

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Door

Yan Sham Shackleton · Wednesday, November 6th, 2019

“Door” is an excerpt from a trilogy of novels set in Hong Kong. The novels span the 50 years between the regime change between Britain and China in 1997 and when Hong Kong becomes fully integrated into the Chinese Communist Party’s totalitarian state. This story is set in today’s Hong Kong Resistance which started in June 2019 and continues to the present.” – Yan Sham Shackleton

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Time seemed meaningless. The ice had melted in the vodka. James, my husband had gone on another business trip. I suspected they were his excuses to get away from my drinking.

A few months before, our infant daughter died in her sleep. The doctor explained that sometimes it happened. Nothing we did: sudden death syndrome.

Grief filled me. Guilt filled me. Fear filled me.

How come I couldn’t die instead? What did I do wrong? Would James leave me now? Headed toward divorce, we had only saved our marriage because of my pregnancy.

Alcohol filled me.

The door bell rang. I sighed, maybe I had lost track of time so much, I forgot James would arrive home that evening. The door bell rang again. Then again. A desperation seeped through the sound. It annoyed me, as James had his own key. The bell rang again, and James began knocking. It made me irate. Why did he have to be so insistent?

When I swung open the door, the sight surprised me. It wasn’t James at all, but Eason and his little daughter: Water. Their clothes looked rumpled, their faces exhausted. Eason had lost weight.

“Jo muy yer, ah?” The two of us always spoke Cantonese to each other. “What’s going on?”

“Le hor ng hor yi, tei ju Sui ah?” He gently pushed his little four year old in front of him. He asked me to look after his daughter.

“The police are after us. After me. I don’t want them to take her.”

“What did you do? Why are they after you?”

Not replying, he picked up Water. His sleeve pulled, exposing a healed scar 30 centimeters long on his forearm. No doubt, gotten from an earlier confrontation with the police.

Hong Kong had turned into a police state. Just being a known leader of The Resistance would put in him in constant state of peril. In the eyes of the government; his very being was illegal. They could arrest him anytime at their convenience.

“Have you eaten?” I asked.

Edison shook his head. “I should go.”

“No, you should eat.”

“They might come for me.”

I thought about my high-rise apartment, in an upper middle-class neighborhood away from the strife of the protests. No tear gas had ever been shot underneath our home. No fires set. The building filled with pro-government people who would never participate in The Resistance. The police wouldn’t come here to look for him.

“They won’t. Not here.”

In the kitchen, I boiled water to make them instant noodles. It didn’t seem hearty enough to feed Eason but I thought the speed would be more important.

“Can you take her until I find another place? It’s just for a few days,” Eason said.

I looked at the poor little girl clinging to her father. Her matted hair had the beginning of dreadlocks on the top of her head. The two of them emanated a sour smell. It made me self-conscious of the smell of alcohol on my breath.

My heart ached with the horror and sadness of the state of them, the state of my city, and the state of me.

“When was the last time she had a bath?” I asked, making sure I had no judgement in my voice. I poured hot water into the cup of noodles.

“I don’t know,” Eason said, looking at the food with anticipation.

Eason had no way to look after this child. He could barely look after himself. The places they would be hiding in: warehouses, abandoned flats, under freeways, must have awful conditions. I opened my mouth to tell him I would care for Water.

A loud smashing sound came from the living room. Another cracking noise, and I watched the door burst open. In streamed police officers in blue shirts and bullet proof vests. On their heads they wore helmets with thick plastic covering their faces.

“Run!” I screamed, but I didn’t know where. We lived on the 10th floor and all the windows were barred.

It didn’t matter that there were nowhere to hide, because within seconds a policeman launched

himself over Eason, and they crashed onto the ground. Another fell on top of both of them, as if one person could not subdue him.

“Water!” I shouted. I fell on my knees and grabbed her close to me. She shook so much, I felt like I couldn’t hold her before she broke through.

I watched a policeman come for me. I knew they would rip Water from me, and arrest me too. They would end up hurting her in the process.

“Cui sei sui ge,” I screamed. “She’s only four.”

Then for a second, I caught the police man’s eyes, and I begged there were still conscience in him. He spun around, and his colleague was about to grab me when he held out his hand to stop him.

In that second of silence, we could all hear Water screaming, “Baba baba baba.”

Blood seeped out of Eason’s head into a pool. I tried to hide Water from the sight, but she kept reaching for her dad, wanting to go to him. The policeman had Eason’s hands tied with a zip tie behind his back, and one of them had his foot on Eason’s head. He kept pushing down.

“Let go of my head,” Eason said. “You have me already.” The policeman ignored him, and ground his foot down even harder.

One policeman dragged Eason up by his collar. At first, Eason struggled, not giving in yet. Then he saw Water and he stopped. He stood up straight with pride, despite blood streaming down his face. The police would not drag him out.

“Sui, daddy loves you. Be a good girl,” Eason manage to say before the police led him towards the broken door.

The last image Water had of her father was one of dignity. Walking head high, not ashamed, nor broken.

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The next morning, I called someone to fix the door. An old sifu, with two young men arrived.

“I’ve been fixing a lot of doors,” the man said, with resignation in his voice. “There are so many doors being broken these days.”

I nodded at him, understanding his coded message. He knew.

After putting in the new door, I asked him how much. He pushed my wallet towards me. “Ng sai bei chin,” he said.

I insisted, at least let me pay for the door, even if he didn’t let me pay for his services. He said again, “No need to pay.” I took out some cash, and tried to tip the young men who helped him.

They both shook their heads. As they started to leave, one of the young men looked around as if wary someone might hear. When he saw no one, he spoke to me.

“Gwon fok Heung Kong,” he said. “Liberate Hong Kong.”

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