

## CHAPTER 29

We return by midday, to find Hong Kong in deep mourning. In Central, we join a crowd that moves in slow procession to the Happy Valley Racecourse, where it has been hastily arranged that we Hong Kongers will be able to express our feelings.

During the march, the mood changes. Grief and fear give way to anger, then to defiance. By the time we arrive at Happy Valley, hot, our clothes wet and clinging, we find Szeto Wah soaking. He is on a makeshift stage. He calls for a General Strike on Wednesday.

“All Hong Kong will close. That will show the Butchers in Beijing that we will not be intimidated. I will not leave Hong Kong in 1997, even if Li Peng is still premier!” Szeto shouts. The crowd booms agreement. He steps off the stage, and collapses from heat exhaustion.

There is speech after speech. Martin Lee tells the Chinese leaders to stop their murdering. “You cannot kill a people. Kill one Chinese, one hundred will arise in his place!”

There are many other speakers. One is Siu Ling. She looks so tiny and fragile up there on the distant stage, dressed in mourning, in white shirt and trousers. She is clearly distressed by the heat and by the occasion, but her words, magnified many times by the PA system, are powerful.

“Do not lose your faith in democracy, my friends! We in Hong Kong will be an example to the world. We will show the devious British, who sold us out so shamefully. We will show the cruel tyrants in Beijing, who use the blood of their own people to maintain their power. We will show them all that power, real power, lies with the people. With us!” She drops her voice. “With us.”

Emily squeezes my arm, tears in her eyes. “Aren’t you so *proud* that she is your friend? I am.”

We stay until half-past four, when there is an even more emotional moment. There is a call for two minutes of silence, to remember the dead. A million people are profoundly silent. Except some who, like Emily, cannot control their sobbing. Many are not only weeping for those at Tiananmen, but are, like Emily, weeping for their relatives, murdered not early this morning, but many years ago, and by these same butchers.

But with all the tears and anger, life continues. The Hang Seng rocks violently a few times, but manages to settle down higher than it was previously. Sir Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary, comes to tell us how much Britain is doing for us – except the one thing they actually could do, but will not. That thing is to give us British citizens what we are entitled to be given: residency in Britain. For his pains, he is loudly told, on television, that it is “a bullshit speech.” He is jeered on his way out.

Next morning, Emily vomits. It is not a political gesture. A life is developing. But perhaps, after all, it is a political gesture. So many Chinese lives have been lost, while we have created a new life. At least it will replace one that has been lost.

Our focus is now on events taking place inside her body. As soon as we have our hopes confirmed, we tell our parents. Ah Ma, I must say, is wonderful.

She turns up just as I am about to leave for the office. She has bags full of cooked dishes in plastic containers.

“Emily must not waste her energies cooking.” She pushes her way into the kitchen. “Ha, good. I see you have a microwave. Here, I have brought some of her favourites. Here is what she liked most: soy chicken. Remember how she ate so much of that ah?”

It was Siu Ling who had eaten the soy chicken, but I do not correct her. She is a great help, fussing around, now having the perfect excuse to teach Emily all those things that wives and mothers need to know.

Previously, Ah Ma had felt overwhelmed by Emily and her background; she and Ah Ba had kept their distance since our marriage. It was my fault, and I feel guilty now, but with the joys of marriage, the demands of my work, and the political distractions, we had selfishly neglected my parents. We saw Emily’s parents more frequently. I got on well with Old Wu, I think because I did not take him seriously. Emily’s mother, ah, I feel a great sadness about her. How I wish I knew her when she was in possession of her faculties. She must have been beautiful, poised, and dignified, more dignified than Emily, dare I say, who has a streak of fun that I doubt her mother ever had.

And here is my mother, also lacking a streak of fun, but with a heart of gold, really.

“I have to go to work, Ah Ma. Thanks so much. Bye-bye.”

Ah Ma's help can only be short term, and even then I cross my fingers and wish fervently that her well-meaning jabber does not drive Emily crazy. The time has come to go to an agency in Central to check out a maid.

There is an agency in Queen's Road. I call at lunch time. I am greeted by a girl who has the looks and the arrogance of a starlet. I explain we want a live-in maid, who can cook, clean, iron, and mind children: "My wife is expecting, you see."

"Okay. No problem. Chinese or Filipina ah? Filipina? Good, take a look over there." She jerks her head to a dozen or so Filipinas, crowded onto a bench against the wall, smiling eagerly at me with their mouths, while their large eyes display how stressed and insecure they really feel.

"Any you want to interview? Or do you want to see their files first? By the way, our fees are \$6,000."

"What? I thought it was one month's salary. That's much less than \$6,000."

"You don't pay the statutory rate, of course. You just pay her, say, \$1,800 a month, \$1,500, whatever you decide. Up to you, la. She won't complain. If she does, she'll lose her job. Back to Manila. Ha? By the end of her contract you are well ahead. And so are we."

I stare at her coldly. "That's illegal."

"Who cares? That's the way we play it. Take it or leave it."

"I care. And I'm a lawyer. You'll hear more about this."

I turn, and slam the door open with the flat of my hand. I am very angry. I later tell Emily about it, and she too is outraged. But isn't it the way of the world? We have our worries, Hong Kong is pressure, pressure, pressure, all the time. And in the end, I don't do anything about it.

Except I do tell my friends and colleagues we need a maid. Cyril Tang responds:

"We have a girl I would thoroughly recommend. Her contract is up in four weeks, and we won't renew because she doesn't speak Chinese, and our other maid does. We only need one maid now, and my wife would prefer a Chinese speaker. Would you like to meet her? We can arrange this without agency fees."

We go to Cyril's apartment in Kowloon Tong. Imelda is a pleasant looking woman, in her late twenties, who speaks good English. That is important, we think, because we would like Wong Tsai to use English from an early age, even if a Filipino accent is the price! Yes,

she assures us she would be very happy to help nurture a baby. She is married, and has a little girl herself, who is looked after by a relative back in Manila.

“Wah,” Emily exclaims, “you must miss her!”

“Yes, Ma’am, of course.” She looks at Emily, her eyes hinting pain. “I would rather be in the Philippines, but that is not possible. So to look after another person’s child is a help.”

Emily melts. She nods to me, her own eyes now large and moist.

Cyril looks embarrassed. “Well, have we a deal then?”

We have. The agency has not.