

2. Challenge: Creativity with Concepts

Romance - Love in Unexpected Places

A Dark Secret//An Old Enemy //Love Triangle//An Irrational Obsession

Catherine

On these green, stained mosaic tiles, there lay Catherine and I, with a smothering mixture of herbal odour in air. Soft, smooth, fluffy - her whiskers were angel's hair. I sank my hand into her body and whispered, "Wake up". She lay still with her eyes squeezed tight - she was pretending. I woke up and nuzzled against her nose, when out of the blue I heard your voice slitting through the dense air.

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I am Tak. When I was little, mum and dad told me that I was special and different. No, I didn't want to be peculiar; I just wanted to be as ordinary as my mates. But that was just a wishful thinking; the monstrous desire grew stronger and stronger from within. It strained me, wounded me and choked me, like a shadow tailing me in an endless maze - I ran away and went back to where I started.

That was a humid Friday night in summer. I was wandering along an alley in Sheung Wan. I enjoyed strolling under the neon light tubes, for under the dazzling shades and through the reflection of myself in puddles, I felt my connection to this city. Roaming on the streets with vehicles endlessly passing by, I dropped by Ooze, an uncharted bar hidden next to a flight of stairs. I didn't walk in. I thought I was waiting for something. I walked up and down, seeing

people in and out. Some of them were wasted; some of them were crying; some of them were making out at the doorstep. Just as I turned away and decided to leave, a stocky man blocked my way. I wasn't scared, as it happened a lot to tiny girls like me. I said "Excuse me" without looking at him, but he didn't move. I looked up and locked eyes with him, blonde, handsome, staunch: I was drawn by the gripping sight, gentle and wistful.

"Hi, I'm Gordon"

"I'm Tak."

"I can walk you home, if you don't mind."

"I don't have one."

"Cool, me neither."

He ran his fingers through my hair slowly as if he was attending to every strand of my hair. The warmth, the touch and the spasm stripped me of my defence against the obnoxious sex. This was the first time my heart throbbed for a man.

And a new story unfolded that night. I thought I needed love, honestly, as a homeless and single girl, plus I had never dated a guy, so I gave it a shot. After a short while we started cohabiting. From time to time I asked him why he liked me. I was unusual: short hair, no make-up, and I dressed myself in earth tone. I was a procrastinator; I broke stuff; I bit. I was rebellious and capricious, like a cynical hipster. I walked my way - but on my way I bumped into Gordy, who was gentle, yet equally dominant. He was fun-loving, but also stoic. Maybe this was why he dovetailed with me. I thought the monster inside me would be conquered by Gordy's dominance, I wish. I had long been hoping that someone would free me from the manacles of such a shame, yet the anomaly resistance against him became more irresistible. With a whim to escape this tormenting reality, I embarked on my old journey.

I sneaked out before Gordy woke up. I strolled and strolled. I loved this city, though I knew it hated me. Imagine a life teeming with people, neon tubes, wet markets. The suffocative shades, the rancid smell and the damp air. Living in here is living every moment in ecstasy - you never know what comes next. In a drizzling afternoon I dropped by a Chinese Medicine shop. I

was attracted by the scent at first: salty, bitter and sweet, an incredible combination. I stopped and the old lady walked up to me, saying “What can I help you, Madam?”. I didn’t reply. I couldn’t. I stared at the bottles behind her: black, crimson, brown, white matters overwhelmingly nauseated me. The old fan at the ceiling mixed the space and scent in air; the overwhelmingly bright light tossed the whole space into a daunting green. “Catherine”, she yelled with a rising tone, and there behind one of those repugnant bottles loomed near an elegant, fluffy demon. Her name was Catherine, if I got it right. She had amber eyes, sagging ears and long limbs. Her hair was bluish grey, tinted with white gloss, glowing against the disgusting shades in those unfathomable bottles. She was such a beautiful girl. I reached out my hand to her. She didn’t back off, but rather curled her tail as if she was asking me to touch her. I stroked her hair: the warmth, the touch, the spasm, the ashes deep in my chest reignited. She purred; she rolled; she smiled, her paws reaching to my face.

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That was the night we met. I came out of Ooze, where I celebrated my promotion with my friends. I was not a big fan of alcohol, but as an expatriate, I realised that drinking is the very first thing foreigners associate you with. I understood, but I had had enough of this seemingly indulgent nightlife, where you got nothing real out of it. I had to leave. Right away. I jostled through the crowd and managed to get out. And her silhouette cast on the window caught my attention. A nymph, a nymph, long limbs, short hair, ruddy face with big wondering eyes, dressed in a way just to escape attention. But I got you. I walked up to her and asked she needed a company home. She said she didn’t have one. Umm, interesting. I picked up along the line and said neither did I, stroking her hair gently as if I was attending to a baby kitten, and the magic kicks in at that moment, so fleetingly, but ever-lasting, as wonderful as the moment before you strike a match.

Some time after that night we started living together. Everything worked pretty well. She was volatile, and you never know what’s happening next. An intriguing, equally enraging girl, spicing up my tedious life stuffed with paperwork. Until one day, I woke up to a bed without her.

When she came back at night, I didn't ask what happened, but as I drew her close to me, she smelled differently. She reeked of death. That was weird, and uneasiness and fear seeped through my skin. And one day I caught her at 7 in the morning.

“Kat, where are you going?”

To my surprise, she wasn't shocked.

“Just looking around,” she said, flattened and sound.

I felt very insecure about this. A few days later, I planned to tail her in stealth . She woke up early as usual, and I pretended to sleep in without noticing her departure every day. I knew she didn't like it, so I took every step carefully. I peeped through the blind on the window to see if she was gone. No sooner did she vanish at the corner of the street than I jumped out of bed and began stalking her.

I ran and ran. I might have lost track of her, I thought, barging through the mysterious crowd of inorganic beings. Grim, haggard, and ruthless, they stood no comparison with my nymph. I ran and ran, just to catch that glimmering tail of hers. I dreaded that I might lose grip of her, and when I finally caught her, she was there - in an exotic shop that reeks of death. I drew closer, just to see if that was Kat, my beloved Kat. There she was, entangled in a fluff. I don't understand. I stood still and growled as the icy, battered iron gate of the shop was pulled down. With smouldering anger, I scratched hard the gate, nails torn.

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I was once a stray cat wandering around this city feeding on rats and croaches and leftovers living happily under the trees when one day I bumped into one of these giants who locked me in this place they called a shop filled with death death and death in those bottles in which withered flowers wilted roots and dead animals were sealed in the worst state I had ever seen in my entire life and they named me conveniently after the way these egghead classified us then I became Catherine and when I was brought here I almost threw up over the dead bodies of fish and the scent in air was as suffocative as the corrosive fume from the swamp in the hell where I was starving and they fed me with these tiny grainy pebbles that drew my energy vitality

and hopes away day by day I grew haggard listless drowsy living just to be fed and to roam in this museum of death as the old woman occasionally beckoned me to serve these strangers touching me with their filthy hands and cursed me with their stench saliva that defiled and ground my soul bit by bit until one day I saw her stumble upon this sordid place staring at me with her twinkling eyes yearning for lust and passion at first she came closer and stare at me I knew I knew I fondled her with my paws and purred tempting her with a wistful blink we snog snog snog as if I was back in the lush paradise where you and I belonged to where we answered the call of nature where we lent ourselves to dissipation till the end of the day.

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My father always wanted a son. He said he would only pass his knowledge to a boy, but never a girl. I thought I was cursed so that the ghosts and demons took the freely swaying stuff from me. He always blamed me, my sisters and my mother. I later came to realised that it was not us who had been cursed, but him. When I was a girl I wanted to be an artist; I wanted to be pretty; I wanted to be loved. But father said as I eldest sister I had to follow his footsteps :I have to be a man. I didn't know what that meant. After the crucible of time ate away at him I dutifully inherited this Chinese Medicine shop that blatantly sold dead stuff. Every day I went on running the store, without a reason, just an obligation. I always scared people away when they found me reek of herbs, but I needed love and company. I decided to keep a pet: they'd better not bite, not yell, not reek. And I met Catherine. She was a energetic, lively and haughty cat. She was yearning for love when I saw her purring at me(she needed me), so I brought her home, my home. I fed her well with nutritional food and healthy snacks. She grew lazier and lovelier. She liked her new home, and sprinkled this spiritless cage with liveliness.

One day another stray cat came. "What can I help you, Madam?", I asked in a way that cats understand, I thought. She didn't reply. Oops, Maybe a he? And the cat jumped to Catherine and they started playing with each other as if no one was watching. It seemed to me that they were having a good time cuddling each other. I was jealous. Life would be easier if I were a cat. Take on an adventure, bump into new cats and succumb to that very organic desire. Perhaps love

Chan Shing Hei Robbie

is just as easy as what cats do. On the green mosaic tiles the two cats rolled over each other. Lovely. When all of a sudden, there emerged in front of the store a retriever howling, long and mournfully. He wouldn't stop. I rolled down the steel gate lest he would bother the interplay of my lovely cats. The howl went on and on.

(1994 words)