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The Translation of *Perfect Chinese Children* by Vanessa Woods

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Perfect Chinese Children by Vanessa Woods is an autobiographical short story published in the *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (Pung, 2008), a collection of prose, poetry and comics by Asian-Australian authors, edited by the award-winning author Alice Pung. The book was published by independent Australian publisher Black Inc., and has been very popular among young adult readers, largely through its inclusion on the Victorian high school reading list. As the title suggests, the book is about childhood and memory, but more importantly, Asian-Australian life, as written by Asian-Australian authors. Through this book, Pung wanted to present and promote Asian-Australian culture to readers, in order to show that “not only what it is like to grow up Asian in Australia, but also what it means to be Asian Australian” (4).

Woods’ short story reflects a particular Chinese-Australian narrative. The author has a Chinese mother and Australian father, and grew up with her Chinese relatives, but as an “Australian child” (Pung 105). Inevitably, Woods experienced cultural differences and conflicts, as well as cultural interactions and conciliations. As a second-generation migrant, Woods tried to fit into mainstream Australian culture, whilst struggling to understand her own Chinese heritage. Like many other authors represented in this collection (such as Benjamin Law, Michelle Law and Tony Ayres, amongst others), Woods may be viewed as a “cultural translator”, who exists in-between cultures, identities and languages.

The concept of cultural translation was discussed by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994); he argues that migrants translate their own culture and language into the host community and the receiving culture. Consequently, the receiving culture is intervened, transformed and hybridized, and the host language (in this case, English) becomes more diverse and hybrid (Young 2012). As the Indian-born British writer Salman Rushdie (1992) famously describes wrote: “Having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (16).

Bhabha also connected the notion of cultural translation with hybridity. He views hybridity as a result of cultural interactions and the notion of being “in-between” cultures. Migrant writing, including by Chinese-Australian authors, may be viewed as extremely hybrid and complex (Ang, 2001). Writers such as Woods and Rushdie often speak of their hybrid identities and cultures, which can be fluid and complex (Ang 2001). So-called “hybridity features” therefore become one of the most distinguishing characteristics of migrant stories. Hybridity features in the text create a sense of foreignness and unfamiliarity to the reader, which are often used by writers in order to highlight their position of in-betweenness (Simon 2001).

In Woods’ *Perfect Chinese Children*, hybridity features can be found on both cultural and linguistic levels. Cultural hybridity takes place when different cultures come into contact, reflecting cultural conflicts and differences. Linguistic hybridity, on the other hand, occurs when different languages exist in one text – this is often found in literature written by migrants (Bhabha, 1994). On a cultural level, Woods found herself in between two cultures and identities. She grew up with her Chinese mother and relatives, eating “dun tahts” and Peking duck, and going to Yum Cha every Saturday. But she does not look Chinese nor behave like a Chinese person, so she never

quite fit in with her Chinese cousins. Moreover, she was not a perfect Chinese child to her mother. Woods was teetering in between her Chinese heritage and Australian culture, stating “Australians are dog shit” (Pung 107) but then telling her mother she wanted “erasers with Snow White on them” (Pung 110). She also witnessed the conflicts between two cultures and races – her Aunty viewed white people as barbarians, while her cousins were bullied because they were Asian. On a linguistic level, she admitted that she could only speak three Cantonese phrases, but Chinese words and references are still predominant through the text. Whether the author can speak or write Chinese, Chinese culture and language are deeply embedded in her English writing.

Hybridity features in both linguistic and cultural forms can, however, pose difficulties in translation, therefore the translation process and strategies are worth examining. Additionally, as the Chinese heritage or the “Chineseness” of the author thrives through the text, it leads to the translation issue of “back translation”. Back translation takes place when translating the Chinese words, concepts, names and culture from the source text (ST) into the Chinese target text (TT). Different strategies have been adopted in order to translate and back translate the hybridity features in the text. However, some hybridity features found in the ST are lost in the TT, while others, interestingly, have emerged during the translation process. For example, “cha siu bao” and “dun tahts” might be unfamiliar to some Australian readers, but it would be familiar to Chinese audiences. On the other hand, “Jesus Christ” is used as a common swearing word in English, but it can create a strange effect in Chinese.

The overall strategy employed relies on Antoine Berman’s theory of “deformation” (2000), which is used to highlight the unfamiliarity and foreignness in the TT, and to reflect the foreignness and hybridity features in the ST. I have also used Nida’s (1964) equivalence theory, as this translation has attempted to create “equivalent hybridity” in the TT. There are several translation methods/procedures identified by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), including the notion of borrowing, which has been adopted in the translation to reflect the hybridity features and hybrid nature of the ST. Through borrowing or “zero translation” (Qiu, 2001) strategy, some words and phrases of the ST are left untranslated and kept in the source language. Examples are provided below to demonstrate some of these translation challenges and strategies.

As already mentioned, Cantonese words and Chinese cultural concepts are heavily employed in the ST; these foreign words are used to highlight the author’s hybrid identity. In my translation, I have adopted the strategy of borrowing or “zero translation” for most of the Cantonese phrases such as: “Kung Hei Fat Choi” “lycee” and “gno sat neyko say yun tow”. They were not presented in the ST using standardized Cantonese spelling, as Woods has limited knowledge of Cantonese. Therefore, to retain the effect and meaning of the original terms in the TT, borrowing was deemed the best approach. It will not create confusions for the reader as explanations are already provided in the text; for example, the author explained what “lycee” is: “red envelopes stuffed with cash” (Pung 103). Keeping the term “lycee” untranslated will retain the foreignness of the ST. However, for other terms like “Aunty Yee Mah”, I cannot use the same strategy. As “Yee Mah” means “aunty” in Cantonese, translating directly or borrowing completely would make it redundant or meaningless in Chinese. Therefore, I have translated it as “Aunty” (yi ma) which has a similar pronunciation as “Yee Mah”.

In the story, Woods describes the challenges and conflicts between culture, family and inter-racial marriage. When her father’s family meet her mother for the first time, the reaction was “Jesus Christ – a chongalewy-chow Sheila!” (Pung 105). This

sentence contains a swear word, a made-up (hybrid English/Cantonese) term, a racial reference and Australian slang. This hybrid combination created a huge challenge for translation. The sentence might seem strange or unfamiliar to English readers, but the purpose and effect, and I wanted to create a similar level of strangeness in the TT. Therefore, I adopted an equally hybrid and creative approach, using the equivalence Chinese term for “Jesus Christ” and “Sheila”, while for “chongalewy-chow”, I chose “清嘎啦虫” (Ching Ga La Chong) for the meaning and sound.

Perfect Chinese Children is a beautiful and touching story, but is, at the same time, complicated and meaningful. Woods, as a Chinese-Australian writer and “cultural translator”, honestly reflects what is like to grow up in Australia as a Chinese-Australian child, and as a person in between cultures and identities. It is a personal and unique story, which also imparts many universal feelings and experiences. The text is worth translating into Chinese for Chinese readers who do not understand what it means to be Chinese-Australian, but also for readers who may share similar experiences.

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Perfect Chinese Children

By
Vanessa Woods

If there was ever anyone I wanted to stab in the heart with a chopstick, it was my cousin David.

‘What happened to the four per cent?’ my mother says, looking at my maths exam.

‘I got ninety-six. What else do you want?’

‘Don’t talk back,’ my mother snaps. ‘Ninety-six isn’t 100. If you want to do well you have to try harder. David just got 99.9 on his HSC.’

I dig my nails into my chair and wait for the punchline.

‘He asked me to ring up the school board and contest the score. Ha! Imagine that. The lady on the phone laughed.’

My mother shakes her head in wonder, as though David is the god of a new religion she’s following.

‘It really was 100,’ she says confidentially. ‘They had to scale it down for the school.’

Usually Chinese par-ents don’t have bragging rights over other people’s children, but my mother tutored David through high school, so his HSC score is her crowning victory.

My maths exam, with the scrawled red ‘96’ that I was so proud of, begins to look ratty. Untidy figures rush across the

完美的中国孩子

瓦妮莎·伍兹 著

何文慧 译

Translated by Wenhui He

有一个人我想用筷子戳进他的心脏，那个人就是表哥戴维。

“少的那四分去哪了？”妈妈看着我的数学考试成绩问道。

“我得了96分。你还想怎么样？”

“少顶嘴。”妈妈发火了。“96不是满分。如果你想有出息，那就要更努力。戴维在高中毕业考试得了99.9。”

我把指甲戳进椅子里，等着她的“点睛之笔”。

“他让我打电话给学校董事会去提出质疑。哈！前所未有的事。接电话的女人都笑了。”

妈妈不可思议地摇了摇头，仿佛戴维是她的新偶像。

“实际成绩是100分。”她自信地说。“但因为学校政策，他们不能给满分。”

通常情况下，中国父母不能吹嘘别人家的孩子，但妈妈辅导了戴维的整个高中学业，因此他的毕业考试成绩就是她的辉煌胜利。

我的数学试卷上，潦草的“96”本来让我感到骄傲，现在却看起来

page as if they're about to make a run for it. David's handwriting is famous for looking like it came out of a typewriter.

'He's going to medical school,' she sighs. 'He's going to be a heart surgeon, just like Victor Chang.'

The reason my mother harps on about David so much is probably that her own two children don't warrant much praising over the mahjong table. My sister Bronnie has been expelled from piano lessons twice, and me, well, I am trouble on all fronts. I'm the child who talks back and gives viperous looks to her elders. In all my life I've only learnt two Cantonese phrases: *Kung Hei Fat Choi*, Happy New Year (saying this at the right time earned you *lycee*, red envelopes stuffed with cash), and *gno sat neyko say yun tow*, a phrase I hear often from my Auntie Yee Mah that roughly translates to 'I will chop off your dead man's head.'

'Jasmine just bought her mother a \$600,000 apartment in Hong Kong,' mother says wistfully before going for the touchdown. '*In cash.*'

Jasmine is David's perfect sibling. She is a stockbroker in New York, married to an investment banker. The photographer at her Sydney wedding cost \$12,000.

'Jasmine only got 80 per cent on her HSC.' My mother looks hopeful, as though retards like me might have a chance after all. Then she shakes herself out of it. 'But no one paid any attention to her until she started making money.'

很糟糕。卷子上歪歪扭扭的数字就像要逃跑一般。而戴维的字出了名的工整，像打字机打出来似的。

“他要去上医学院，”她叹口气。“他要当心脏外科医生，就像张任谦一样。”

妈妈不停地夸赞戴维，可能是因为她没法在麻将桌上炫耀自己的两个孩子。我妹妹布露妮已经两次被钢琴教室开除了，还有我，而我的问题就多了。我会跟长辈顶嘴，目光凶狠地瞪着人。我一辈子就学了两句广东话：一句是“Kung Hei Fat Choi”（在正确的时间点说就能拿到“lycee”，装满钞票的红包）；另一句是“gno sat neyko say yun tow”，这是我经常听见姨妈说的，意思是“我要砍下你的死人头”。

“杰丝敏刚给她妈妈在香港买了价值60万澳元的房子”，妈妈的语气充满渴望，又压低声音说：“用现金。”

杰丝敏和戴维这对姐弟堪称完美。杰丝敏在纽约做证券经纪人，嫁给了一个投资银行家。她在悉尼举办的婚礼上，仅摄影师的费用就是1万两千澳元。

“杰丝敏的高中毕业考试只得了80分。”妈妈似乎充满了希望，仿佛像我这样的智障或许也有一线生机。然后她又摇了摇头“但她开始赚钱之前，也没人看好她。”

My mother looks around our tiny two-bedroom apartment. The kitchen is fine if you're a troll and enjoy dim, cramped spaces. The carpet is grey and curling around the edges. The furnishings are the type you pick up by the side of the road. There are occasional glimpses of the life we had before. A Ming vase. A black lacquered screen with flourishes of gold. But the priceless antiques give the apartment the ambience of a refugee camp, as though we managed to save a few precious things before catastrophe threw us into squalor.

When I visit my cousins in their two-storey palaces, their kitchens as big as our apartment and their lucky trees with lifesized peaches of jade in the foyer, my secret pleasure is to creep upstairs and press my face into the pale, plush carpet.

*

We are poor because my mother's financial history has been overshadowed by unlucky four – *sie*, which sounds uncomfortably close to *sei*, death. She was the fourth child born in the fourth decade of the century. Her father gave all his money to Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese leader of the Nationalist Party who lost China to the Communists in 1949. My mother's brothers and sister were also left destitute, but they all married suitable Chinese spouses who helped them earn back the family fortune.

My mother, with her silken black hair and face like a doll, could have done better than anyone. But instead, she married my father, a *gweilo*, a ghost person, a white man. In our world, interracial marriages are unheard of. We don't know any other Chinese who married Australians.

妈妈环顾我们狭小的两居室公寓。或许对于喜欢阴暗逼仄环境的小矮人来说，我们的厨房还算过得去。地毯发灰，边角卷起。家具像是从路边捡来的那种。偶尔也能瞥见过去生活的影子：一个明代花瓶，一面金纹黑漆屏风。但这些昂贵古董给公寓增添了一种难民营的气氛。仿佛在灾难来临流离失所之前，我们设法保住了几件值钱的东西。

表哥他们家住在如宫殿一样的两层别墅里。厨房和我们公寓一样大，门口招财树上挂着和真桃子一样大小的玉桃。我的秘密乐趣是偷偷地上楼，将脸埋进洁白的毛绒地毯里。

*

我们家很穷，是因为妈妈的财运一直被一个不吉利的数字笼罩着——四，听起来像“死”。她是本世纪家族中第四代的第四个孩子。她爸爸将所有的钱都给了国民党领袖蒋介石，1949年国民党溃败，共产党执政。妈妈的兄弟姐妹们都穷困潦倒，但他们与合适的中国人结婚，并重建了家业。

我的妈妈有着一头乌黑的秀发和洋娃娃般的脸蛋，她本该比别人都前途无量。然而，她却嫁给了我爸爸——一个“*gweilo*”，一个洋鬼子，一个白种人。在我们的世界

‘Barbarians,’ Yee Mah would say. ‘Chinese were using chopsticks while *gweilos* were eating with their hands.’

My father was a charming but troubled Vietnam vet, prone to occasional psychotic episodes and heavy drinking. When he brought my mother home to meet his family, my grandfather’s first words to her were, ‘Jesus Christ – a chongalewy-chow Sheila!’

My mother did everything required of a dutiful Chinese wife. She spent three hours baking *dun tahts*, the pastry as flaky around the warm egg custard as those served for the Kangxi Emperor at the Manchu imperial feast. She did the ritualistic two-day preparation for Peking duck and gave herself RSI from rolling perfectly circular Mandarin pancakes. She served orgasmic banquets to my father’s friends and unwittingly to his mistresses.

It wasn’t a surprise to anyone except my mother when my father divorced her and left her for a white barbarian when I was five and my sister was two.

My mother almost slit her wrists in shame. We didn’t know anyone who was divorced. Chinese spouses had affairs, slept in separate rooms and barely spoke to each other, but no one divorced. It was a matter of saving face.

Her own life in shreds and two dollars in her pocket, we became her only hope. We would be brilliant at school, earn accolades and awards until the day

里，种族通婚是闻所未闻的。我们认识的中国人里，没有其他任何人和澳大利亚人结婚。

“一群蛮子，”姨妈说，“中国人用筷子吃饭，鬼佬用手抓着吃。”

我的爸爸是个有魅力的男人，也是个内心痛苦的越南老兵。他有酗酒倾向，偶尔还会精神失常。当年爸爸把妈妈带回去见家长时，爷爷对她说的第一句话是“上帝啊，一个清噶啦虫姑娘！”

妈妈做了一切称职的中国妻子该做的事。她花3个小时烘焙蛋挞，脆脆的酥皮裹着温热的蛋浆，和康熙皇帝在满汉全席上吃的一样。她花整整两天做北京烤鸭，为了做出完美的圆形春饼而患上重复性肌肉劳损。她做满满一桌丰盛佳肴，招待爸爸的朋友们，也毫不知情地招待了他的情人。

爸爸和她离婚时，没有人感到惊讶，除了她自己。他为了一个“白人蛮子”而离开了她，当时我5岁，妹妹2岁。

妈妈羞愧得无地自容，差点割腕自杀。我们不认识任何离过婚的人。中国夫妻可以有外遇、分房睡、几乎不和对方讲话，但没有人离婚。这是面子问题。

她生活破碎、身无分文，我们成了她唯一的希望。我和妹妹本应

when we were educated, rich and could lavish her with the money and attention she deserved.

Unfortunately, it isn't quite working out that way. As a result of the impure blood of my father, my sister and I don't even look Chinese. We both have Chinese hair, dead straight and completely resistant to the crimping tools crucial to the '80s, but my sister's hair is blonde and mine is the colour of burnt toast.

As time goes by, it becomes clear to her that we are going the way of *Australian* children. The ones who don't work as hard, are loud and uncouth and, worst of all, talk back to their parents and hold chopsticks near the pointed ends, like peasants.

Until the divorce, we had barely seen my Chinese relatives. Suddenly, from our big, comfortable house in Turrumurra, we were living in a troll cave in Kingsford near Vietnamese boat people. Instead of a mother who stayed home all day cooking delicious and exotic meals, I had a mother who worked as a secretary for fourteen hours a day. And every day after school, my sister and I get dumped with my Auntie Yee Mah and my three cousins.

It is well known among all my new relatives under the age of sixteen that you do not fuck with Yee Mah. Yee Mah isn't fat but there is a heaviness to her. The back of her hand feels like a ton of bricks. She once broke a bed just by sitting on it. Besides the famous 'I will chop off your dead man's head,' she sometimes pulls out a box of matches, holds one out close to our mouths and hisses, 'If you are lying to me, I will burn out your tongue.' In a way that convinces you she absolutely is

该成绩优异，受到老师表扬，获得各种奖项，最终学有所成，用金钱和孝心来回报她。

然而，现实往往不如人意。因为有着父亲的“不纯血统”，我和妹妹看起来根本不像中国人。我们都有中国人发质，头发又直又硬，80年代流行的卷发工具对我们完全没用。但我妹妹的发色是金色，我的是焦黄色。

随着时间流逝，妈妈意识到我们长成了“澳大利亚”孩子。不够勤奋、粗野聒噪。最可恨的是会和家长顶嘴，拿筷子拿最下端，像乡下人一样。

在父母离婚之前，我们几乎没见过中国亲戚。一夜之间，我们搬离了宽敞舒适的图拉姆拉区大房子，住进了金斯福德区的“矮人洞穴”，与越南难民为邻。妈妈从一个每天在家做美味异国佳肴的家庭主妇，成了一工作14小时的秘书。而且每天放学之后，我和妹妹就被丢给姨妈和三个表亲。

在我的新家庭里，大家都清楚一件事：16岁之前，别惹毛姨妈。姨妈不胖，但力气很大。她的手背和砖头一样厚实。有一次她坐到一张床上，就把床坐塌了。除了那句著名的“我杀你的死人头”之外，她会拿一根火柴放在我们嘴边，低声说：“如果你说谎，我就烧掉你的

not joking.

Her daughter Erica is seventeen and the high-achieving darling. Robert is number one son and therefore immune to any criticism or punishment. However, her other son, Patrick, my sister Bronnie and I, we are all under ten and therefore under her complete jurisdiction.

So every day after school, Bronnie, Patrick and I get up to mischief and then try to stop Yee Mah finding out. On the weekends there are more cousins, aunts and uncles to visit, most of whom aren't even related to us. The hope is that some of their Chineseness will rub off on us and Bronnie and I will become bright, smart vessels and alleviate some of my mother's disgrace.

Bronnie and I never quite blend in, but our new playmates are always too polite to mention it until one day, Erica storms out of the playground.

'Australians are retard-ed,' she says churlishly. Erica is seven years older than me and I worship her. She is everything a good girl should be: smart, respectful, and her boyfriends buy her large stuffed animals that I secretly covet.

There's a rhyme going around the playground. The kids pull up the corners of their eyes, then pull them down, chanting: 'Chinese, Japanese, hope your kids turn Pickanese.' On 'Pickanese,' they lift one eye up and one eye down, giving the clear impression of mental retardation. Like all bad jokes that come into fashion, this one is going around like wildfire, and Erica has apparently been

舌头。”从她说话的方式你就知道她不是开玩笑的。

姨妈的女儿艾瑞卡17岁，是个成绩优异的乖乖女。罗伯特是家中长子，因此不会受到任何责罚。她的小儿子派特里克、妹妹布鲁妮和我，当时都不到10岁，完全在姨妈的管辖之下。

每天放学之后，我们三个就会调皮捣蛋，然后想尽办法不让姨妈发现。到了周末，我们要去见更多的叔叔阿姨、哥哥姐姐，其中绝大多数跟我们没有任何血缘关系。这样做是希望我们能从这些人身上蹭些“中国味道”，于是我和妹妹就能成为聪明懂事的孩子，让妈妈不那么丢脸。

我和布鲁妮从来没能完全融入。而我们的新玩伴总是很客气，没有戳破那层窗户纸。直到有一天，艾瑞卡在操场上发泄了出来。

“澳洲人都是智障，”她狠狠地说。艾瑞卡比我大7岁，是我崇拜的对象。她是标准的完美女孩：聪明又懂事，她的男朋友会给她买令人羡慕的大毛绒玩具。

学校操场上传唱着一个顺口溜。一群小孩上下拉扯着眼角，唱着：“中国狗，日本狗，生出一群哈巴狗”。唱到“哈巴狗”的时候，他们把眼睛一只往上一只往下拉，像极了智障儿童。和所有的无聊玩笑一样，这个顺口溜像野火一般蔓

socked with it 150 times during lunch.

As we wait outside school for Yee Mah, I catch Erica giving me a sideways look, as though she is seeing me for the first time, realising that I look more like one of *them* than like her.

‘Yeah,’ I quickly say. ‘Australians are dog shit. Their babies will all eat dog shit and die.’

I have to be liberal with the faeces because the week before, my cousin Victor was bashed at the 7Eleven in Maroubra. A local gang was targeting Asians, and a couple of them beat up Victor and stole his bike. I saw him staggering down the road, bleeding from his nose with scrapes along his arms. The cheekbone beneath his eye was swollen and red, like a ripe fruit about to burst.

There is also a rumour going around that Asian-haters have been stabbing Asians with syringes full of AIDS blood in the cinemas on George Street. As a result, we don’t go to the cinema for at least a year.

Yee Mah’s car pulls up and we all climb in. Erica doesn’t speak to me for the rest of the day. Without knowing why, I am ashamed.

*

Every Saturday, about twenty of our ‘inner circle’ go to yum cha. The children are fed *cha siu bao* pork buns to fill us up so we don’t eat any of the expensive stuff, while the grown-ups brag about themselves by bragging about their children.

延开来。据说艾瑞卡在午休时就被辱骂了150次。

我们在校门口等姨妈，我看见艾瑞卡瞥我的眼神，仿佛她不认识我一样。她意识到我看起来更像“那些白人”，而不像中国人。

“对啊”我连忙说，“澳洲人都是狗屎。他们的小孩都吃狗屎，不得好死。”

我必须要说得难听些，着重强调粪便。因为上周表兄维克多在马鲁巴区的7-11便利店里被打了。当地的一个帮派专门针对亚洲人，他们打了维克多，还抢了他的自行车。我看到他一瘸一拐地走在路上，流着鼻血，手臂上有伤痕。他的颧骨红肿，像熟得要裂开的水果一样。

当时还有个流言，说那些亚洲仇恨者会在乔治街的电影院里用装着艾滋血的针筒扎亚洲人。结果我们整整一年都没去电影院。

姨妈的车开来了，我们都上了车。艾瑞卡一整天都没和我说话。不知道为什么，我感到很羞愧。

*

每周六，我们“小圈子”里的20多人会去喝早茶。小孩子嘴里被叉烧包塞得满满的，这样我们就不会吃那些贵的东西。大人们则通过夸耀自己的孩子来吹嘘自己。

‘Patrick just passed his Grade Seven piano exam,’ says Yee Mah. ‘And Erica is top of her class. Again.’

Aunty Helen talks about Jasmine’s new office in the World Trade Centre and David’s internship.

And my poor mother sits with nothing to say. No awards we have won. No praise from our teachers. No marks high enough for medical or law school. It is the ultimate aspiration for any Chinese mother to have a child who is a lawyer or a doctor. The best-case scenario would be a lawyer who defends doctors in court.

‘You would make such a good barrister,’ my mother sometimes tells me. ‘You and that slippery tongue of yours.’

Such two-faced compliments are the staple of my existence. ‘*Ho liang*,’ my relatives say. ‘How pretty.’ But I always sense another implication: at least I am pretty, because there isn’t much else going for me.

Even worse, Bronnie wants to be an actress and I want to be a writer. My mother can’t think of anything less likely to lead to one of us buying her an apartment.

‘You’ll end up penniless in an attic,’ she tells my sister. As for me, she clips out cuttings from the newspaper to prove that most writers end up dead of starvation in the gutter.

*

To twist the chopstick even deeper, I am developing an aversion to school. In class, I am miserable, churlish and awkward. I don’t have any friends, and a boy called

“派特里克刚刚过了钢琴7级，”姨妈说，“艾瑞卡呢，又是班级第一。”

海伦阿姨说着杰丝敏在世贸中心的新办公室和戴维的实习工作。

我可怜的妈妈坐在那无话可说。我们什么奖都没得，从没被老师表扬过，成绩也不够上医学院或者法学院。所有中国母亲的愿望就是有个当律师或者医生的孩子。最好的情况就是当一个在法庭上为医生辩护的律师。

“你肯定能当个好律师，”妈妈有时这么对我说，“你和你的那张快嘴。”

这种虚假的夸赞贯穿了我的人生。“好靓啊，”亲戚们说。但我总看到另外一层意思：幸好我长得好看，因为除此之外我一无是处。

不仅如此，布露尼想当个演员，而我想当个作家。妈妈想让我们俩其中一个给她买套公寓的愿望就必然要泡汤了。

“你会穷死在阁楼里的。”她告诉妹妹。而对于我，她会从报纸上收集文章向我证明大部分作家都会饿死在阴沟里。

*

“锦上添花”的是，我越来越厌恶学校。课堂让我感到痛苦、暴躁和不安。我没有任何朋友，一个叫

Owen throws rocks at me after class. There is another charming game going around the playground in which you pinch someone and say, 'Tip, you've got the germs.'

I am always the original source of the germs.

Finally, to escape being the human turd, I lock myself in the school toilets for three hours. When a teacher comes to find me, I tell her I've been vomiting. Half an hour later my mother pulls up outside school and drives me back to our apartment. She cooks me chicken soup with noodles and wraps the bed sheets around me so tight I feel like I am in an envelope, about to be posted somewhere exotic. I love the garlic and chilli smell of her hands. She takes my temperature and smooths my forehead and continually asks if I am all right.

I suffer another week through the germ game until I lock myself in the toilet again. This time, Yee Mah picks me up from school.

'What's wrong with you?' she demands.

'I threw up in the toilet.'

'You don't smell like vomit,' she says suspiciously.

'It was only a little bit.'

She looks at me slyly from the corner of her eye.

'Do you know why your mother is poor?'

I shake my head.

'Because of you. She has to pay your school fees, very expensive. You see how tired she is? You must pay her back with

欧文的男生在下课时会朝我扔石头。当时在操场上还流传着另外一个“有趣”的游戏，掐别人一下然后说“喂，你身上有细菌。”

而我总是那个细菌的源头。

最后，为了不做人类病原体，我把自己关在厕所3个小时。老师找到我时，我告诉她我吐了。半个小时之后妈妈到学校接我，开车带我回家。她给我煮了鸡汤面条，用被子把我裹得紧紧的，像个要寄到远方的包裹。我喜欢闻她手上的蒜味和辣椒味。她量了我的体温，摸着我的额头，不停地问我有没有好一点。

我又忍受了一周的细菌游戏，直到我把自己再次关在厕所里。这一次，姨妈来学校接我。

“你怎么搞的？”她质问我。

“我在厕所吐了。”

“你闻起来不像吐过。”她怀疑地说。

“只吐了一点点。”

她用余光瞄我。

“你知道为什么你妈妈这么穷吗？”

我摇摇头。

“因为你啊。她要付你的学费，可贵了。你没看到她多累吗？”

good marks. Otherwise you will make her shamed.'

The emotional terrorism continues until we get to her house. There is no chicken soup or tucking into bed. I have to sit on the couch with Bobo, her mother-in-law, for six hours, watching daytime television until my sister and Patrick come home.

*

'Mum,' I tug on my mother's arm during Saturday yum cha as she chews on a prawn dumpling, part of yet another meal she can't pay for. She looks down at me absentmindedly. 'Mum!'

'Yes, sweetheart?'

'Can you buy me that fish?'

'What?'

There are over fifty brim stuffed in the tank of the yum cha restaurant. They are squashed so tight together they can hardly move. In the middle there is a beautiful golden one, with scales that shimmer in the light of the crystal chandeliers. I want my mother to buy it so I can take it to Bondi Beach in a plastic bag and set it free in the ocean.

'Don't be stupid,' my mother says. 'They are for eating.'

The eating habits of my sister and I are yet another source of embarrassment. We are very wasteful. We don't eat chicken's feet. We don't suck the jelly out of fish eyeballs and we refuse to eat the creamy filling inside prawn heads.

'Just that one. Plee-eeeeeease.'

'No.'

'Why?'

你要好好学习报答她。不然你就会让她丢脸。"

这样的情感勒索一直持续到我们回到她家。这次没有鸡汤和被窝。我还要和她婆婆坐在一起，看了6个小时的日间电视节目，直到妹妹和派特里克放学回家。

*

"妈妈，"周六早茶上，我拉着她的手肘。她吃着我们买不起的虾饺，敷衍地低头看我。"妈妈！"

"宝贝怎么啦？"

"你能不能给我买那条鱼？"

"什么？"

早茶店的鱼缸里，50多条鳊鱼挤在一起，紧紧贴着彼此，几乎无法移动。中间有一条金色的鱼，鱼鳞在水晶灯下闪闪发光。我想让妈妈买下它，这样我就可以把它装进塑料袋里，带到邦迪海滩放生。

"别傻了，"妈妈说。"那是用来吃的。"

我和妹妹吃饭的习惯也很丢人。我们很浪费。我们不啃鸡爪，不吃鱼眼，不嗦虾头。

"就那一条。求求你了求求你了。"

"不行。"

"为什么？"

‘We can’t afford it,’ she hisses.

I let go of her hand and catch up with my sister and Patrick, who are playing in the elevators. We like to go into the elevators and push all the buttons. Go all the way up. Go all the way down. Occasionally, we get out on a floor we aren’t supposed to be on and run up and down the corridors.

It doesn’t bother me that we are poor. I’ve found a way to combat it – I steal from other children. When I get kicked out of class for misbehaving, which is often, I rifle through the school bags of all the other kids and steal their lunch money, as well as anything else I like.

When I finally get caught, I’m terrified Yee Mah will burn off my tongue like she’s always threatening. Instead, my mother sits me down at the dining-room table. She is very quiet. She puts her hand on my hand and says, ‘What do other children have that you don’t?’

If I were smarter, I would hear her heart breaking.

‘Erasers with Snow White on them,’ I say without hesitating.

‘All right,’ says my mother. ‘Go to your room.’

As I leave, I see her bow her head, as if she’s carrying a great burden. It’s shame. And she’s not ashamed of me, she’s ashamed of herself. For failing to teach me the difference between right and wrong. For failing to make me feel like I am warm and safe and don’t need to steal from other kids to make up for everything I don’t have.

“我们买不起。”她小声说。

我放开了她去找妹妹和派特里克，他们在电梯里玩闹。我们喜欢按下电梯里的所有按钮。上到顶楼，再到底楼。有时我们会去到其他楼层，在走廊里跑来跑去。

贫穷并没有影响到我。我找到了一种对抗的办法——从别的小孩那里偷。我常常因为表现不好被老师从教室赶出去，这时我就会去翻别人的书包，偷他们的午饭钱和其他一切我看中的东西。

最后被逮住的时候，我很害怕姨妈会把我的舌头烧掉，就像她一直威胁的那样。然而，妈妈却让我坐在饭桌旁。静静地，她把手放在我手上，问我：“别人有什么东西是你没有的？”

如果我懂事一点，就能听到她心碎的声音。

“上面有白雪公主的橡皮，”我脱口而出。

“好吧，”她说，“回房间去吧。”

我走开的时候，看见她深深地埋着头，仿佛背着沉重的负担。是羞耻。她不是因为我感到羞耻，而是为她自己。她没能教会我对与错。她没能让我感到安全温暖，没能告诉我并不需要从别处偷窃，来弥补自己的缺失。

The next day, the Snow White erasers are on the dining-room table. I don't even want them.

*

When I finally ring my mother to tell her my HSC score, she sounds delighted.

'You got 88.8? Very lucky number. You will be rich for sure.'

There is an odd note in her voice, one of momentary regret. That this isn't the moment when I exceed all her expectations.

'Very rich,' she says again, as if to comfort herself with an ancient Confucian wisdom: *Just think how it could have been worse.*

As for me, I've given up hoping she will tell me she is proud. I no longer begrudge my friends their mothers who overflow with constant affirmation and nurturing encouragement. When she criticises me with all the sensitivity of a Japanese scientist harpooning a whale, and I feel the slow-burning resentment building to rage, I bite my slippery tongue.

Instead, I fossick through my memory for one of my earliest recollections.

My mother is in the kitchen. Steam rises from the wok and oil spatters over her hands. There is a delicious smell of soy sauce, garlic and chicken. She tips the contents of the wok into a dish, then spoons out chicken wings onto beds of rice. Chicken wings are the cheapest part of a chicken. She has bought all her salary can afford.

On my sister's plate there are two. On mine there are two. On hers, there is

第二天，饭桌上放着一个白雪公主橡皮。但我根本不要。

*

当我终于打电话告诉妈妈我的高中毕业考试成绩时。她听起来很高兴。

“你得了88.8分？很吉利的数字。你以后肯定会发财的。”

她的声音听起来有些异样，有着一闪而过的遗憾。此刻我并没有超越她的期望值。

“发大财。”她重复道，似乎在用古老的儒家智慧来安慰自己：知足常乐。

我已经不再期待能够听见她说为我感到骄傲，我不再羡慕朋友们，他们的妈妈总是怀着爱意和鼓励。而我妈妈像日本科学家捕杀鲸鱼一般，极其敏锐地批评我。我感到内心的忿恨升温至愤怒，我闭住了我的快嘴。

相反，我在记忆的最深处搜寻。

母亲在厨房里。锅里蒸汽腾腾，油星溅到了她的手上。空气里混合着酱油、大蒜和鸡肉的香味。她把炒锅里的菜倒进盘子，把鸡翅舀到饭上。鸡翅是鸡身上最便宜的部分。她用上了全部薪水，也只能买得起这些。

妹妹的盘子里有两块鸡翅，我

only one.

的盘子里也有两块。她的盘子里，
只有一块。

And in her sacrifice, I see love.

在她的牺牲里，我看到了爱。