

1. MYSTERY: The Shanghai Mystery

Billy Anderson walked toward the check-in counter at an old hotel in Shanghai. The high ceilings and traditional carvings reminded him of a Chinese temple. At the desk, the hotel manager approached him and handed him a weathered manila envelope.

"Mr. Anderson right?" He said, "Someone left this envelope for you at the lobby desk this afternoon."

"For me? Are you sure?" Billy responded, totally baffled. He took the envelope. "But no one knows that I'm here."

As Billy opened the envelope, an old, faded photograph slipped out and fell to the floor. The manager picked up the photograph.

"That's a photo of you in the old city quarters, Mr. Anderson," he said, handing him the photo. "It's very strange though. This photo appears to have been taken about eighty years ago when this was still an occupied city." (Write the story.)

Gazing at the photo in his hand, Billy's mind slowly fell into a memory of the distant past. A time when the architectures in front of him were no longer black-and-white. A time when the passers-by captured in the photo were no longer static. A time when his life were no longer on the track he once planned.

It was a usual day in 1999. Billy Anderson was in Shanghai for a collaborative development project for his real estate business. After having a conference with the local land developers, Billy finally had time for his dinner, to be exact, lunch and dinner.

While Billy was savoring the local cuisine in a sea front five-star hotel, a spectacular night view of Shanghai came into his eyes. The Oriental Pearl tower and other skyscrapers were sparkling with colorful decorative lights despite the dark night, as if a string of pearls were shimmering to capture world's attention.

Looking back to the past few years, Bill could conclude in pride that he had been a responsible and devoting craftsman for the cities. If the luster of a pearl was faded with time, he would replace it with a larger and more glamorous one without any hesitation. This was what he did for the sake of cities' evolution and improvements.

After dinner, Billy decided to have a stroll nearby in order to explore this international city. Then he stopped at a narrow and dim alley. "Risky it may be, it may at the same time lead me to an old shabby neighborhood in which the residents are waiting for redevelopment. Just a glimpse will be safe," Billy debated within his mind.

Billy then rushed into the alley, almost like running. He was utterly astonished with what he saw. Instead of the decayed neighborhood, a little yet hustling neighborhood with a mixture of traditional western and Chinese buildings showed up. It was just like scene showed in the documentary of 1930s old Shanghai that Billy watched in history lesson in schools.

Along the street, most people dressed like rural farmers with clothes made up of thin plain cloth while the remaining wore old-fashioned shirts and trousers. Another weird thing caught Billy's attention too. Numerous rickshaws, which were often displayed in the history museum, were now travelling along the road. "Is it a gimmick of the local tour to demonstrate the daily life of the old Shanghai? It indeed surprises me," Billy thought.

Wandering around, Billy found more interesting scene. For examples, there were some male foreigners with top hats enjoying themselves in western style café. Billy guessed it was to show to the tourists the history of old Shanghai. Learnt in his history lesson, Billy still remembered that Shanghai was once ruled by the foreign countries as a result of the treaties signed by the Qing government.

Beside a series of shops, there were a crowd of people clustering in front of a temple. Some local residents told Billy that they were celebrating the birthday of a Chinese god. Some vendors were yelling as loud as they could to solicit customers for the desserts. Some children were playing the vivid flour dolls which were made into different Chinese characters. All of these formed a harmonious picture with a sense of festivities.

"Congratulation, Sir. You are our 100th customer today so you can have a painting free. Would you like to have a portrait painting?" asked by a middle-aged street painter.

"Why not? Thank you! Could you include this traditional temple and the surrounding as the background?" replied by Billy with excitement.

"Okay. Just a few minutes. I am glad that you love this old temple as every one here does. Since this area was invaded by the foreign countries, the cityscape has been modified a lot. Keeping this temple gives us some comforts and makes us feel we are still on our homeland. Do you aware of the delicate cravings at the rooftop....."The painter introduced every special features of the temple to Billy as if the temple was his treasure.

At that night in the hotel, Billy looked at the painting again before he slept. Although it was only painted with the simple tools, it was still marvelous to Billy. Perhaps it was the attractiveness of the customs, social cohesion and atmosphere. He realized that this 200-year-old temple not only reflected people's religious belief, but also illustrated a place's past experience and enhanced people's sense of

belongings. All these could never be illustrated by just a historic photo. A city without any relic from the past could never be a familiar home for its residents. Never had Billy been so inspired.

When Billy revisited the site on the next day, he was shocked to find there were nothing left but an emptied neighborhood with the dilapidated shops and temple he saw yesterday. He was so confused with this mysterious place. Maybe, it was a message from the ancestors. Since then, Billy's outlook had changed totally. He incorporated preservation elements with his new development plans.

Recalling such memory, Billy was again in Shanghai for a workshop about preservation in the developing cities. He turned the photo he was holding and it wrote:

“Thank you for your devoted efforts in preserving the valuable cityscape in these years. Since I met you on the street yesterday, I thought it was the time to tell you the truth.

I am a resident who lost my neighborhood in one of your redevelopment projects. The mysterious place that you visited in 1999 was a scene set by me and the other residents to scare you. We had made a little renovation work on that abandoned ruin before you came. Never had we thought this incident could inspire you a new way of development. Sorry for keeping the secret for such a long time.

This photo was taken by us secretly at that time. I hope it could remind you the importance of heritage to a city.

The painter”

(996 words)