

COME AGAIN

TO TOUCH THE SOUL OF A GOD

by

ELEANOR WONG

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5 Anne and Li Mei, secretaries in an office sit having breakfast. Anne has a brown paper packet of mee goreng open in front of her. Li Mei is reading an Ecstasy Candlelight Romance while munching an otak, and drinking a cup of black coffee. It's another morning at work. What a drag. Anne reaches over to another drawer (obviously belonging to a fellow secretary) and takes out a pair of fork and spoon.

10 Anne: (brandishing the fork and spoon) Look at this (pointing to the logo on the fork and spoon). Look at this. She stole them from SIA, I tell you. (Rummages in the drawer and finds another pair) Twice, some more!

15 Li Mei: (engrossed in her ecstasy romance, but looking up for the moment) On the way there and on the way back what.

20 Anne: . And three times a day, she takes these (pulling out from the same drawer a pair of SIA eye blinds) and pretends that she's the Lone Ranger or something. (Rummages further and finds some decorations in the drawer, a few streamers, some lights etc) Aiyoh!

25 Li Mei: What? (Never looking up from her ecstasy)

30 Anne: She took this from the office New Year party! Too much, that woman. Everyday, Mr. Ho can see her sleeping from his office but he never says anything. If she's such a good secretary why doesn't she do her fair share of the work, I ask you?

35 Li Mei: This one is not as good as the last one you lent me.

40 Anne: Be patient, lah. Not yet come to the good part, what. (Anne starts tucking into her mee goreng with the SIA cutlery) At least it's better than the books we publish... maths textbook, English textbook, they don't even give me a discount for my son's primary one books, they only think of making money here. Here, let me show you (she takes the book and holds it so that it opens at the part obviously read the most often). There, you can always tell which are the good parts from the way...

simultaneously put down everything they're doing and pretend like they're attentive and working.

Li Mei and Anne: Good morning Mr. DeSilva.

DeSilva barely acknowledges them and walks on to his room/desk. The moment he's gone, they revert to their eating etc.

10 Anne: Did you hear about Mr. DeSilva's Philippino maid?

Li Mei: What?

Anne: Mrs DeSilva just gave birth right?

15

Li Mei: Yah?

Anne: So Mr. DeSilva hired a Philippino maid to look after the baby.

20

Li Mei: Yah?

Anne: She tried to commit suicide (very dramatically) .

25 Li Mei: Really (her attention finally caught)?

Anne: Yah! The day after Christmas. She was very depressed

30 Li Mei: Homesick, what. Ay, but how did she do it?

Anne: She swallowed a whole bottle of Mrs DeSilva's pills.

35 Li Mei: Alamak, a whole bottle of sleeping pills??!

Anne: No lah, iron pills.

40 They both break into laughter. Tony Ho walks in. Anne and Li Mei make no pretence that they're not working.

Tony: Good Morning.

45 Anne and Li Mei barely acknowledge Tony. They quickly get back into their conversation.

Anne: So Mr. DeSilva had to pay for her to go back to the Philippines because she was emotionally unstable...

50

DeSilva walks out of the office. Anne and Li Mei abruptly stop again.

55 DeSilva: Tony. Good. You're in. I need to get your input on the progress with the Pereira Cookbook. See me in my office in half an hour.

DeSilva walks back to his office.

Tony: Where's Shirley?

Anne: She's late.

Tony: Oh. (P) Is she on leave today?

10 Anne: Don't know.

Tony: When she comes in tell her that I need her to finish typing up the Pereira proposal for me.

15 Tony walks half absentmindedly to his office. Then turns back again.

20 Tony: Since you're free, Anne, can you just get Shirley's diskette out and start work on it first. She can carry on once she gets in.

25 Anne: See what I told you? She's half and hour late and he like tidah apa. No wonder she never bothers to come in on time. Some more, he makes me do her work for her. With that Tony Ho, only if you make noise like Shirley then you can get away with murder. I don't think he cares about anything.

30 Li Mei: Aiyah, Anne. As if you are so dedicated.

Anne: But I'm not a partner, like him. They pay me peanuts. I have a right not to be dedicated, what.

35 Li Mei: (Losing interest in the converstion and going back to the novel) Aiyoh, that Damien, the way he bosses her around.

40 Anne: Of course what. The hero is always like that at first. Then he falls in love with her and sweeps her off her feet.... and he still bosses her around.

They laugh.

45 Anne: Now, if that Tony Ho would boss Shirley around a bit, maybe she would fall in love with him and do some work for him for a change. She used to be alright when she was Mr. Husein's secretary. Never complain, stay back late. But Tony Ho is so easy going. He never stands up to anybody. Never kicks up a fuss when she has to go off early. If I work for him, I would also have an easy life.

55 Li Mei: Switch with her then.

Anne: Are you crazy? Ay, DeSilva is a tough boss, but at



poems. I'm in this business to make money, you understand? That's what pays your HDB installments every month, you understand? The first day you came to work, I already told you. If we receive any manuscripts in the mail for that sort of thing, you just send the standard rejection letter. Don't bother me with it, you understand?

10 Anne: Sorry, sir. I must have seen wrongly.

DeSilva: Seen wrongly. Seen wrongly. Time is money, Anne. Every second I waste on drivel like this, I can spend on something more worthwhile, (he throws the manuscript at her) Take care of this.

15 Anne: Yes, sir.

Tony comes out of his room at the commotion.

20 Tony: What's up?

DeSilva: Some idiot who thinks he's a Philip Jeyaretnam. Sent us his masterpiece. (Reading from the letter sent with the manuscript) "I hope you can give this  
25 your kind attention." What does he think this is? A charity?

Tony: Oh? Was it good though?

30 DeSilva: Good? Good? You don't suppose I actually read the stuff.

Tony: Well...

35 DeSilva: We've been through this before, Tony. I thought we'd settled it. We are not here to mollycoddle every lame dog or dreamer who thinks he's a writer, Tony. This is a money making concern. Works of art do not make money in this town. You know that. We  
40 leave that kind of thing to the publishers who can afford the luxury of making out that they're patrons of the art. You and me, Tony, we stick to the money makers, like that Pereira Cook book. How's it coming along.

45 Tony: Fine. Fine. But, you know sometimes, if this guy's really... you know...., it may be worthwhile...

50 DeSilva: Come off it, Tony. Don't be a bleeding heart. How much can that kind of work sell, you tell me. It's not as if we're given a whopping Ministry grant to promote creative writing in Singapore. Correct?

55 Tony: Right.

DeSilva: What are you girls staring at? Got no work to do,

is it?

As Tony walks back to his room.

5 DeSilva: The Pereira Cook Book.

Tony: Right.

Anne: Moneyface.

10 There is another hiatus. Peace descends on the office for a while. The Other Tony walks in.

15 Tony2: Can I speak to Mr. Tony Ho please.

Anne and Li Mei are uninterested.

Tony2: Can I speak to Mr. Anthony Ho please?

20 Anne: That's his secretary (pointing to Shirley).

Tony2: Excuse me, Miss. Can I please speak to Mr. Anthony Ho.

25 Shirley: Sorry. He's very busy. You don't have an appointment, right?

Tony2: No, but it's quite important that I speak to him immediately.

30 Shirley: I'm sorry, ah. You leave your name and number. May be I get him to call you back.

35 Tony2: I'm sorry. But that just won't do. Which is his office? That one? Let him know I'm coming.

Shirley: Wait a while.... (as Tony2 walks towards the room)... Who shall I say...?

40 Tony2: Tell him it's an old friend of his, a very old friend.

Spotlight shifts to Tony's room. As Tony2 comes in, Tony looks up.

45 Tony: What...?

His speaker phone sounds.

50 Shirley: Mr. Ho, he insisted on coming right in... He said he was an old friend.

Tony: It's alright, Shirly, I'll handle this. (To Tony2) Yes, what can I do for you?

55 Tony2: Hi, long time no see.

Tony: Yes?

Tony2: So it's true.

Tony: I beg your pardon?

Tony2: They told me you wouldn't recognise me but I didn't believe them. After all, it hasn't been so long. But it looks like it's true.

10 Tony: I'm sorry. Perhaps you're looking for someone else.

Tony2: You may be right. I'm looking for Tony Ho.

15 Tony: I'm Tony Ho.

Tony2: No, you're not. You're not the Tony Ho I knew.

20 Tony: Look. I'm rather busy, and I'm not sure what you want, but whatever it is I don't think I can help you with it.

Tony2: Oh? Throwing me out already? Again?

25 Tony: Look here, Mr....

Tony2: Ho.

30 Tony: Mr. Ho...

Tony2: Tony Ho.

Tony: Mr. Tony Ho, I've been patient with you but...  
(realisation sinks in)... Oh my God. You're not...

35 Tony2: Happy New Year, Tony. I'm you. Remember me?

40 Tony: If this is some sort of game...

Tony2: No game, Tony. I wish it were. I'm you, Tony, and I'm here to live your life for you today.

Tony: What?

45 Tony2: But we can get back to that a little later. We've a lot of catching up to do.

Tony: Catching up?! I want you to get lost!

50 Tony2: That's not very nice, Tony, you've lost your manners.

Tony: You impudent young...

55 Tony2: Young what, Tony? You talk as if you're an old man,

Tony. You're only , what? 35?

Tony: 33. Going on 34.

Tony2: There, you see? You're not old. You're only 33. You should be young and full of enthusiasm. Instead you're ... this. Hasn't life been good to you, Tony?

10 Tony: It's been fine. I'm doing OK.

Tony2: What are you here, a partner?

Tony: Yeah.

15 Tony2: Good. That's good. How about Siew Hoon? Is she working at that accountant's firm?

20 Tony: Yes, she still is. Funny. She always had a better head for numbers than me.

Tony2: That's true. Remember the dates when she would have to work out what the service charge should be? Could never impress her because she always knew what the meals cost.

25 Tony: Yah.

Laughing.

30 Tony2: And Dad?

Tony: Dad is in an old folks' home. After Mum died and Dad...

35 Tony2: What?

Tony: After Mum died, Siew Hoon and I talked about it and decided that we didn't have the time to devote to looking after him. We were both working.... God what am I doing? I'm explaining myself to a ghost or zombie or something.

40 Tony2: I deserve an explanation don't you think?

45 Tony: I don't believe I'm doing this. If this is some sick joke....

Tony2: Hey, listen I told you before. This is not a joke, it was lonely, being sent out into the other place when you decided that you had no more use for me. It's lonely there, Tony, very lonely. I just came to see how you were doing, what your life was like now, whether we've turned out anything like what we thought we would. Make sure you start the year off right.

55

Tony: It's none of your business...

Tony2: And I also came to tell you that I'm going to live your life for you.

Tony: What?

10 Tony2 Just for today, Tony... (Tony is aghast)

Tony: This is **not** funny.

Tony2: Think of me as a New Year Resolution.

15 Tony: What the hell are you talking about?

Tony2: Try me for a day. If you can't keep up, put me aside for next year. I'm not asking for much.

20 Tony: Oh sure. Just my life.

Tony2: You let me take your place, sit at your desk....

Tony: Impossible.

25 Tony2: Wear your clothes, (takes a look at Tony) you could do with a new wardrobe, walk in your shoes. One day. Then you get it all back, your nice comfortable middle-class life.

30 Tony: Oh come on. This is going too far. What am I supposed to do while you're so-called living my life? Stand around and watch you screw my wife?

35 Tony2: Our wife, Tony, our wife. Yes. You could stand around if you wanted to, I could show you a thing or two, considering how you've done so far.

Tony: What do you mean, how I've done so far?

40 Tony2: Precisely that, Tony. You don't think you're doing a marvelous job living our life for us do you?

Tony: What do you mean? Marvelous? I think I've been

45 doing a good job. I don't hear anybody complaining.

Tony2: Ah, but do you hear anything, Tony? Do you hear the song in the wind? Do you hear the call of a challenge? Do you hear your own heart beat? What is

50 this? This airconditioned office with Ikea furniture and modern art on the wall? Is this what we wanted?

Tony: What? You think it isn't? Have you forgotten? This

55 is what we wanted. We wanted to do this. We wanted to go into publishing, into books. That's what I'm

doing.

Tony2: That's right, Tony. Nice little glossy cook books that sell to the thousands of wives who want to know how to please their husbands after a day at work. Perfect, Tony.

Tony: What's wrong with that?

10 Tony2: Have you forgotten the other part of the dream, the part that supplied the meaning? And what about Dad?

Tony: OK, that's enough.

15 Tony2: You've got your successful career and a cushy apartment somewhere off Bukit Timah Road . . . .

Tony: I said that's enough...

20 Tony2: And you think that you can shunt him off to an Old Folks Home somewhere.

Tony: Don't preach to me. Your other place, where you  
25 come from. Is it nice and quiet and peaceful? Do people let you be what you want to be, let you dream your little fantasies and applaud you for your idealistic notions? That's not how it is here. And for here, I'm doing the best I know. When I was you, I was young, a young that didn't understand  
30 responsibility, a young that owed no commitment to anything except himself. You know what that state is, the state of utter self-absorption and self-glorification? It's called masturbation, friend. You are a product of my mind's masturbation. Well,  
35 let me tell you, boy, it doesn't last, you can't exist forever on some orgasmic high.

Tony2: So you end up carrying DeSilva's balls?

40 Tony: Damn you! (Picks up the cookbook) You think I like reading that 1 bud of cloves together with an ounce each of tumeric, coriander and cumin is the basis of a good curry? (Throws the book at Tony2) It's a living. We came out of University. No money, no  
45 experience, no expertise but plenty of brash young ideas. I couldn't get a job. We couldn't get a job. Then Dad got me this place with DeSilva's. It earned us a solid wage. No doubt the stuff we put out here isn't your soaring poetry. . . . .

50 Tony2: Sure. Cookbooks.

Tony: Don't be naive. You can talk all you like about  
55 ideals and art. But ask anybody to choose between them and filling their stomach, and nobody, nobody, gives a damn about your freedom of speech, your

spiritual life, your works of art.

Tony2: If Dad could hear....

10 Tony: And all this self-righteous talk about Dad. You have a very convenient way of selectively rewriting history. Or have you forgotten? Dad's the one that wanted me to settle down. He's the one who insisted that the time for dreams was later on, that I should provide for my family first. So don't preach to me unless you think that you could do a better job at living my life than I have. Don't you dare preach to me.

15 Tony2: But that's all I want to do. Give it a try. I may be a failure at it. Fine. Then I'll go away and leave you to carry on with your life, undisturbed. Admit it. Aren't you the tiniest bit curious whether I can do it?

20 Tony: That's like asking if I'm curious about the devil. Either way the answer could be dangerous.

25 Tony2: Don't tell me you've lost your sense of a gamble as well.

Tony: Hey.

30 Tony2: OK, OK. No insults until I prove that I can handle this real living. What do you say?

Tony: Well... (Long pause) you only want 24 hours? No more? I let you "take over" and you'll leave me alone after that?

35 Tony2: Absolutely. In fact, I'll give you the option of turning me out at any time if you really think you can't handle it.

40 Tony: (Sarcastic) Oh, that's so generous of you.

45 Tony2: (Dead serious, losing his brashness for just a while) Please? You may not need me at all. In fact, it would seem fairly clear that you've decided you don't. But just for today, I need you. I need the chance to try this. I need to know. Doesn't it strike you that you might too?

50 Tony: Well. (Sighing) I'll have to brief you on what's happened since you... left, you know, so that you'll be prepared for any questions...

55 Tony2: So that I won't screw up your well organised life, right? No need to mince your words with your self, Tony. You've told me about Siew Hoon and about Dad. What else? No children?

Tony: Not yet...maybe now that both our careers are off the ground....

Tony2: Hmmm...that's a project we could try making a headstart on...

Tony: Wait a minute...

10 Tony2: We'll have to do something about that sense of humour as well. What about that secretary of yours, a bit of a bitch isn't she?

15 Tony: Oh, Shirley? She's alright. She gets the work done ... eventually. She's been with the company for donkey's years. It would be too much of a hassle trying to teach that dog new tricks. I make do.

20 Tony2: Yeah, I can see you've had to do a lot of that. And DeSilva? I vaguely remember him. A loudmouthed tyrant with dollar signs where his eyeballs should be.

25 Tony: DeSilva's ....DeSilva. He's tough. He's had to be. He's a businessman, concerned that every dollar he puts into this venture pays off. He's a good boss when he remembers to be human. I'm still hoping that the day will come when I can persuade him to take a risk on one young writer. Like yesterday, a manuscript came in, late in the day after the typists had gone home. I put it on his desk, on the offside chance that he might take a look at it...

30

35 Tony2: Sneaky... that's good... haven't lost the native wit.

Tony: Unfortunately, not so good. He was totally unreceptive, threw the thing at Anne, his secretary, along with a few unmentionable words.

40

Tony2: And you didn't own up that it was you all along?

Tony: Hey..

45 Tony2: Right again. Ricebowls before unpolished diamonds. So where is this manuscript? Maybe we could look at it ourselves, take a little initiative...

Tony: Whoa there...

50

Tony2: I'm taking over here. Don't worry. I'll handle it with my usual charm and tact.

Tony: Great. Just great. What am I getting myself into?

55

Tony2: The best day of your life, I imagine.

Tony: Oh God.

Tony2: Take it easy. Sit back and enjoy the ride, as they say. Now where do we start? (Reaches over and activates the speaker phone) Shirley?

Shirley: Yes, Mr. Ho?

10 Tony2: Does Anne still have that manuscript that Mr. DeSilva wanted her to return?

Shirley: I don't know.

15 Tony2: Well, find out then. I've only got all day. And Shirley...

Shirley: Yes, Mr. Ho.

20 Tony2: Get a move on that cook book, I've got a lot of other projects on my list, exciting projects. Let's not dilly dally shall we?

Shirley: {putting down the phone} Humpph!

25 Anne: Serve her right. Maybe she'll have to do some work for once.

Shirley rummages around first and then turns to Anne.

30 Shirley: Ay, Anne, give me that manuscript that boss didn't want just now.

35 Anne: Neh.. What do you want with it? I got to send it back, you know.

Shirley: Don't know. (Shrugging her shoulders and pointing at Tony's office) Mr. Ho.

40 Anne: Yah, well, Mr. Ho is not the boss around here. Don't forget. Wait you get into trouble with DeSilva then you know.

45 Shirley: That's why, lah. This Mr. Ho also too much. You don't go and tell DeSilva, OK?

Tony comes out of the office, but is this the same Tony? There's a spring in his step we didn't see before.

50 Tony: Ah. There we are. Thankyou Anne. Shirley... the cook book.

Shirley: Yes Mr. Ho.

55 Tony: (Flipping through the manuscript) This is not bad, not bad at all. A little rough. Could do with a bit

.of refinement, but the boy has promise. I think we'll look into it further.

Shirley: But Mr. Ho, Mr DeSilva said that we were to return it... I think you should...

Tony: Shirley. I'm not especially concerned at this point of time what you think I should do. When I am, you'll be notified, I'm sure.

10

Shirley tosses her hair in a huff.

Tony: Anne, take down this letter for me. "Thankyou for your letter dated etcetera etcetera, enclosing your manuscript entitled "The saga of an artiste", we'll have to get him to change that a little, I think. "It has promise. Perhaps you could make an appointment with me to talk about how we can refine it with a view to publication. Yours faithfully, Anthony Ho." Type it up immediately and we'll send it by hand. Meanwhile you can give this gentleman a call and we can arrange to meet him this afternoon if he's free.

15

20

25

Anne: We usually get them to reply to us in writing, Mr. Ho.

30

Tony: That's usually. This is me, today. I don't have much time. Let's see what we can achieve in as little time as possible, shall we? Oh, and can you get the florist to send a bouquet of flowers to my wife.

35

Anne: Flowers?

Tony: Yes.

Anne: To your home?

40

Tony: No, no, to her office.

Anne: Oh.

45

Tony: And Shirley, could you call up my Dad's Home and see if it's OK for me to visit him this afternoon, say at 4.00pm.

Shirley: But you don't get off work till 6.30pm.

50

Tony: Shirley. Remember what I said about asking for your opinion? Ditto.

55

Shirley: Well. Mr. Ho you don't have to be rude to me. You know that Mr. DeSilva is not happy when we go home early. I'm just reminding you.

Tony: Shirley, maybe if you would make a little more effort to work and not take so many afternoon naps when you should be working, you could actually finish your work and go home early as well.

Shirley: WELL. You don't have to talk to me like that. I'm going to tell Mr. DeSilva.

DeSilva comes out of his room just then.

10

DeSilva: Just what are you going to tell me, Shirley?

Anne: Now he's going to get it.

15

Li Mei: Yah. Wonder what's wrong with him today. I've never seen him act like this.

Shirley: Mr. Ho was being rude to me.

20

DeSilva: Really?

Shirley: And he's going to visit his father at 4.00pm.

DeSilva: Oh?

25

Shirley: And he wants to meet the boy who wrote that book that you wouldn't publish because he wants to publish the book.

30

DeSilva: Oh? Is this true, Ho?

Tony: Roughly.

DeSilva: Perhaps I should talk to you in my office.

35

Tony: I don't see why. There is nothing I wish to say that can't be said right here.

DeSilva: Oh? (Deadly calm. Not a good sign at all).

40

Tony: This is a partnership, is it not? I'm entitled to air my views, am I not?

DeSilva: And?

45

Tony: Peter. I really think we should consider publishing this book. I think it's got potential.

DeSilva: Tony. This is neither the time nor the place...

50

Tony: When then?

DeSilva: What?

55

Tony: When would be a good time to discuss this? When we've spent another ten years building up this

company, making a pot of money for DeSilva and Ho? When would be a good time to take a risk on something worthwhile? When?

5 DeSilva: Tony. We have been through..

Tony: Yes, we have. We have been through this before, but never to my satisfaction. It was well and fine when we were truly struggling. When you owned this  
10 company and I was just an employee. I'm just saying that we are now in the position where we can afford to be driven by more than just the prospect of making money....

15 DeSilva: And where did you get that notion?

Tony: ...Besides in these days of the working woman and the fast food joint, do you really think a cookbook is going to sell that much better than a novel  
20 about last year's Arts Festival? The public is ready for it, Peter. And if it isn't then maybe we can do our part to give them a push onto the right path. We would be doing the nation a service. Can you imagine it in twenty years time? Peter DeSilva  
25 public service star for contribution to the arts. If there was a time to make a start, this is it.

DeSilva: Tony, have you been drinking?

30 Tony: Not at all, Peter.

DeSilva: Too bad, Tony, at least if you had, there would have been some excuse for this behaviour. As it is, let me say it very clearly to you, I run this  
35 company. It belongs to me. You and your 20 percent share don't count. I gave you a job because your father asked me to. You came in with all your bright ideas about what sort of books this company should publish. Naive, impractical ideas. After all  
40 this time, I thought I had managed to convince you that you had no idea what you were talking about. It appears I was wrong.

45 Tony: I think that as partner...

DeSilva: Ah that. Perhaps another mistake of mine. You are an average worker, Tony, not especially bright or aggressive, but with a certain tenacity. So when you'd been here for 10 years, we talk partnership  
50 and you put in your 20 percent, and that, I thought, was that. Until today and all this nonsense. Now, if you want to assert your rights in this partnership, if you want to take a risk on a stupid novel that no one wants to read except the  
55 author, you do it, but you do it on your own time, you do it on your own money, not mine. You take it

out of your share of the partnership and don't come whining to me when you lose a ton of money on this, you understand?

Tony: I understand perfectly. I understand that you have no vision, Mr. Peter DeSilva. You cannot see beyond your immediate needs. You cannot conceive of a greater cause than beefing up the company profits. You...

10

DeSilva: Tony, Spare me this ridiculous talk.

Tony: Peter, I am grateful to you for the time and energy that you've spent training me in this trade. I am grateful to you for giving me a job when I couldn't find one. I am grateful to you for not throwing me out of this office after 10 years of unimaginative, unconvincing service. I am grateful but not beholden. I will say what I must. And I will take up your offer to use my part of the partnership funds to finance this young writer, and who knows, if I get wiped out by the undertaking, you'll be rid of me.

15

20

25

DeSilva: Well, don't expect any sympathy from me when that happens.

Tony: I assure you that that is one of the last things I would ever expect from you. but thanks anyway...

30

DeSilva: For what?

Tony: For the confidence in me.... (cheekily) I'll try to live up to it.

35

DeSilva: Bloody young upstart!

DeSilva walks back to his room.

40

Tony: So what are you girls staring at? Don't you know that time is money?

Tony walks back to his room.

45

Tony: Oh God. Do you know what you just did? Do you know what you just did?? You almost lost me my job, that's what you just did. Why did you have to start quarrelling with old man DeSilva for? What if I do lose all my money on trying to promote this guy. His work isn't even that good. What if I do lose all my money? I have to live with this mess that you've created, not you. Are you going to be there when I have to explain it to Siew Hoon. I must have been crazy to agree to this.

50

55

Tony2: I'm sorry if this has upset you. I didn't expect

DeSilva to be so unreasonable. I thought that if I appealed to his sense of nobility...

- 5 Tony: Nobility? You mean impracticality. I keep trying to tell you that your ideas won't wash with DeSilva and you won't listen. You're so young you don't know to listen to what people are telling you.
- 10 Tony2: But things aren't so bad. The manuscript had potential, serious, and at least now DeSilva will realise that you're more than just a DeSilva clone.
- 15 Tony: Great. Where does that get me? Then you antagonise my secretary as well. I can't expect to get any work out of her as it is, but with that little scene you can be sure that she'll rather paint her nail 40 times before she does another jot of work for me again.
- 20 Tony2: Then get rid of her. Better still, if things don't work out with DeSilva, leave the company, set up on your own.
- 25 Tony: If you could only hear yourself. It's not so easy, friend, to just up and leave. I'll need capital, I'll need contacts. And what do you think the firm will make its money on? Publishing poets? There aren't enough to go around. I'd end up with the Pereira Cookbooks and the Maths Textbooks anyway.
- 30 At least with DeSilva's I get a chance to do a few quality productions as well.
- 35 Tony2: Alright. I'm sorry. I didn't realise that this was the effect I would have. (Tony is still fuming) Look, why don't we give Siew Hoon a call and meet her for lunch?
- 40 Tony: Yeah? And what's this about sending flowers to Siew Hoon? Flowers? You know how much those things cost? And how long they last? If you had to get all romantic why don't you get her something practical? Worse thing is that she'll probably think that I'm seeing another woman and am trying to cover up.
- 45 I've never sent her flowers before.
- Tony2: You haven't. But we have. Before we married her. If you're really upset, we can cancel the bouquet now.
- 50 Tony: Oh forget it. Maybe we'll have guests over the next few days, maybe it'll be nice to have some flowers around the house for decorations.
- 55 Tony2: That's the spirit. So? Let call Siew Hoon and have lunch and then we'll meet this young author at 3.00pm and Dad at 4.00pm and tonight we'll..

Tony: Wait a minute, you'll meet the author, you'll meet Dad and as for lunch, no can do.

Tony2: Why?

Tony: Because you have another appointment to meet with a Social Biology textbook writer in 10 minutes' time and you also have to pick up some groceries and household stuff that I promised Siew Hoon to get, and you have to drop by at the bank and...

10 Tony2: Hey, that's not what I want to do... it sounds terribly boring.

15 Tony: Well, you better get used to it at least for today, because that what you've got to do..

Tony2: Oh... let's not..

20 Tony: Uh uh. You wanted to have a taste of my life, you'll get a taste of it, the boring bits as well as the exciting parts..

(This last bit of the conversation should be slightly overlapping as both Tonys walk out the door)

25 Lights down. They open back onto the office after lunch, later that afternoon. Anne and Li Mei are taking their tea break.

30 Anne: So what do you think?

Li Mei: About what?

35 Anne: About Mr. Ho and DeSilva lah..

Li Mei: Well, . . .

40 Anne: What do you think has gotten into Mr. Ho? He's never talked back to DeSilva before. I thought they were going to have a fight or something.

Li Mei: Actually, I think it's quite nice. That DeSilva is always bossing Mr. Ho around. It's about time he did something about it. And it's true. Mr DeSilva is always thinking about making a profit only.

45 Anne: Actually, you're right, hor. And serve that bitch right. Maybe he'll force her to work from now on.

50 Li Mei: So romantic, also, getting his wife flowers.

Anne: Yah. You know, Shirley ordered roses.

55 Li Mei: Really? So expensive.

Anne: That's why. Would you have imagined this when you came into work today?

Li Mei: No. You think it's going to last?

Anne: Don't know.

10 Tony comes out of his room with a young man. DeSilva also happens to come out of his room. He surveys the scene sceptically.

15 Tony: Well, thankyou very much for coming in to see me. I'll give you another call in a few weeks time to see how you're coming along with those suggestions I made and then maybe at that time, we can talk about future plans in a more concrete way.

Man: Thankyou.

20 Tony: Goodbye.

Man: Goodbye.

25 DeSilva: Well? Any good?

Tony: I didn't think you were interested, Peter. Like I said. He's got potential.

30 DeSilva: Having potential is not the same thing as being good, Tony. You should bear that in mind.

Tont: Don't worry. I will... and on my own money too.

35 DeSilva walks away, slightly exasperated.

Shirley walks in.

40 Tony: Shirley, have you finally finished with the cook book?

Shirley: Yah. Here.

45 Tony: Thankyou. And Shirley, (flipping through it) this is a good piece of work. Keep it up.

Shirley: Oh! (surprised) Thankyou Mr. Ho. I sent the flowers to your wife already.

50 Tony: Thankyou Shirley.

and Li Mei look at each other, eyebrows raised. Shirley settles down happily to some work.

55 Tony: Looks like you've won Shirley over.

Tony2: Oh I don't know. Sometimes when you catch a person

by surprise, they forget to frown.

Tony: Was that actually DeSilva asking you about the book?

Tony2: Yes.

Tony: Maybe you're right about taking a more assertive stand in the office.

10

Tony2: And maybe you're right about not placing too much hope on that manuscript.

Tony: Not so good huh?

15

Tony2: (Sighing) Not so good. I guess these things take time, and I've got so little of it that I may be rushing things.

20

Tony: Yeah. It's not so easy wanting to get somewhere in a hurry. Take a another look at it. It might not be as bad as you think.

Tony2: I don't know.

25

Tony: Well, you better make up your mind before the day is through, because I will have to send out the rejection letter.

30

Tony2: This is difficult stuff, living.

Tony: Yeah, I know.

Tony2: So, are you ready?

35

Tony: For what? Not some other harebrained scheme of yours?

Tony2: We've got to go see Dad.

40

Tony: You've got to go see Dad.

Tony2: Why do you do that?

Tony: Do what?

Tony2: Freeze up, whenever I mention Dad.

Tony: I don't.

50

Tony2: Yes you do. You just did. What is it between you and Dad that happened after I left?

Tony: Nothing. It's just that the old man is ... you know old. He doesn't always recognise me and Siew Hoon when we go to visit him.

55

Tony2: Doesn't recognise you?

5 Tony: Yes. He doesn't always remember who I am. He sometimes thinks that Mum is still alive.

Tony2: But maybe that's because you don't go and see him often enough...

10 Tony: Here we go again. Are you trying to tell me that I haven't tried enough for Dad? Siew Hoon and I have done everything possible to make things comfortable for him. After Mum died, he moved in with us for a while. You weren't there to see it. He had retired and had time on his hands but nothing to fill it with. I could tell that he was so frustrated about that. One day it happened, he fell down in the toilet and broke his hip. He was lying there in his own shit all day till we came home. We rushed him to the hospital. He was crying all the way, not from the pain but from the indignity of his helplessness and age. I had to sit by his side and watch him, my father, cry like a baby. Where were you then?

25 Tony2: Oh don't blame me, Tony. You were the one that didn't want me around. It's not my fault I wasn't there to help.

30 Tony: Would you? would you have helped? Would you have known how to wipe the salt and the snot from his face. Would you have sat next to him in the hospital in case he needed help getting to the toilet. And when he came out of hospital, what would you have done in my place? We couldn't afford to employ someone qualified to look after him all day. We couldn't give up our own jobs. What would you have done? I decided then that we just couldn't look after him, and I made arrangements for him to be put into the home where he is now.

40 Tony2: Well, it seems to me...

45 Tony: That there must be more that can be done? Is that another one of your idealistic notions from the other place? Hasn't it dawned on you yet that in this place we don't always have alternatives. I have watched you crash through my life today, tearing down structures that it has taken me years to build up. I have watched you pull out your magic tricks from your other place hat and try to impress the world. Frankly I'm not impressed at all, and I'll be glad when you take your leave. I only hope that you'll leave something for me to pick up the pieces and rebuild my life. I am sick and tired of hearing what I could have done with this that and

the other. I'm beginning to understand exactly why I let you go. You don't exist in this world. You know nothing about it. You have no place here.

5 Tony2: If that's how you feel, then maybe I should leave right now and let you get on with things. I only thought to help.

10 Tony: Oh no you don't. You're not going to leave me now when you've fixed me up to visit Dad and I haven't yet explained to Siew Hoon why the sudden burst of interest in the flower trade. You are going to stay right here until we sort out part of the mess that you've created, and you better think of something good.

15 Tony2: Okay. How do I get to the home?

20 Tony: No cars where you come from?

Tony2: Sure, but I couldn't bring mine in, the import duty was prohibitive.

25 Tony: Why do I bother? Come on, I'll give you a lift.

Lights down. They come up again on the simple setting of the Old Folks' Home where Tony's father is staying. Tony knocks on the door (or peeps tentatively around the corner, depending on the sets).

30 Tony: Dad, Dad?

Dad: Hmmm.

35 Tony: How are you Dad?

Dad: (basically doesn't respond) Hmmm.

40 Tony: Dad, it's me, Tony.

Dad: Where's Siew Hoon? Tony always comes with Siew Hoon.

45 Tony: Siew Hoon is at work today, Dad. I came alone this time, to see you.

Dad: It's not Sunday is it?

50 Tony: No, it's not Sunday, that's why Siew Hoon is at work. I just thought that I'd come and visit you.

Dad: Tony never comes except on Sunday. Tony works during the week. He works very hard, that's why he cannot come to visit me. You're not Tony. Tony is working.

55

Tony: There's always time for work, Dad.

Dad: That's the problem with you young people. You don't understand that you must work hard if you want to achieve anything in life.

Tony: There's always time for work, Dad. But I thought I would take the opportunity to come and see you today, maybe talk a bit.

10 Dad: Talk? Talk? Talk about what?

Tony: Just talk.

15 Dad: Tony and Siew Hoon are free on Sundays. That's when they come to see me. That is the best day. Young man, you should be like my Tony. He wouldn't leave work early to come and see me.

20 Tony: Sometimes there are things that are more important.

Dad: Humph, (unconvinced)

Pause

25 Dad: Is Tony still living in that flat of his?

Tony: Dad, I'm Tony....

30 Dad: When is he going to buy a house? A flat is no good. A piece of air, that's all it is. A house is different. A house is solid. It's an investment. He should think about buying a house. Everybody else is buying a house. Why can't he? He is not serious enough, that Tony. He doesn't try hard enough. (P) You know Tony? You know Tony? My only son. We had him when we were 40. Too old, you know. His sister is a good girl, but she is only a girl. Tony. (P) I thought he had a bright future ahead of him.

40 Dad: Clever boy. Not to say that he was stupid, you know. Clever. I made him study. Not like these days, the parents. In my day, we knew how to discipline our children.

45 Tony: I remember how you used to take out the cane whenever I disobeyed you.

Dad: We used the rattan, you know. He would cry. Then I caned him harder. Cannot have him growing up a sissy. Hah, Tony? Cannot have you growing up like one of those pretty boys. You are going to make me proud, hah, Tony? But he is too easily satisfied, that Tony. You can tell him that. He's not interested in advancing his career. He's not interested in setting up his own company. I tell him, everytime I see him but he still doesn't

55

listen to me, that boy. He thinks that I'm an old man now and I don't know what's good for him anymore. I tell him. Why are you happy to stay with that DeSilva? You think that when I got you a job that I wanted you to spend the rest of your life working as a peon for that Eurasian (Indian)? Ten years with that chettiar and he 's still just a junior partner. Not even 50 percent partnership. I don't understand that boy. He used to be very enthusiastic. Now he can't care less like that. No backbone, that's the trouble with him. No backbone. That's what I tell him.

10  
15 Tony: Dad, I've got plans. I've got plans for the future. It's too soon to say, but I may even leave DeSilva's and set up a company of my own, just like you've always wanted me to. It will give me more flexibility. I'll be able to set aside more time and energy to talent scouting. You know, instead of concentrating only on the commercial type  
20 publications. You remember, Dad? Like I used to talk to you about?

25 Dad: What are you saying?

Tony: Dad. I'm going to take a risk at last, dad. Ten years with DeSilva has made me fat and uncommitted to anything. I'm not happy with DeSilva's. It's not what I always wanted to do. I want to do something  
30 that's meaningful. That satisfies my soul. I'm not going to be content to just move with the stream anymore, Dad.

35 Dad: Tony? (beginning to recognise him)

Tony: You were right. I used to be enthusiastic but I seem to have lost it somehow in arriving where I am today. I'm going to stop having no backbone, Dad. I'm going to make you proud.

40 Dad: Tony, what are you saying (recognising Tony at last)? What is this nonsense you are talking? You sound like last time when you were young. Ridiculous talk about what? Satisfying what? Your  
45 soul what? You think it was your soul that fed you and your wife? You think it was your soul that bought you a car, hah? You think your soul can make you a living, hah?

50 Tony: Dad, I know that I need to provide for Siew Hoon and you, but....

Dad: You don't remember? You don't remember who it was who got you a job when you came running to me because no one would take you in? You don't  
55 remember who worked all his life to give you an

5 education? You don't remember who it was who had to  
go to DeSilva and swallow his pride and ask  
DeSilva to give his son a job? You don't remember  
who it was? It wasn't you, son. You had no time  
for anything except your dreams. I made a start for  
you. You don't forget that. You don't forget that  
one day you must have a company bigger than  
DeSilva's. I didn't do all that for you to go back  
10 to your old ideas. I didn't make all those  
sacrifices when you were growing up so that you  
could go and feed some other man's son.

Dad gets very excited and starts wheezing.

15 Dad: Son, you hear me or not?

Tony: I hear you. I remember, now. I remember why I had  
to leave. Caught in a trap where I could never  
please you as long as I stayed. Do you realise that  
20 I left to make you happy, Dad? I thought that I  
owed you everything. I thought that I owed you  
enough to leave. And in the end, it became more  
convenient for me to leave, stop having to face the  
expectation and disappointment in your face, in  
25 everyone's face. I actually came to want the very  
things that you wanted of me, in a half hearted,  
obliging way, And that was when I started  
disappearing, becoming less and less real till one  
morning someone else woke up in my place. The most  
30 difficult thing was getting used to not having to  
eat and sleep and shave and piss. And after all  
that, it still wasn't good enough for you. I wasn't  
good enough for you, was I? I thought I could make  
myself into your image but you dismissed me  
35 altogether. You stopped recognising me. Even then  
all I knew was to feel guilty because I had made  
you forget me. Well? Do you recognise me now? No  
one else does. I left so long ago. But do you  
recognise me? Do you?

40 Dad has been getting more agitated as Tony talks.

Dad: Tony...

45 Tony: That's right. Tony. Your son, Tony.

Tony holds Dad, perhaps by the collar, perhaps by the  
shoulders.

50 Dad: Tony...

Tony: Yes, Dad. What do you have to say to me? Do you  
want to know what I've made out of my life? Do you  
want to know what it's like in the other place? Do  
55 you want to know how much I thought I missed you?

Dad: Tony. You shouldn't be home so early. Don't you have classes? Let me see your exercise books. You should come on Sundays. That's the best day. You shouldn't take leave to come and see me. Don't take things for granted. Work harder you understand? Paper qualifications are very important now. That's why I want you to study. I only want you to be happy, son. I only want you to be happy.

10 Tony: Dad?

Dad: Don't talk back to me you understand?

Tony: But Dad...

15 Dad: Don't talk back, boy. I've worked for you all my life, don't talk back to me. (Dad starts to cry, confused)

20 Tony: (alarmed) Dad... Dad. I'm not talking back. I just came to see you that's all. I only wanted to talk.

Dad: You're not my Tony. Tony doesn't talk back. Tony listens to me...

25 Tony2: I only wanted to talk to him. What's the matter? Is he having a fit? Shouldn't we call the attendant?

Tony: (Ignoring him) Dad?

30 Dad: I worked for you, Tony...

Tony: Yes, Dad. You better rest now. Do you want the other pillow?

35 Dad: You should come on Sundays with Siew Hoon, Tony. Weekdays is no good.

Tony: I know. You're right, Dad. I'll bring Siew Hoon this Sunday.

40 Dad: You bring your mother as well, Tony.

Tony: Yes, Dad. I'll bring Mum as well. You better rest first. (To Tony2) Let's go.

45 Dad: . Sunday, Tony. Sunday is good.

50 Tony and Tony2 walk out to front stage.

Tony2: All I wanted was the chance to speak to him again.  
Tony: Are you satisfied now? You've screwed up my work. You've gone and given Dad a fit. Are you satisfied now? Is there any other part of my life that you would like to mess around with, by any chance?

55

Anything I can lay out on the platter for you so that you can do your worse. In fact, why make you use your precious energy? Why not just tell me which areas you would like destroyed and I'll take care of it myself, you can watch. What will it be, my marriage? My golfing average? My magazine subscription? Name it and I'll destroy it right in front of you, at no extra charge.

10 Tony2: (shouting) I'm sorry. Alright? Is that what you wanted to hear? I'm sorry for the trouble I've caused today. It was never my intention to destroy.

15 Tony: Don't lie to me You wanted it. You thought of yourself as my conscience, as my saviour. You heard about my drab, boring, uneventful existence, and you thought to yourself, why don't I pay Tony a call and shake up his life a little, tear down a few sacred cows, resurrect a few dreams, destroy some of his pet complacencies, make him a new man. Make him what I should have been. THAT is what you intended. That is what you wanted.

20 Tony2: So? Was that so bad a thing to want? I am you, Tony. You are me. It hurt me to think that you didn't want me around.

25 Tony: And that's another thing. Let's get the record straight once and for all. I didn't throw you out of my life. I didn't wake up one morning and decide that I had no use for my ideals anymore. I remember now what actually happened. You left me. Things started getting bad between us a long time before we started work at DeSilva's. The problem wasn't even Dad. His demands made the split worse, but we were the ones who couldn't handle the divide between our dreams and the demands of reality. Starting work was the final straw. You were taking a bashing everyday from DeSilva's no-nonsense approach. But you wouldn't compromise. You kept on provoking DeSilva into more discussions, more arguments that we could never win. Day after say, DeSilva confronted us with the foolishness of our dreams. And you were the one who finally got tired. You were the one who left me, a little more each day, becoming more and more distant till you were gone altogether, leaving me to carry on. So let's not conveniently rearrange history to suit our purposes. Because I am starting to remember again, as well.

30 Tony2: I wouldn't have left if you'd held on tightly enough.

35 Tony: Damn it. Stop lying to yourself. Stop making

excuses for what you did, what we did. You were tired of fighting so you gave up. It was always all or nothing for you, and the world didn't intend to give us all so you gave up. I didn't try very hard to stop you. I admit that. Perhaps if I had, we might both have found out how to grow up together. But I was not very strong then and you seemed to be the cause of troubles. You embarrassed me, so when you wanted to go, I let you go.

10

Tony2: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to desert you. I didn't mean to abandon you. Maybe we both didn't hold on tightly enough. Maybe you're right about my giving up, but I didn't come back just to screw things up, Tony. I couldn't stand the thought that you were about to go through life a dried husk, a poor reproduction of what you wanted for yourself.

15

Tony: And whose fault it that?

20

Tony2: I don't know. Mine? Yours? Does it matter? What if I couldn't stand the thought that you didn't even realise what was happening to you? What if I couldn't stand the thought that you were as miserable and lonely as I was?

25

Tony: Don't patronise me.

Tony2: Think about it, Tony. We're both of us incomplete without the other.

30

Tony: You flatter yourself. I need you like I need the plague.

35

Tony2: Don't hide behind words, Tony. I wanted you to see how else things could be for a change, just to see it for a day and then to decide for yourself where you wanted to be, instead of just having faded out of active existence. Be honest Tony, weren't there moments today when you felt good about yourself, when you found yourself looking forward to the future, instead of always looking down?

40

Tony: Oh sure, like when we were getting screwed up by DeSilva. (but with less conviction)

45

Tony: I am sorry things didn't work out. I really am. I know I really messed up badly, for which I am truly sorry. But do you really think you could have done much worse by just letting things slide? At least today I didn't spend my time folded up and kept away out of sight, because you were ashamed of me, gathering dust and wrinkles. At least today I saw the sun and smelled the breeze and heard the grass grow. Doesn't that matter to you at all? Doesn't what I feel matter to you at all?

50

55

Tony remains quiet. His concentration is somewhere else.

Tony2: OK. Forget it. Why don't we just forget the rest of this crazy deal. I can leave now.

Tony: Hey. (Taking Tony2 by the arm suddenly)

10 Tony2: What?

Tony: Aren't those roses beautiful? Maybe I should buy some for Siew Hoon.

15 Tony2: Are you crazy? We already got her some today. You really want her to think we're having an affair?

Tony: Hmmm. Maybe tomorrow on the way back from work, we'll get her some.

20 Tony2: We? Sorry but you're going to have to pay for the roses yourself. I'm due to leave, remember? Right now, in fact.

Tony: What's the hurry?

25 Tony2: I beg your pardon?

Tony: OK. This sounds crazy, and I'm probably going to regret it the moment I say it. Now, don't think that I've bought all that bullshit you've been giving me today.

30 Tony2: But it's not...

35 Tony: Shh. Listen. I think you've got some serious growing up to do, and that's something I could help you with. I also figure that I'm in charge here, if only because I earned it by staying on when you left. So if you have any ideas for the future, you're going to have to discuss them thoroughly with me, and work out a few feasibility plans before we jump into the frying pan.

40 Tony2: Wait a minute. What are you saying...? (he's speechless)

45 Tony: I'm saying that you are a pain in the ass but today I saw roses and recognised them again for the first time. Maybe tomorrow, you can teach me some other trick, or I could teach you about living. Might be interesting.

50 Tony2: But are you sure you want...

Tony: (Gently teasing) Chickening out?

Tony2 is struggling with his emotions. There is an awkward moment. Tony breaks it, taking control.

Tony: Now what's that you were saying about my wardrobe?

10 Tony2: (Still trying to be nice) It's... (hesitates, and says without much conviction) OK. (Tony and Tony 2 catch each other's eyes, and laugh). (Recovering his jauntiness) It'll need a thorough overhaul, I suspect.

Tony: Oh?

15 Tony2: But first, Tony....that manuscript....

Tony: What about it?

20 Tony2: Maybe you should send out that rejection letter after all... first thing in the morning...

Tony: Me?

Tony2: Well....

25 Tony: You!

Tony2: Well....

30 Both: Us.

They both walk off stage, arm in arm.

Tony: (Just as they reach stage end) You know something?

35 Tony2: What?

Tony: You're the first New Year resolution I've ever kept.

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ELEANOR WONG

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