advancing police.

Reaching the concrete blocks, the police line lost its footing and was unable to get to the protestors and had to fall back. Hundred of protestors in their home-made protective clothing now ran amok. Journalists and cameramen were in the melee. Feelings ran high and voices boomed in the echoing tunnel. Occupy diehards came down with their own banners, one reading, 'Dear Police, don't use violence, Democracy is good!'

So the tunnel was theirs. But would the gain stick? With Connaught Road blocked this hitherto quiet tunnel was the one East-West route remaining in the traffic system, therefore the police must mount another counter-offensive. But if it could hold its position Occupy would have its major escalation and perhaps CY Leung might resign in the morning.

Angela and Henry sat down on a ledge at the side of the tunnel. There was nothing Henry could have wanted more than these shared life-changing hours with Angela. Reggie came and went. Joshua Wong was prominent in the fight.

Close to daylight there were stirrings from the police end of the tunnel. The police advance that now came was a stronger one than the first. The occupiers were this time unable to hold the roadblock and had to fall back to their end of the tunnel.

The police began to remove all material blocking the tunnel. It was patient physical work taking some time. The occupiers formed up in the mouth of the tunnel, braced, umbrellas furled. The police now came up in a line as before.

Protestors, hoarse already from a night of shouting, called out at them. 'We have a right to our protest action. 'We are the future of Hong Kong.'

On the police came.

Angela had put her goggles on. She was in hooded PVC raingear. She breathed heavily and gripped her umbrella with determined hands. Henry was beside her. The police advance was like the inexorable advance of the mainland itself.

‘Take care, Angela,’ said Henry.

‘Christ be with us,’ she said.

The police first ripped the umbrellas to pieces. They grabbed and trampled them as they came through. Occupiers were buffeted with batons and felt their clothes being ripped by strong hands. They were pushed back, falling over each other. Now it was mayhem. Everyone was pushed back, some losing their footing. A young police officer swung his shield at Henry and their faces were inches apart, so Henry was faced by the sweat and anger on the policeman’s young face, and the sharp gel-smell of his regulation hair. Pepper spray was being used. People were being pushed to the ground by the police and surrounded. Engaged by a female police officer, Angela put her hands up defensively, trying to keep some distance. ‘You filthy student whore,’ the policewoman screamed at her, pointing a can of pepper-spray and spraying Angela in the eyes. Two policemen supporting the policewoman tackled Angela and brought her to the ground. Henry could not get to her. Angela started to scream, her eyes blinded and burning. The three police dragged her towards the line of police vans which had come in and parked at the roundabout. Henry was knocked down. His whole body tense, he put his hands to his face, expecting to be pepper sprayed too. Then he was dragged clear. It was Reggie, a handkerchief over his face. Henry found himself among the routed students who had fallen back over the lawns above the tunnel. Police were all over the roundabout and some were on the lawns, making arrests, working in groups, their torches arcing among the saplings. Students backed away with their hands up or were caught, floored and handcuffed. The arrested were escorted or carried away. The lawn was scattered with exhausted bruised people catching their breath.

Henry and Reggie sat on the grass for a long time. Gradually the sun came up. Henry had no energy to move. Around them were other HKU students, some still in their protective gear, some with opened textbooks as they had a test that morning. On the water, the double-ended Victorian ferries had begun sliding

across the straight carrying commuters to work. The early sun sparkled on the faces of the high rises. Traffic was moving on Lung Wo Road. Some vehicles honked in support of the overnight struggle others drove quickly by.

Henry was nauseous. He was a weak fighter, he felt. He was just an engineer who would work in America one day and his parents and brothers might join him there - the kind of migration seized on by so many Hong Kong Chinese, decade after decade, Hong Kong a transit hall for those looking West.

Hong Kong was in a nasty situation. He had learned it now. But the bitterest fight, with no opt-out, was for those with no way out of Hong Kong, no way of getting out from under the deterioration in rights and freedoms: Joshua Wong; the unemployed; the hard-line life activists. And on the other side the police, authorised by their superiors, would go on to the bitter end too. And observing, all those who made a living in journalism, media and international affairs.

Angela was a force because of her religion. That night she had told him. Christianity and politics were inseparable because both were about the right treatment of fellow human beings. Christians knew that everyone was equal in the eyes of God thus Democracy.

Henry sobbed and for consolation there was the sweet smell of the grass, a caressing morning breeze, the birds playing among the saplings planted on the lawns and held up by wooden stakes. How ugly human life was in comparison. He had done his best. Perhaps he would become a Christian. He was in love with Angela and keenly worried about her.

## FOUR

Those arrested, forty-five in all, were taken to the Hong Kong Police Headquarters, otherwise known as Wanchai Police Station. It occupies a city block, a compound of modern concrete buildings past which the traffic sweeps on three sides, or would if the compound were not also on the margin of Occupy. The large numbers for processing fretted the night staff and detainees were chaotically bundled down to basement cells, men and women separated, for the morning staff to handle. As interested persons began to gather outside, police set up makeshift pens on the pavement, not allowing anyone inside, and the pens filled up with the friends and family of the arrested and with the media.

The Officer in Charge arrived at nine o'clock and the booking and processing began.

Before loading Angela into the police van they had washed her eyes out using the same laboratory squeeze bottles in circulation in the Occupy camp. Her sight was restored but her eyes burned. She spent the night in a cell with five others. A young student next to her on the bench cried much of the night and Angela comforted her as best she could. In her innermost self, she felt this arrest changed everything in her life. She was gloomy and unable to think but also it seemed she had come to prominence before God. She did not need to pray to feel she was in divine view.

During the night she watched a prison officer do his sweep every fifteen minutes. Everything about his manner suggested he thought those the other side of the bars belonged there and had revealed themselves for what they were: undesirables. The powerful feeling in the paint on the walls and in the smell of the police station was that state-sanctioned police action was not in question. The capture of the detainees was pre-ordained in some way and correct. Angela and the others were the individuals in society who had failed to follow the state programme and had been weeded out.

When her turn came, Angela was told to stand up, the officer unlocked the door and she was taken upstairs.



The Officer in Charge had lately turned fifty but he looked five years older with a lined, wen-marked face and a bald patch at the crown of thinning hair. Three weeks ago, at the beginning of all this, when the force had used the eighty-seven canisters of tear gas on Connaught Road, he and his fellow officers, feeling the sting of public criticism, experienced tremors of inner conflict about their role as police. After all, it was a popular uprising and each one of them was a citizen too. But those feelings were long gone. The media and the government had made it clear the student presence in Admiralty was nothing but civic disobedience, illegal and harmful to Hong Kong's prosperity and to its cherished rule of law. Yet each year this policeman spent his annual two-week block holiday cycling in Vietnam with his wife and children. On holiday, by the second week he was always ready to admit to himself and to his wife, after the children were asleep and they talked together on the verandas of the roadside hostels where they spent the night, that he hated his job. It made so many claims on him that for long periods he could actually no longer feel he was a real person with coherent feelings, even less a citizen.

Angela came up before him.

'Who's paying you to ferment trouble?'

'No one. I'm a student.'

'Why haven't you a yellow ribbon?'

'I gave mine to a dying old lady who asked for it.'

'Can you pay five hundred Hong Kong dollars?'

'Yes.'

'Next.'

Angela was taken to the cashier's office to pay and be given a summons to return in two months' time. Then she was released in the hall and found herself free to venture out of the main doors. She went outside and stood at the top of the steps. She felt strangely blank, thirsty, hungry. It was a brooding day, cool, thunderstorms in the sky.

At the bottom of the steps, in one of the pens, was her mother, indomitable and grey-haired, eyes blazing, and her father, kind and non-combative, stooping a little in an old suit. They were with William among other waiting relatives.

Angela's mother had already berated the attendant policemen for penning them in and gained some popularity among the group, who were all worried and

irritated. 'My very own daughter arrested. Wait till I get her home,' she'd said to the woman next to her, who agreed saying, 'The young today are not obedient.' Angela's mother was particularly annoyed as she had left her pupils in the hands of relief staff whom she didn't trust. As soon as Angela came down to the pen she began.

'Horrible girl. I never thought I'd bear such shame. Tell her, William.'

'Yes, this is dangerous, anti-social behaviour you're involved in, Angela. It's got to stop.'

Angela saw that Bettie, Kelvin, Henry, Reggie, were in the pen too, and could only say, 'Mum, Dad, these are my friends,' before beginning to weep.

'Then they must be wilful like you,' said her mother. 'Disobedient, destructive. I don't wish to meet them.'

There were other students and friends of the arrested in the pen, and other parents, and they all heard this exchange: the regular people of Hong Kong, brought here by the deeds of their children. There was a dowdy woman of yellowish skin, balding, shielding her face from the imaginary sun with an umbrella, another woman the same age in big sunglasses on her bridgeless nose and a large sharp black handbag. There was a workman who wore his belly out from his vest. A man with stained teeth from years of over-iodined water in the Seventies stood alongside his wife, a woman with post-surgery single-lidded eyes. There was a tall man with a pressed shirt and trousers wearing brogues and an old man beside him in pyjamas.

'We are reformists, suffragists,' someone said to Angela's mother – a student.

'Don't talk in a silly way. Look in the mirror, you are a child,' Angela's mother returned.

'Come now,' said someone else and there was a stirring of hostility between the two factions in the pen.

Angela had her hair grabbed by her mother who literally intended hauling her away.

Another student spoke up. 'We know your type, Lady. "Do what I tell you. I'm in charge!"'

'Decent Chinese listen to their parents and elders,' said an opposing voice, speaking up for Angela's mother.

‘And you sound like CY Leung, Sir. He doesn’t want us to think for ourselves either.’

‘Oh, this is too much,’ said someone else.

‘Why shouldn’t we learn about the real world now, before our studies end,’ said another student with cold humour. ‘Yes, we admit civil disobedience is outside the curriculum.’

A parent said with real pain, ‘You worked so hard. Don’t do yourself harm now. Some things can’t be changed. You’ll only destroy your own life.’

‘But the world is not static just because your generation failed,’ said another student with particular coldness.

‘No, nothing is static, that’s exactly the point. We are part of China now and must learn to be the same,’ said the tall man.

‘An outright pro-Beijingist. Congratulations on being on the wrong side, Sir,’ said a young voice with icy sarcasm.

Crying in pain, Angela wrestled herself free of her mother and moved into the protective arms of her friends. Her mother, genuinely put out, said ferociously, ‘My daughter has always been disobedient and worthless,’ and began a haughty withdrawal, taking her husband and William with her. But William had something to impart. He had an overweening desire to put the HKU students in their place, his ego swarming in his chest. He yelled at Angela with all the pomp he could muster, ‘YOU’RE DUMPED!’ Yet her father had something to say too. As his arm was pulled by his wife he had just time to impart these words: ‘Your mother and I will continue paying your tuition, I’ll see to it, all love to you my darling.’

After this, freeing themselves from the pen, the students could think of nothing better to do than go and eat so they began to walk to Landale Street. Angela cried steadily, seemingly inconsolable. They were all unsettled and impressed in varying degrees by what had just been said. This public brawl between parents and children, this generational clash at the very nub of Occupy, it felt a more visceral clash than that with the police. And it didn’t matter if it was Angela’s parents or theirs, the ideas were the same.

Landale Street, their destination, is a small lane of kitchen restaurants. Parked cars here are forced half on, half off the pavement by its narrowness. Inside the cafes, the serving people shout orders in Cantonese and everything is done roughly and quickly, and well. Already journalists and Student Union

leaders had preceded them to the lane, having been in the vicinity of Wanchai police station all morning too.

Somehow Angela managed to signal to the others that she wanted to eat in a prawn wonton noodle soup shop so in they went. Soon, smart phones laid down, their heads were bowed over bowls of noodle soup, elbow to elbow along the table. Overhead, news programmes on televisions replayed the night's clashes. Angela cried and ate. 'Why does she have to be like that?' she moaned between mouthfuls. 'Yes, yes, it has to be her way,' she spoke to herself like a crazy one. When she had sucked up all the noodles she picked up the bowl to drink off the remaining soup and roundly plonked the bowl back on the table. The others, eating beside her, stopped to watch. 'She doesn't understand Christianity,' said Angela, looking at them, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and appearing, despite herself, more cheerful, 'only her own status.'

'I think you're going to be ok,' said Kelvin, arching his eyebrows. For some reason everyone, including Angela herself, began to laugh and laugh.

Now they all felt more normal again, more in key with the cheerful thing that is Hong Kong at lunch. Around them the ordinary workforce of office workers and shop assistants was eating nourishing food with good appetite and sending up a sea of chatter.

Ping rolled up, perfectly fresh having had a good night's sleep on campus. She had attended the morning's maths lecture. She sat on an unrolled napkin to keep her dress clean and was careful not to touch the table. 'We've finished Eigen Vectors,' she reported. 'No more Professor Hong. I've copies.'

'Am I going to be expelled?' Angela asked Bettie, looking at her friend with frightened eyes.

Bettie had been up all night at the First Aid tent with Kelvin. 'I don't think the university can just expel everyone who's ever been arrested, that's almost half the school,' she replied. 'What did the police say to you?'

'I've got a summons to return in two months.'

'So nothing will happened until then. Let's not worry about it for now.'

'You weren't arrested' Angela said to Henry.

'No,' said Henry a little sheepishly. 'That policewoman who attacked you was a real bitch.'

‘Ayah! I’m the Christian, why didn’t I get the Guardian Angel?’ Angela complained.

They all found that funny too.

## FIVE

A week later the Hong Kong Federation of Students and representatives of the administration talked for two hours before the assembled media at a neutral venue, the conference room of a medical college. Carrie Lam was motherly in pearls and a fitted jacket and the Justice Secretary and Constitution Minister sat alongside her. On the opposite side of the table, in T-shirts, were 'Alexter' and three other spokespersons for the students, all of whom had been living on the streets for a month. Proceedings went out live across Hong Kong. The protest camp in Causeway Bay had the benefit of a large movie screen lent by a film director.

Opening for the students, Alex Chow said, 'Many people have expected this conversation for a long time. Hong Kong people feel that the society is sinking. They think they must come out to fight. In the past month, they have eaten a lot of pepper spray, suffered the eighty-seven canisters of tear gas. They were forced to come out and fight in the streets in order for their voices to be heard.' He went on, 'An unequal nominating committee is no good to the wealth gap in Hong Kong. Should it continue to serve business conglomerates? Won't it continue to deprive the political rights of the one million people living in poverty?'

In her opening words, Carrie Lam said, 'Hong Kong is not an independent entity but only a Special Administrative Region of China and cannot decide on its own its political development.' And she said, 'The 2017 election is not the destination. We can still improve the system for 2022. If all the public opinion being expressed can be recorded and reflected to the Beijing Central Government, it will be good for the democratic development.' And she also said, 'There is still ample room under the August 31st decision to work out a nomination procedure and election method for 2017. This will be the goal for the second round of public consultation.'

The moderator invited both sides to make concrete proposals. The students called for the government to accurately reflect public opinion to Beijing and think how to pull society together. Carrie Lam said that a new report would be sent to the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office. She pointed out that while the student

view was one thing, the anti-Occupy group had collected a million signatures of their own.

At the press conference afterwards the students expressed disappointment. The one concession Carrie Lam had made, agreeing to file a new report, seemed worth nothing. No one knew what this Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office was. They told the press that in two hours the government panel had acted in a concerted pretence that nothing was wrong.

Much of the same disappointment prevailed among those who watched the discussion in camp. They knew they were fighting for something very clear, one person one vote with open candidature rules. Yet the administration just didn't seem to get it, clouding the issue. What next, was the question on students' lips, asked with a certain blankness. When their five spokespeople returned to Admiralty they were cheered. At least they had spoken well, handled the discussion with maturity.

Among the newspapers the next day even the pro-Beijing organs evinced a certain pride in the students. A Hong Kong Baptist University journalism professor said, 'I'm proud of our students. Their credibility was far greater than that of the five people sitting across from them.' A Lingnan University cultural studies professor said, 'I was not disappointed because I had placed no hope in the meeting. But it was not hopeless because our younger generation has matured through days and nights in Umbrella Square.'

Meanwhile the absent CY Leung was in America where he was candid why it was not just Beijing that was not prepared to re-write the law and clear the path for open candidacy in a territory-wide ballot. He told journalists at the New York Times, 'If it's entirely a numbers game and numeric representation, then obviously you'd be talking about half of the people in Hong Kong who earn less than 1,800 USD per month,' he told them. 'You would end up with that kind of politics and policies.'

Further time passed. The tents remained, so many hundreds of them, the barricades, the rows of cones outside Occupy re-directing traffic, the strings of police on duty. The government was fighting through the courts for injunctions to move the students and the new stocks of tear gas and rubber bullets remained unused. New art, local and international, sprang up. Above People's Corner a

multi-colour awning floated between footbridges fabricated from umbrella skins stitched together.

Zuckerberg visited Tsinghua University in Beijing, Tim Cook of Apple visited Shenzhen for meetings at the Foxconn complex which made components of the iPhone, but the arrival of these two exponents of the free world caused no measurable populist stirrings on the mainland.

Beijing sent papers to Hong Kong explaining mainland Rule of Law with Chinese Characteristics. By this doctrine CY Leung, in the Hong Kong arena, was the Supreme Power above all other authorities, governmental, judicial and administrative. Rule of Law with Chinese Characteristics meant the independence of the judiciary must defer to the ultimate authority of the Supreme Leader, and all his agents.

It was widely being argued by government spokesmen and other pro-Beijing parties that the students' civil disobedience was undermining Hong Kong's precious Rule of Law. Meanwhile everyone who was pro-Occupy knew very well that the Occupy movement was on the side of protecting Hong Kong's precious Rule of Law, so absent on the mainland.

Two weeks after talks, weariness had set in. The tents on Tim Mei Avenue in their tidy rows alongside the LegCo were yet undisturbed by bailiffs or police but increasingly empty. Focus in all parts of Hong Kong was settling on the harm the students were doing to themselves and the economy. Dr Check, a financial pundit who wrote a square of print each day in The Standard, spoke for many when he wrote, 'As a citizen, I wish the students would go back to talking and not ruin our economy.'

But the reformists hung on. On day sixty the police launched an operation to clear Mongkok. Seven thousand policemen were sent in, a hundred arrests made, injuries sustained on both sides. 'Alexter' and Joshua Wong were there and arrested. The police ripped up the camp and the traffic flowed freely once more.

After the reverse of the Mongkok clearance new efforts were made in Admiralty to escalate the movement. Protestors pressed on the government offices, forcing LegCo into brief lock down. All day there were chaotic scenes. The police used water canon and pepper spray. After dark another attempt was made to close Lung Wo Road with the same conclusion. The students wore yellow hard hats and there were forty more arrests in the early hours. It was not as



great an action as before. More apparent among the reformists were fully-rigged activist fighters with ties to the National League of Democrats, less evident were the students, no longer the body a hundred thousand strong. As the police were rampant, students picked out by the media cameras and shown on the morning news appeared as isolated, pensive figures sitting on walls watching the chaos on Lung Wo Road with sorrow.

A few more days and Joshua Wong, released from detention, began a hunger strike, as did some of his closest comrades. Before starting he took interviews on Tim Mei Avenue looking tired and without his spectacles - which had somehow been lost - speaking with the same rapid unerring conviction. 'We will just drink water in an attempt to force the government to relaunch political consultation,' he told a concerned CNN reporter, 'because the first report to Beijing did not show that public opinion wants true universal suffrage.' The CNN reporter asked Wong if his parents knew about the hunger strike, and did Wong know a hunger strike could fatally ruin his health? 'Yes,' said Wong. His hunger strike lasted one hundred hours and that of some of his companions lasted a little longer. Wong was too young for hunger strikes, he had no body fat, he was as lean as one of the bamboo scaffolding poles on the barricades.

The founder of Occupy Central with Peace and Love, Benny Tai, the HKU law professor, walked out of the Occupy site and handed himself over to the Wanchai police, making an end of it.

## ENDINGS

Wednesday morning. Cool on the ground in Admiralty, a limp sky overhead. The bailiffs, supported by police, would clear Connaught Road the next day and students had till then to pack up. They were arriving on site, staying no longer than necessary, in and out with what they wanted to save.

The tidy Occupy village grew ragged and skeletal. Charities came to pick up the unused stores. The television pens and equipment were removed. And some things, by common consent, were to be left: the messages on the People's Wall; some of the tents; Study Corner; the cleverly carpented steps over the central carriageway with Henry's railings; the sofa on the overpass; much of the artwork. Let all those who arrived in their JCBs, operating metal-cutting machinery and pressure hoses, feel the shame of destruction.

A handful were having a normal day, not making preparations for departure. Tomorrow at dawn they would lie on the road in front of the wreckers and force the police to carry them away bodily.

It had all gone on a long time: seventy-nine days. Resolve, patience, commitment, had all been called on. The very endurance was a victory of sorts. And at last it was over. No more nights in tents on the road.

'That's not the corner of the groundsheet, my darling, that's the corner of the roof.'

'Well, stretch it out anyway.'

'All right, but don't keep letting go.'

'I'm trying. You are in charge, my love.'

It was Bettie and Kelvin, dismantling a tent.

They had become a certain stamp of couple, an Umbrella Couple.

'Once this tent monster is neatly folded it goes in the trash, I take it?' said Kelvin.

'No, it's going to my little brother. He's a scout now,' said Bettie.

At the barricade, Reggie, Henry and Angela were taking a last moment. Henry and Reggie were firm friends. They hoped to both work together in

America one day in the same hi-tech engineering firm. And Henry and Angela were together, a couple, so Henry's cup was full. He looked at the barricade and wondered how long it would take to be torn down.

Ping was not coming. She had left some things behind and Bettie called her to ask if she wanted them. Ping said she didn't care. Bettie made up a bag of Ping's things anyway.

When the five of them were packed and ready to leave, Bettie suggested a last walk around.

They walked up one of the over-passes. From here the site was laid out before them. From here, in the heady first night, gay Mexican Waves had run across sixty or a hundred thousand heads, the crowd tasting something entirely new to them and to Hong Kong. The immediate future an unknown destination to which they were sailing with initial success, full of hope, and now a bitter destination had been reached.

'So how many Umbrella Couples are we?' said Kelvin.

'Three, surely,' said Bettie.

She knew Reggie and Ping were seeing each other. They were talking to each other in a way they had not talked to anybody before, two eighteen-year-olds de-pressurising by laughing with increasing affection at each other.

'We must all join the Umbrella Couples Facebook page,' said Bettie, 'and have Umbrella babies.'

'Steady there. We're still just freshers,' said Kelvin.

'Yes, but a generation will follow ours with protest in their DNA,' insisted Bettie feeling momentous standing here on the fly-over surveying the wreckage of the camp.

'All right. Watch out Beijing.'

'Actually, I do sound a bit creepy.'

'It may be true though.'

They walked back off the flyover, past Study Corner and the People's Wall and turned left into Tim Mei Avenue, going up to the Visitor's Entrance and the orderly bivouac of Scholarism in the car-park half under the building. They were shy here, never part of the hard-core, though they had done their bit. The five did not go in under the half-dark. In one tent possibly was Joshua Wong, in prayer perhaps, with his friends, still recovering from the hunger strike. From here,

would the fight be taken on in years to come? Would Joshua Wong ever call out Hong Kong again to the barricades? That was a question for another day. Bettie, Kelvin, Henry, Angela, Reggie, they left the camp with their things.

## TWO

Matt left his room in the morning and walked along the coastal path to Kathy's cottage. He was in shorts and shirt-sleeves, his face and neck bronzed, his limbs still white. He had made this walk frequently and liked the feeling of being the young footloose man. Today the warmth and light of the tropics was as seductive as ever. He passed the small sandy beach where he had swam with Kathy. Freighters were offshore at anchor and inshore on the shoulder of the hill the thick jungle with spotted with flowering trees. Not that he had been on Lamma all the time. He had been returning to Hong Kong Island regularly, sometimes overnight, because there was demand for his copy, so long as he kept himself close to the action. Producing work and with Sarah making contacts on his behalf, his pieces had begun to appear, in *The Guardian* and elsewhere. Even Kathy had proved useful, putting him in contact, discreetly through her circle of friends, with someone at the Foreign Correspondents Club. So Matt had made it and he was coming to say goodbye to Kathy because he was going back to England.

Ten feet from the garden gate, Kathy's children, John and Tilly, who were too young to understand that their mother was having an affair, were standing next to a nanny who was herself stock still on the path. She was Filipina or Indonesian and her warm brown skin was goosepimpled with fear. They were all watching a snake working its head into an open pipe-end right next to the gate post.

After a few seconds the snake's head came out of the pipe, something the size of a small rodent inside its mouth and it slid over the path before them and disappeared into the thick vegetation.

'Rat snake,' declared John, energetic, a slight know-all.

The nanny shuddered, patted the heads of the children and went on her way.

'I don't like it when they drop from trees,' said Tilly. 'Hello, Matt.'

They were off to the village for a school activity - beach combing.

Matt went through the gate and took the steps two at a time, up to the terrace before the pink cottage. Not finding Kathy there he went in. It was cool. She was in the kitchen. 'Have the kids gone?' she asked. 'Yes.' They kissed, a momentary

tasting of each other's silky inner mouths, the sort of kiss leading on to sex. 'You've got a flight?' said Kathy. 'Yes, tomorrow.' 'Let's go out on the terrace with drinks.'

They sat on the painted iron chairs at the table and watched the sea, oily and silky at midday. The Amalfi Coast with noodles for pasta and impenetrable greenery for olive groves, Kathy had once said – and snakes.

She was wearing a summer dress and flip flops. She was half-glad he was going, embarrassed as a married woman at having an affair. Her husband was a successful businessman, something you needed in this expensive part of the world, and probably they still loved each other, even if they had drifted apart and he was absent much of the time.

She brought out Matt's working class, lads, bottle of beer and for herself her middle class, gentrified, glass of wine from the fridge, for that is what they both were they had agreed. She had become that, the wine-drinking gardening mother, and he was still the beer and football Northerner. She was the girlfriend he'd never had, he had told her, not at the right time when he was younger and single.

'What did Sarah say?' she asked, even though Sarah was Matt's problem, as her husband was hers, and they would both deal with these problems alone.

'I know she suspects something. I'll deny everything. She wants me back, I think.'

'Yes. She need never know.'

'Let's not be sour.'

Instead of going up to bed they kept looking at the sea.

'Heaven,' said Matt mechanically.

'But not enough for you, ambitious with your fast-track career.'

'Right.'

On National Day, Kathy had taken her children to Occupy, wanting to see it for herself, and wanting her children to be anointed with the yellow ribbons of the reformists, to wear them on the ferry home. From afar she adored Joshua Wong as if he was her own son. 'Perhaps Occupy affected me,' she said, saying something she'd begun to realise was true. 'It made me throw myself at you, risking this and that, revolting against marriage even.'

'We're an Umbrella Couple then, as they call it.'

'Not whiter than white, but yes, I hadn't thought of that.'

‘They say there are hundreds of them.’

Matt was not at ease, not enjoying his beer. He was irritated. It seemed the moment when Kathy would become unavailable to him had been unnecessarily brought forward. Whatever name their relationship had to the outside world they had been everything to each other for long hours at a time, lying together as Adam and Eve, pleased and full with each other, the rest of the world forgotten. ‘You know I would have married you like a shot if I’d met you earlier, don’t you?’

She didn’t reply.

He got up from the table, put his head against hers, smelled her fresh hair. Touched, she leant in to him. She also wanted to go upstairs, to their bed, different from the bed she slept in alone or with her husband.

‘Let’s go up,’ he said, tugging her gently.

‘All right. Once more.’

## THREE

Albert Yu journeyed up winding Stubbs Road in a chauffeured car towards the Peak, to a dinner with his patron, Terry Wong. In the last few days, since the end of Occupy, old aches and pains had returned to him, now the danger to LegCo and CY Leung were over. He sat back, resting his head against the seat-rest, closing his eyes as the car climbed the hill. It was quite possible to have vertigo at places on the road. He felt for a pill in the inside pocket of his coat.

His boss, CY Leung, was quietly triumphant. And at the Liaison Office there was a self-congratulatory air in the various committee rooms. China had shown restraint, allowing Hong Kong its uprising, not ordering the opening of the gates of the garrison or harsh action by the police. There were no deaths, there was no slaughter. The ghost of Tiananmen was exorcised, the Fifty Year Agreement intact and Taiwan could take note and trust China with its future.

Cresting the hill the car rode along high ground past mansions and villas. The car pulled in through the gate of No 88, Plantation Road. Albert prepared himself to smile, knowing he was about to get a warm welcome. He thanked the driver and got out. The Wongs' villa was on three floors plunging down the face of the hill, with the entrance on the top floor.

Old Wong, a self-made man, had built the business empire. He was Albert's first patron when Albert was very young, giving him an introduction into political life so he might take the Infrastructure functional constituency which was in Old Wong's pocket. And then Terry Wong had succeeded his father and it was Terry's family that Albert had come to see now. There were two children, to whom Albert was something of an uncle, usually with a joke or two about the Liaison Office - was that sphere on top a weather ball, a communist totem, or a transmitter? He always brought with him a new theory for the children. And there was Venus Wong, Terry Wong's wife, one of the lovely Cheung sisters, a family that had long brightened the Hong Kong social calendar. And here they all were, standing at the door to greet him.



He might well have fingered his dyspepsia pills because the dinner was rich. He had to tackle *foi gras* then abalone, the latter a recipe from Hunan Province where Venus had relatives.

The oldest child was Angel, taking A levels, shortly to fly to UK to face Oxbridge interviews. She was serious and beautiful like her mother. 'At least now Hong Kong has had some good press internationally,' she said. 'I mean it did produce Occupy. Those Oxbridge professors are less likely to take me for a crass, moneyed Chinese girl belonging to some filthy rich family that has no regard for human rights.'

Her younger brother, who carried himself like an American jock but was as intelligent and hard-working as his sister, said, 'Dad, I want to go to HKU. Those guys killed. They're rock stars.'

His mother, Venus, said, 'There was never reason enough to cause all that turmoil, it just wasn't right.'

Next to speak was Terry Wong. 'They were thinking for themselves, using their education. And they were non-violent. We can be a little proud of them.'

Now it was Albert's turn, the LegCo lawmaker, to opine. 'Of course you are all right,' he flattered them.

Venus, loved by men, lay a hand on his wrist. 'Can we all be right, Uncle? Anyway, these children of mine know this house is not a democracy.'

'It's easier to love Hong Kong than to love China,' the Oxbridge candidate spoke up again, moodily. 'We are small and cute, a sugar-cake city. China is a whole continent, a big monster.'

Albert allowed himself to eat and drink too much and enjoy himself.

After eating, the children disappeared. Venus retired. Two nannies came in to clear up. Albert followed Terry to the study.

The study was a room in the European style with glassed-in bookcases, a heavy mahogany desk and a globe, collectively having the air of items bought at auction and shipped as one lot, as indeed they were. They took their brandies outside onto the lower terrace.

Albert, whose own home and family was across the water in Kowloon, was always impressed by the view here, by Hong Kong as it presented itself in these cooler heights once preferred by the colonial administrators. It was a city gone on to greater prosperity; and the opalescent grid of Hong Kong at night, among dark

masses of hill and water, was like a multi-faceted jewel set in a rough piece of geological ore. Albert and Terry always found something to say to each other before it. Albert owed Terry the deference to a patron, Terry deference to an older man, and they were mutually curious about each other's access into life, into worlds commercial and political.

It was a night for summation.

'The city below us,' said Albert. 'I sometimes feel no one is really in control. It has its own momentum.'

Terry thought for a moment. 'Business is no different. In the boardroom we have a hand on the rudder, but we are not master of wind or wave.'

'If I may borrow your metaphor, the tide of history will have the final say, it will decide in the end if this much vaunted Western Democracy is ever to reach these shores in a complete form.'

They were silent.

'Interesting how the mind always soars before this panorama,' said Albert.

'My wife will tell you there are better back gardens, one's less threatened with slippage,' said Terry.

Albert asked Terry if he wouldn't mind calling the car. He was ready to go home to his own wife and children. In the car Albert thought he might resign from politics. He wasn't sure any more that he knew what was best. He would talk to his wife. Ballsy, cunning CY Leung had survived and perhaps Occupy deserved a scalp. He would not give a resignation speech of any meaning, he would just slip away - if Terry Wong had no objection. Yes, that might be the thing to do.

## FOUR

In England, Matt and Sarah had breakfast. A few days ago, just before Matt's return, Sarah had watched Occupy being cleared on the evening news. There were diehards carried away by the police, a final speech of defiance by someone, yet somehow the newscast betrayed a certain weariness, a wish to report on something new - or so she felt. They sat in their dressing gowns at the kitchen table whose yellow laminate surface, worn at the corners, shone under a naked bulb. Through the back-door window was sight of the rotting garden and mouldering shed. It would be Christmas in two weeks. Sarah was doing the crossword, Matt was toggling between online news sites on his tablet.

'Can you hear me munching?' Sarah asked. She was eating toast. 'Now you're back, I can hear myself munching.'

'No, babs.' Matt stopped and looked up. 'Let's get out shall we? Show me the cathedral.'

She drove them in the mini into town. It had had an oil change and ran gamely.

They had met at Cardiff on the journalism course, thrown in with others to share a house outside campus for a short intense year. They were both recent graduates, each with an uneasy three years behind them for different reasons. At Southampton, Sarah had felt too privileged, at a disadvantage on the campus for being obviously middle-class, as she endeavoured to take a step away from her parents to become her own person. Matt, at Manchester, had enjoyed quick acceptance on campus as an easy-going Brummie of working class origins – his parents ran a pub – but he possessed a kernel of ambition of his own. He was drawn to those whose parents were in the professional classes, to achievers, not just to his set. And once or twice he had seen posh undergraduates shouted down by politically-charged individuals whose claim for moral precedence he knew to be exaggerated, stemming in part from frustration. Neither Sarah nor Matt had quite managed to step out of their grooves at university but when they met at Cardiff they quickly made sense to each other. He was protective towards her,

impressed that she did *The Times* crossword in thirty minutes flat, she was glad to dilute her privilege by taking him on.

There was a biting cold wind in the square in front of the cathedral which had a Norman frontage. Taking a ramp and automatic doors they entered one of the glories of the English Middle Ages.

‘They give wonderful tours here,’ said Sarah, ‘the Magna Carta, Lincoln Imp, all that sort of stuff.’

‘Dear old England,’ said Matt.

They went for coffee to the lounge of the main hotel in town. Matt could image journalists making the bar here their headquarters in the unlikely event that political ructions of national significance ever overtook sleepy Lincoln.

For lunch, a gastro pub along the cobbled street. Steak and Ale pie each and a shared bottle of red. After a warming glass of wine, Sarah said, ‘We should be firmer with China shouldn’t we?’

‘Probably, yes.’ Matt had somehow stopped talking to Sarah about Hong Kong.

‘What about taking the car to London?’ he said. ‘We can get somewhere near your parents in Bromley, if I get this London job. You can get something better yourself.’

‘Yes, maybe. But you haven’t told me anything about Hong Kong.’

‘I discovered I wanted to be a foreign correspondent. That’s the important thing,’ said Matt.

She could see change in his leaner, tanned face, and hear his Brummie accent disappearing.

‘I do want to live near my parents,’ she said, feeling soft and useless.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

## AFTERMATH

In June 2015, six months after Occupy, the bill for reform in the method of appointing the Chief Executive in the form prescribed by Beijing and generally recognised as fake democracy came before LegCo. It required a two-thirds majority and in a day of some disarray at LegCo was not carried. The Pro-Democrats voting against the bill said it would be wrong for them to anoint reforms which simply served the vested interests of the very people who were putting them forward. Carrie Lam, remaining then Chief Secretary for the Administration, argued passionately that Hong Kong should take the reform package rather than make no advance and be left with nothing. Two years later, Carrie Lam replaced CY Leung as the new Chief Executive of Hong Kong under the old, un-reformed, election system.

After Occupy things got worse for Hong Kong. Six booksellers disappeared and the hand of the mainland was immediately suspected. Publishers were free to publish what they liked in Hong Kong and that included political cartoons and skits on Central Party figures. Even the 1991 bestseller, *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang, was still banned in China. The six booksellers finally turned up, in different parts of Asia, with patchy recollections of what had happened to them, clearly afraid to speak. Perhaps even CY Leung was nonplussed. Occupy had been defeated and now with perfect logic Beijing had squeezed harder.

Occupy did not prove to be the end of serious agitation for reform in Hong Kong though. A strong but fragmented localist movement evolved, with a common purpose in Hong Kong's independence or sequestration from Beijing, frequently making the headlines as strategy changed from peaceful protest to open confrontation with the police. In various flare-ups there was property damage and injuries, both to police and to localists.

In 2016 a handful of young reformist candidates, who had cut their teeth in Occupy, won seats at LegCo. Just as these street politicians were set to enter the

mainstream, new barriers arose over the swearing-in process, which required an equal pledge of loyalty to China and Hong Kong. Joshua Wong, perhaps slightly burnt out, had not stood, but joined his triumphant friends on the hustings. He ended Scholarism and founded a new group, Demosisto, targetting the 2020 LegCo elections. Then, on appeal, the government had a prison term imposed on Wong for his role in Occupy and he sits in prison now, banned from holding public office for five years after his release.

Perhaps the big mistake of Occupy was made by Alexter, in agreeing to talks with the government without the participation of Wong, their greatest speaker, the most charismatic young leader Hong Kong has ever had. Perhaps they had tried to include him and the government said no, arguing that the Hong Kong Federation of Students was one thing, Scholarism another. Perhaps they allowed themselves to be flattered by such blandishments into thinking they were a more mature group than Scholarism. In the lead up to the talks Occupy did no more than go sideways and after the talks Occupy was dead, despite the best efforts of Joshua Wong to keep going with it. The Hong Kong Federation of Students did not escape fall-out. Within a year, four of the five main universities which comprised it disaffiliated, including HKU and HK Baptist University, citing poor leadership.

Another new squeeze after Occupy concerned the universities. Until then they had been free to choose their vice-chancellors without interference. Now pressure was brought to bear. CY Leung's administration wanted a veto. Such key roles in Hong Kong university life must be filled by pro-Beijingists. This has not doubt ramified through every layer of the university apparatus, through the teachers, through the students, right down to the course materials, and to the grades to be expected by students in politics or history for writing one thing over another.

## NO REPLY

A fellow called Jason Y Ng did not reply when, after reading his fine book, *Umbrellas in Bloom*, I took slight issue with him by email about his position on Article 45. This silence was quite possibly because he has considerable profile as an Occupy expert while I have none. But it may also be that my email, addressed to his website email address, was picked up by one of his helpers and not passed on.

Jason Ng is a Cantonese-speaking lawyer and journalist who, having spent much of his life in Italy and America, moved to Hong Kong. He was around as Occupy started, he blogged and wrote numerous news pieces about it and went on, as *Umbrellas in Bloom* tells, to become a regular at Study Corner where he initially held English lessons and later discussion groups, living and sleeping on Connaught Road with everyone else. In fact I have *Umbrellas in Bloom* to thank for one or two small details in my own account.

*Umbrellas in Bloom* is authoritative. Jason Ng slots in perfectly as Occupy's book-length popular spokesman and everything he has to say about the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress's determinations re: Article 45 is on the same line as that of all the other pro-democrat radicals. He writes of the decision, '*In one broad stroke, the Standing Committee thwarted hopes for real democracy in Hong Kong. We couldn't tell which was more frustrating: that Beijing had backed out of its promise, or that it didn't think or know it had.*'

I take a different view. I think it is a point of reasonable importance, even now, to say that young people went into Occupy with a misconception. It was being said that something promised was reneged on. But that statement of something promised was a mis-statement. It reflected, I think, a very understandable state of wishful thinking. Article 45 never did hold out 'democracy to international standards'. When, early in Occupy, the Justice Minister wrote an article in *The Standard* explaining what was possible and what was not possible under Article 45, he was ignored. I think that was a mistake. He was expert and the legal situation Hong Kong was placed in, vis-a-vis the Basic Law and vis-a-vis China, had to be recognised. What I believe happened in the



years before this was that many had fallen into the sanguine habit of conflating Article 45 with meaningful democracy without examining it. When the scales fell from their eyes it was easier to find fault with the Standing Committee's ruling over Article 45 than acknowledge their own mistake.

## DIFFICULTIES WITH UMBRELLA COUPLES

If you have read *Umbrella Couples* and enjoyed it I am very glad. Still, I admit it's a piece which may have caused a question here or there about what was being offered.

The first thing is about the dialogue. There is probably an axiom that good dialogue is achieved when the rhythm and vernacular of the person speaking is captured. On this basis many writers would not touch characters (except perhaps by making them subsidiary and caricature) whose main language was a foreign one and whose vernacular was out of their grasp, even if some of its rhythms could be reproduced using rearranged English syntax. Why then was I not put off? The Hong Kong Chinese I know speak English fluently and use it frequently in their professional and social lives, so much so that I do not think of them as cut off by language. Cantonese is a private language they have between each other, good to learn if you are a foreigner in Hong Kong, but you can get along very well without it. Perhaps I even want to have this recognised as an axiom: everything the Chinese Hong Kongers have to say can be said in ordinary English.

I began *Umbrella Couples* on a course and had to workshop my early chapters. In the group was a young woman of Chinese antecedents, brought up in Taiwan and then Germany, who knew something about being a young person in a Chinese urban environment. I particularly remember one of her comments where she described the dialogue of *Umbrella Couples* as 'formal but down-to-earth'. Perhaps this was a fair comment and alluded to the fact Cantonese rhythms of slang and syntax were absent but a realism of sorts was present.

The second trouble, more a syndrome probably, is about historical novels set in the present day or near-present day, novels which combine fiction with a chronicle of fact, novels in which both fictional and non-fictional characters appear without obvious separation. I was reading *Hadji Murat* by Tolstoy at the time, a historical novel set in the near-present (when Tolstoy wrote it), combining fiction with a chronicle of fact, combining fictional and non-fictional characters

(most notably Nicholas I) and I began to refer to it for style and narrative voice. It was not until I was well into the story that I realised some of the difficulties. It might well be asked, can Joshua Wong be put on the page when he is alive and well and speaking for himself. It may well be that Occupy is fresh in the memory and does not need a fictional re-launch. I do see that if a reader is obsessed by such questions, *Umbrella Couples* might well leave them unsatisfied.

If I may finish with a slight digression. I had to submit a critical essay along with the novella and here I wrote, 'Where fiction is concerned, it seems the writer can discover truths imaginatively and the reader will be on board if they arise naturally out of the story. But when the writer supplements fact with fiction with no clear delineation between them there is the risk of unease. It can be honestly done but it is taking the writer's omniscience in fiction and carrying it over into fact.'

'That's exactly the problem,' my examiner wrote in the margin. This was Sarah Moss, novelist and Associate Professor at Warwick. I was quite annoyed by this marginal note. I felt a 'yes, I agree' was called for. She was using my words to tell me something when I had said it first.

I always felt Moss's dismissal. My stock was automatically low as a quite old, privileged, white male, a view the whole left wing campus around us reinforced.

If anyone remembers *The History Man* by Malcolm Bradbury, the question of *whether there is any room for ideology in marking* is given dramatic form, and this question about ideology in marking bugged me in relation to Sarah Moss.

In turn I placed her among the self-serving left-wing elite. She had to have the right sort of buy in to left wing campus ideologies in Britain in order for her career to speed along. Yet I suspected (because she was a mother with children) she was old enough and experienced enough to have plenty of reactionary views amongst her portfolio. All supposition of course, but what else was it but supposition that made her dismiss me for having had a career in banking. I was sure, if she did have any such traditional wisdoms, she couldn't utter them without certain campus career death. And that led to the question: was anything she said worth hearing? She was of the system, ambitious and sharp-nailed. I identified with the persecuted student Carmody in Bradbury's novel with his tweed-jacket and wrong ideology, whom Howard Kirk, the Sociology Professor, ruthlessly

seeks to send down in scenes which, deliberately I think, evoke the Stalinist purges.

The mark Moss gave me for a half-finished version of Umbrella Couples, in case you wonder, was a middle-of-the-road 68%.

## THE LAST BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

The British Marines claimed Hong Kong in 1841 and there were two expansions, into Kowloon and then into the New Territories, each by lease agreement with China. As Margaret Thatcher's government in London prepared to hand back Kowloon and the New Territories at the end of these leases, Hong Kong Island was included.

Hong Kong Island's history is simple, comprising three eras. It is an island in the mouth of the Pearl River Delta and first it was an uninhabited one, occasionally the stop-over for a fishing boat. Next, through 156 years of British colonial administration, it grew up into a populated island with a significant economy. Lastly the post 1997 handover era began under a new Fifty Year Agreement whose principles were agreed between China and Britain in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 and chief of which was 'one country two systems'.

The Occupy generation were all born after the British left and in the current era of the Fifty Year Agreement.

So what of those talks between Britain and China culminating in the Fifty Year Agreement and in the Basic Law? Chris Patten, the last governor, a picture of whose smiling, well-fed face is still pinned outside his favourite egg tart shop in Hong Kong, is a liberal free-market democrat and a Christian. He came to Hong Kong to put Hong Kong on the strongest possible footing to prosper and not to suffer after the handover. He had four years to do this. But China already had a foot in the door, adamant nothing could be done without its consent. The difficulties Patten had pushing through reform are brilliantly told in the book he wrote after leaving, *East and West*, an excerpt of which now follows:

Chinese officials would accuse me of having broken the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

'How have I done so?' I would respond. 'Show me where.'

‘You know you have done so,’ they would reply. ‘You must have done so, or else we wouldn’t have said it.’

‘But where?’

‘It is not for us to say; you must know that you have erred.’

‘Give me a single instance,’ I would argue.

‘Well,’ they would usually claim somewhat lamely, ‘you have at least broken the spirit of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law.’

‘What do you mean by the spirit? Do you mean that you disagree with me? Why not then discuss what I have done? Put forward your own proposals.’

‘We cannot put forward our own proposals until you return to the spirit of the text.’

*East and West* is scholarly and I think still worth reading twenty years on.

Patten writes:

‘It feels much the same if you are beaten up by a policeman in Britain or Indonesia. The consequences for you and your family are similar wherever you live if you are taken away in the middle of the night and incarcerated without proper legal process. The censorship of the press, openly or by stealth, has the same effects on the health of every society. Forbidding men and women to worship as they wish is an offence against conscience right around the globe. Denying the right to peaceful protest is everywhere unwarranted. No alleged national tradition or cultural standards can make right in one place what is wrong in every place.

The Asian denial of this proposition rests largely on the claim that order and harmony, which may sometimes be translated in practice as repression and intolerance of dissent, have deep roots in the religious, philosophical and cultural traditions of Asia. (One might equally argue that there is a long tradition of authoritarianism in Europe, emanating from belief in the divine right of kings.)’

Surely as apposite a two paragraphs of the Asian-Western divide as any.

## TIANANMEN PAPERS

During Occupy there was always the question whether it would all end like Tiananmen. While researching Umbrella Couples I came across a thick paperback in the library, which had been given an additional fortifying second cover of plastic, the Tiananmen Papers. This is a cache of several thousand Chinese documents, leaked anonymously to the outside world some years after Tiananmen. Though unverifiable, the scholars and editors in America who took upon themselves the task of reading and picking over the material, which was exceptional in its range, became convinced they were looking at authentic material and they set about the task of translation and publication. In particular, The Papers contain memos and minutes from the Central Party during the occupation of Tiananmen Square: fly-on-the-wall access to the discussion and decision-making in the corridors of power.

I've prepared a few extracts from The Papers. The Western narrative is familiar: A bloody crackdown that shouldn't have happened and a failure to yield to reform. The Papers give a slightly different perspective. Nothing was quite so black and white.

First an extract that dwells on the scale of the unrest in China during those weeks in 1989:

*The movement . . . reached to almost every major Chinese city; to virtually all institutions of higher learning; to nearly half of the professional and technical high schools; to many mines, factories and offices; and into some rural areas. Altogether, nearly a hundred million people participated in one form or another. The movement was autonomous, spontaneous, and disorderly.*

*The preface to The Tiananmen Papers by Zhang Liang*

Next an extract on the make-up of protestors in Beijing:

*'They said that they favoured withdrawing but that less-sophisticated students from the provinces, who now formed the majority of those sitting in, were*

*against it. These students were unwilling to return home without winning the struggle against the government . . . There were now all kinds of people in the Square.'*

*Report from Hong Kong newspaper Mingbao, based on interviews with two student activists in Tiananmen Square.*

Then the role of Deng Xiaoping in the decision-making:

*Deng Xiaoping . . . bore ultimate responsibility for the Party's response to the students. . . he emerges from the documents as perhaps a more sympathetic figure than he appeared at the time. . . He was drawn reluctantly into the decision-making . . . and was willing to support Zhao Ziyang's conciliatory line until that line demonstrably failed. . . Deng authorised the use of force but also insisted that no blood be spilled in the square. He ordered the new leaders to continue on the path of economic reform and opening to the West.*

*So divided were the students that when government negotiators asked their leaders whether they could speak for their constituents, they responded that they could not.*

*Introduction by*

*Andrew J Nathan.*

A further comment about the handling of the situation by the police and the troops in the same introduction:

*What happened next [the massacre] was one of the most common yet preventable kinds of tragedy in the world: demonstrators and troops getting out of control. China paid dearly for a lack of democratic openness, which could have made demonstrations a more routine matter and could have acclimated the government and the police to handling them.*



This was very much different to Occupy where the Hong Kong police had had two years experience playing cat-and-mouse with Joshua Wong and his radicals.

Now a comment by Deng on Hong Kong:

*I once said we should try to create a few more Hong Kongs, and what I meant by that was that we should still insist on opening, we just can't close up again. We should open up more than before. . . Look at Hong Kong, look at the benefits we get from it. Without Hong Kong we'd have no good information, and that's just for starters*

*Xiaoping Deng, Party Central Office Secretariat, talk with Li Peng and Yilin, 31 May, 1989*

Here is part of a pivotal address by Deng to the core leadership two days before the bloodshed:

*Imagine for a moment what could happen if China falls into turmoil. If it happens now it'd be far worse than the Cultural Revolution. . . If the turmoil keeps going, it could continue until Party and state authority are worn away. Then there would be civil war, one faction controlling parts of the army and another faction controlling others. If the so-called democracy fighters were in power, they'd fight among themselves. Once civil war got started blood would flow like a river, and where would human rights be then? . . . refugees would flow out of China not in millions or tens of millions but in hundreds of millions. . . This would be disaster on a global scale. . .*

*Deng Xiaoping, minutes of inner-circle meeting with Li Peng and Bo Yibo*

Now, as a final extract, a description of the bloodiest engagements, which were not in Tiananmen where no shots were fired, but round and about Beijing in outer suburbs. This is a report from the State Security Ministry at 2am on 4 June, regarding the situation at Muxidi (a district of Beijing):

*At Muxidi Bridge the troops were stopped once again as citizens and students threw the broken bricks they had prepared in advance. . . Regular troops, row by row, came rushing onto the bridge . . . turning their weapons on the crowd. The soldiers then alternated between shooting into the air and firing into the crowd. People began crumpling to the ground. Each time shots rang out, the citizens hunkered down; but with each lull in the fire they stood up again. Slowly driven back by the troops they stood their ground from time to time shouting, 'Fascists!' 'Hooligan government' and 'Murderers'.*

*At least a hundred citizens fell to the ground in pools of blood.*

This was the massacre that shocked the West.

I think it is interesting to hear that those who occupied Tiananmen Square were so divided amongst themselves. So was Occupy to some extent, try as it might not to be, with its at least three clear groups: Scholarism, The Hong Kong Federation of Students, and Occupy Hong Kong with Peace and Love.

To me, the inner circle of the Central Party comes well out of The Papers, burdened by a heavy responsibility, articulate, experienced and well-meaning. It may be that fear of being overthrown, disgraced and humiliated may have played a role in their decision-making, but I think the West over-does it. It seems by no means to have been a corrupt leadership at that moment but one striving to tread the best path for China and not allow it to fall into another era of chaos.

## REVOLUTION?

Great nation that China has always been, one of the earliest and most long-standing of civilisations, the Chinese people might agree they have rarely been governed well for long: a few pockets of benign totalitarianism during some of the dynasties but many more abhorrent ones; the economic miracle of the last forty years but China still governed by the Communist Party, which, one might say, is not great. Certainly that is our view from the West. ‘The tentacles of the party [are] a clan of interconnected interests not an ideological movement,’ writes Patten in *East and West* (1998). ‘The Communist Party acts as a state within a state, its members concerned primarily with their positions, influence and rewards within the party system,’ writes Osborne in *A History of Democracy* (2006).

We might expect there will be a day of reckoning for the Communist Party, be it tomorrow, in ten years or in fifty, even if we cannot quite guess in what form. The Communist Party will be toppled.

Such an overthrow might be helped along by international students. China has opened up remarkably in the modern epoch. Today, vast numbers of Chinese students freely go out to study in the US, the UK and elsewhere and then return to China. True, they don’t necessarily make a lot of Western friends, or debate politics or read censored books when they’re abroad. To tell a few personal anecdotes, our bank in Hong Kong interviewed a young man from the mainland who had lived in California for seven years. His English should therefore have been excellent but it wasn’t as he had lived in America entirely among a Chinese clique. When I let my flat in London to three Chinese students they let me know it had become *part of China*, a home from home, nothing but Chinese heard, eaten or seen there, all their entertainment taken on their laptops from Chinese sources, never the BBC news on the television. Or at Warwick University I saw Chinese students taking one year postgraduate courses without really being touched by England from beginning to end. Still, one of the best hopes for change in China must be in this exposure of young Chinese to the West, or so we might hope.

No doubt when the economic boom years are over that is when the Communist Party will face its biggest threat. But if the Communist Party is overthrown, will Democracy surely follow?

We might think so. From where we stand in the Europe or America, we may well see our own political development as a coherent and inevitable modernising progress towards multi-party Democracy and social equality, and therefore assume there is something inevitable about Democracy, which China will eventually come to, in the natural way of life.

In China they might say no. For a start, when they think of the West they think of what is wrong with it, not what is right with it, as we do in reverse of China. As Joshua Wong commented, to say that the single party system in China is progressive and harmonious is a problematic statement - that is our own view. And yet the Chinese think our political system in Europe and America is full of destructive party politics which is no good for anyone. The sense your average Chinese has, as he or she tours the UK on holiday, snapping Westminster Abbey and the Harry Potter studios in NW London, is that the political system here is harmfully antagonistic and gives rise to ineffective leadership and many ailments in society – so much crime, open rebellion, confusing messages. Or worse, multi-party politics is a popularity contest which gives rise to short-termist power-hungry Parties making rash promises. No wonder the East has steadily been pulling past the West.

In our mind, the Communist Party is what it has become, corrupt and self-serving, hanging on to power. In Chinese minds, the Communist Party is what it was, what they learnt at school from patriotic songs and stories, idealistic and beautiful, the system that saved the people.

So is our make-up different? Is that why we have not aligned politically but remain West and East and never the twain shall meet? In my opinion, the history of political change in Europe and America rests on a population willing to make a fuss. I suspect this fuss must be carried to every tier of life: to what is wrong in your own house; to what is wrong in your neighbourhood, in the district, in the province, in the state, and finally, in the country. This historically is where the Chinese may differ from us in the West. Their quiet long-suffering dignity is their fatal flaw, and they have suffered for it.

Do the Chinese have a love of uniformity, everyone being the same, thinking he same, and we a love of diversity and individualism? It might appear so.

In Chinese History, there was never anything to match the aggression of the white man in the eighteen hundreds, trying to steal Chinese territories, to coerce China into its ways. That's why they tried to keep their borders closed and why they chopped the head off anyone who learnt Chinese.