

Shrimps in Space by Desmond Sim

Annotations by Teacher Jo

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I am merely doing this to help those who are struggling with this as a literary text.

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ACT 1

SCENE 1 An empty, dark stage with a door frame and a half-opened door at stage right. Light passes through the opening, throwing a brilliant white wedge on the floor. At stage left is a teacher's table and a big electric bell on the wall behind—it is the only thing lit onstage other than the wedge on the floor. In the centre of the back wall is a whiteboard that acts as a projection screen. The sound of children playing in the distance comes on. The electric bell rings loudly. The sound of children noisily getting into their seats can be heard. Then all is silent.

[CARICATURE] Huat Bee's character is portrayed in this manner of dress with the intention of influencing the audiences first impressions of him. It makes the entire of Act 1 believable.

HUAT BEE Mr Lim Huat Bee comes in. His pale, conservative, checked short-sleeved shirt—^{small, weak} a size too large—and khaki pants and thick-rimmed glasses make him a ^{nerd, a wee b} easy to push around. rather geeky-looking teacher. He writes the word "EVOLUTION" on the white board.

All right, class. Today we are going to talk about evolution...eh-voh-lew-shun...how things change over time. ^{significant, since this is a play about how} people, friendships and circumstances change "Evolution" is an important word. It kind of helps ^{over} time us understand how things were, and how things came to be.

You see, in the beginning, there was nothing on this earth.

There was only a molten planet cooling down... A picture of an angry red planet, the early earth, is projected on the whiteboard.

On the pockmarked face of this planet, the condensed liquids formed a potent brew...a cocktail of life-enriching substances which scientists call "THE COSMIC SOUP OF LIFE"!

And out of this soup, all life emerged.

(brightly) Some of these life forms evolved to become dinosaurs.

A picture of a Tyrannosaurus Rex is projected.

Some became huge sea-mammals—the ancestors of whales.

A picture of a blue whale or an illustration of a prehistoric whale is projected.

Some of these became big, hairy mammoths—the grandfather of all elephants.

A picture of a mammoth or elephant is projected.

(momentously) And some of them, after eons of evolution and development, they remained small—so you have your cockroaches, mosquitoes and shrimps.

A close-up photo of Huat Bee with thick glasses, reading a book, is projected.

All right. Very funny. Who put that slide in there?

Raymond...was it you?

Beat.

If it wasn't you, then why are you covering your face and laughing so loudly? Go stand in the corner.

He comes out of his teacher role and addresses the audience. He is Huat Bee, today.

Don't worry about Raymond. He's a perpetual troublemaker. He'll manage to get in trouble

Consider it:
why is this play carried
out in the form of a
classroom lesson?

again—even standing in that corner.

He looks at his picture on the screen.

Kids are so different now.

When I was young, I got into trouble without even
trying...

I'd better introduce myself.

Lim Huat Bee. That's me. Huat Bee.

But in school, they called me "Hay Bee". Dried
Shrimp.

At first I didn't mind the name.

It was better than the Indian uncle in the mamak
stall¹ who used to call me "cicak kering". Dried
lizard...like the ones the cats caught, played with
and left dead in the sun. They would dry up, all
wrinkled and skinny. Once I stepped on one of
these by accident.

He acts like he is playing the game at that moment.

I was playing hide-and-seek and...

*He mimes the action of a child watching out for
the person who is coming to look for him. He walks
backward, carefully, until...*

I suddenly felt something leathery between my
toes...

Something spongy and leathery...

He stops.

Oh God...

He looks at the sole of his foot.

There were bits of semi-dried lizard stuck to the
soles of my feet.

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

[ironic relief] a light-
hearted opening to
balance out the
play as it progresses
and evolves.

¹ A provision shop traditionally run by Indians

He mimes hopping to the tap to wash his feet with soap.

I washed 20 times! [Hyperbole] but makes him ^{to the} ~~relatable~~ audience.

I kept thinking of the teeny little lizard kidneys... and the cute little dried lizard liver...and the tiny shrivelled lizard heart...all stuck to my feet...

I still get nightmares.

Anyway, between the two descriptions—dried shrimp or dried lizard—I preferred “hay bee”.

At least hay bee is quite tasty—though I’ve never eaten a dried lizard, so I don’t know which tastes better. And so the nickname stuck...like a dead

lizard to unwary feet. [IRONIC] since he was trying to avoid any association with dead lizards.

Note the [DICTION] “stuck” → implying that he has tried to get the name “unstuck” and failed.

Creating visual & tactile imagery for the audience so that we'd get squeamish.

SCENE 2

HUAT BEE

With a name like Hay Bee, you'd think that I would have abandoned all hopes of getting famous. Well, not quite. I had my heroes. Remember that 98-pound weakling you always read about in weight-gain formula ads? Well, I always thought, I could do that! I could become the world's most famous scrawny boy! So I wrote in to a brand of weight-gain milk powder. I sent my photograph. They wrote back! They were willing to take me on!

The milk powder was one of those mega-protein, super weight-gain formulas—a put-on-20-pounds-in-two-weeks kind of thing.

I was going to be their "before and after" model.

"Before" and "after" photos are projected on the whiteboard. The "before" photo is of Huat Bee and the "after" photo is of a bodybuilder's body with Huat Bee's head badly stuck on...

First they took a photo of me—ribs and bones and all.

Then they tried to fatten me up.

"Look...here is an anorexic piece of deflated you char kway² before our super weight-gain formula... and TA DA! Look again! He's become the Asian Arnold Schwarzenegger after our programme!"

Well, they tried their best. *[TONE] ominous, thereby gearing the audience for another laugh*
I was supposed to drink their magic protein-

This is hilarious but in a way that makes us cringe. We laugh at how badly the photo is edited, but we also laugh at Hay Bee because he is so gullible & unfortunate.

[Schadenfreude].

[CHARACTERISATION] He is very self-deprecating that he can joke about his misfortunes. This tells us that, at this point of his life, he has come to terms with his past that he can approach it like this.

↳ He did not used to have such confidence and comfortability with himself.

² A long, deep-fried strip of dough found in Chinese cuisine

→ Growth.
[BILDUNGSROMAN]

enriched milk formula three times a day...morning, noon and night, before meals.

[Exaggeration]
Whether by him or
because the company
was desperate.

However, this has the
audience predicting
that it will end
badly and hilariously.
And it creates [DRAMATIC
TENSION].

[After one week, they made me drink the stuff
before, after and during meals.

So of course there were results lah...

By the end of the second week, I kena³ diarrhoea.

Lao sai.⁴

Really bad diarrhoea—like a tap.

Not just trickle trickle plop plop plop like that...

no...like the bladdy⁵ Yellow River of China.

Whooooosh! ~~He entertains the audience using
[ONOMATOPOEIA], to emphasise how it did~~
So here I am still with my 26-pinch waist. ~~not just tail, it
failed spectacularly.~~
Actually, being such a stick insect was really a huge ~~arty.~~
disadvantage in school.

[pun]

*to highlight how tiny his
waist is, as if it had
been "pinched" small.*

Let's consider the layers in this statement though.

Superficially, it is as if he is preparing
as for yet another hilarious [ANECDOTE],
that we may take part in this seeming
mass-[Schadentreude].

However, he is also sharing his pain. And
we are, very unempathetically laughing
at him, just as everyone has done for
much of his younger years.

∴ Our ~~be~~ response is disturbingly cruel,
and contrasts even more sharply with

King Kong's response to Hay Bee.

3 [Malay] Denotes that something has happened

4 [Hokkien] Diarrhoea

5 [Singlish] Bloody

Note the progression of

his [ANECDOTES]. SCENE 3
He has structured his
narrative to list his misfortunes
in an escalating manner.

scene 1 - random, coincidental
misfortune. Very minor.

#life HUAT BEE

scene 2 - tries to improve
himself and falls
spectacularly.

scene 3 - External Conflict,
In the form of
non-malicious,
physical violence.

The nature of misfortune
gets worse and worse with
every scene. Yet, how do
we respond? With more
laughter?

REFLECT → Is it ok to laugh &
+ treat it like he doesn't
matter since he's sharing
in such a light-hearted
manner?

[CHARACTERISATION]

for all that he is a
laughable victim of life,
he is prejudiced, engaging

in stereotypes.

Explains why he does not
like himself, because
he applies those stereotypes
to himself too.

A rugby ball is hurled across the stage. Huat Bee ducks, terrified. It is thrown again. He ducks, even more frightened. Then he speaks to the audience, half afraid he is going to be attacked again.

You know, I came from a school where the premier ECA⁶ was rugby. All of us were made to try it out—whether or not we were suitable. Whether or not we liked it...

I mean, look at me...

Quite a rugby player, right?

I mean, both my legs could go into one leghole of the bladdy rugby shorts.

You can imagine how insecure I was when I was wearing them. You could hear the wind whistling through all of my...um...lower regions.

He clenches both sides of his shorts to make them look fitting. He walks around uncomfortably.

But you know what, some of those gorillas in the rugby team actually found the uniforms too tight! I mean, they looked like they were going to burst out of their uniforms.

He imitates them.

Low brows, flared, grunting nostrils, huge chests, muscular arms that hung ape-like with knuckles almost scraping the floor and hairy legs, thick like trees.

And these were only the 13-year-olds...the older ones were even larger...

Photos of big, hulking grown men in tight rugby

The effect of this stage direction is visible [CONTRAST].

CARTOONISH.
creates humour.

The ellipses are where he takes in another lungful of air. This makes it easier to imagine the narrative that immediately follows this re-enactment.

Consider it:
why does this play's storytelling style keep oscillating between "classroom lesson" and "re-enactment of flashback"?

At the audience laughs at his antics, there is a sudden shift in [ATMOSPHERE]

Why should he be sad and disappointed? He knew he was unsuitable, and he was in a constant state of terror during the ordeal. So, why is he upset about being rejected? [CRUX] → he knows what he does not like; he also does not like being rejected. Leaves him with an impossible problem.

outfits, looking threatening, appear on the screen.

[Huat Bee looks at the screen and visibly shrinks inwards. He looks timidly at the audience.

Dunno what secret milk formula their mothers fed them when they were babies, right? Probably steroids.

Anyway, playing rugby was quite easy for me.

[A rugby ball is tossed into his hands. He runs screaming around the stage.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaauuuuu-ughhhhhhhhh...

Huat Bee runs and runs, panting as he speaks. He reacts as if he were in a game as his lines go on.

I was just running and running for my life. I would be saying in my mind, oh God...oh God...save me...please let me live long enough to enjoy sex...

And they would be rushing at me from all sides...

and when one of the gorillas got too close, I'd throw the ball as far forward as possible, whether or not there was anyone to receive...or I would turn around and throw it right at the nearest gorilla's face, whether or not he was from my team or the opposing team. *Hilariously emphasising how useless and cowardly he was.*

He throws the ball offstage. There is a loud [CHARACTERISATION] "AIYOH!"

Then I'd run away again...screaming still as they all came after me.

He comes out of the game sad and disappointed.

Well, it was no surprise that none of the teams wanted me on their side.

Magnification of
her rejection.

[In fact, they were always bribing me to join the other team.

I took all their bribes and resigned from rugby.

Not even the coach persuaded me to stay.

*He puts the ball down and stares out at the audience
as if staring into the field.*

↙
This pitiful [conclusion] of the [ANECDOTE] forces the [AUDIENCE] to realize that, like a bully, they have been cruelly laughing AT Hay Bee. Not with him. That he was very hurt and they did not realize it.

MESSAGE: We are very unempathetic as a society, with our prejudices, ~~and~~ stereotypes and schadenfreude. Maybe, we should change that.

SCENE 4

[THEME] Fate versus Free Will

HUAT BEE

This reflection shows us that he is beginning to internalise these stereotypes, resigning himself to fate.

By this point, the [AUDIENCE] likes Huat Bee, because he made them laugh, and opened up to them. So, realising that he is internalising this makes them sympathise with him.

Audience is uncomfortable at this point, we don't know if this character is a bully or not.

CHARACTERISATION

quite [hypocritical] ↑ of him, since he doesn't quite like being judged for his physical appearance & the impressions it creates.

By then, a little black seed had started to grow in my heart. A tiny fear, a splinter of suspicion. What if life was really, indeed, totally unfair? What if fate was something that determined everything—whether we were big and strong, brave or cowardly, successful or a failure? What if it was really true what all the guys and girls had been whispering all along...I mean, what if it was true that SIZE REALLY MATTERS?

I looked up into heaven. God was not there to answer me then. *(Implies abandonment, loneliness. We feel even more sorry for him.)*

I must have been seated quite a long time, staring at the empty rugby field, thinking these thoughts, because suddenly a huge, heavy arm was thrown on my shoulder.

Ooomph! *Makes us wonder if everybody we have laughed at feels this way. (Guilt)*

"Oi! Don't worry lah. You'll get better with more practice. Maybe if you practise for another 20 years. Ha ha ha!"

It was this guy we all called King Kong.

Actually his name was Norman Lam Hin Kong.

Norman was big like a huge lump of concrete, and he actually looked like an ape. I had only seen him from a distance when we were playing rugby—mainly because I was too afraid to let him near me.

Now, up close, with King Kong beside me, I was amazed. *He looked even more like an ape!*

But don't get me wrong...King Kong was actually quite smart in school. He just looked stupid.

He noticed HB's dejection.
That is very sensitive & empathetic of him.

Evidence that he has internalised the stereotypical attitudes.

[CHARACTERISATION]
King Kong is really intelligent & mature.

[MESSAGE] Everyone has a different path to tread, different strengths to have. So why are we fighting so hard to walk the paths that are not ours to walk? Be You. Take your life by the horns & choose Free Will!

Moment of growth for HB, and the impact of this [ANAGNOSIS] is great.

He does not just pick one CCA that he could do well in. He joined three!

And became a high-achiever!

[THEME] FATE VS. FREE WILL.

Anyway, I had the breath knocked out of me when King Kong thumped me on the back. So I choked. "Worried? Me? Why should I be worried?" King Kong looked at me and smiled.

"Dunno lah...dunno why you want to play rugby. You are such a lousy player."

"Well, thank you for being honest," I said sarcastically, shrugging his hands off my shoulder. King Kong persisted. "Maybe you should join something that you can do better in—like gardening or library..."

(with outrage, with his arms on his hip, quite sissily)

["Wah lau⁷...oi! All those are for sissies only lah!" I said, outraged. "What you think I am, sissy, is it?"

"Cool it lah...I just meant that each one of us is good at something. Maybe your something is something else. Anyway...ECA is ECA...where got macho or sissy one? In the end, all we want are the points to go to JC⁸, right?"

This was something new. I had thought all the cool and sporty guys did what they did to be admired. It never occurred to me that they took part in these things just because that was what they could do best. And the fact that King Kong didn't see things in the light of being sissy or macho really took all the pressure off my decisions to join...the book club...

A photo of Huat Bee looking in his element amidst books is projected on the screen.

The LDDS⁹...

A photo of Huat Bee with cue cards in hand,

7 [Hokkien] An exclamatory remark

8 Junior college

9 Literary, Drama and Debating Society

arguing a point with sharp, stabbing motions of his other hand, is projected. Behind him, the sign reads: *Inter-District Debating Finals.*

And the Gardening Society.

A photo of Huat Bee chairing a meeting is projected.

By the way, I became president of all three clubs and our school won a prize during Environment Week the year I took over.

Anyway, that day when we talked, King Kong bought me tau huay chwee¹⁰, and we became friends.

Life was simple then, wasn't it? Life-long friendships were sealed over a cup of soya bean milk.

But you know what's stranger than a dried shrimp and an ape becoming friends?

It's that we stopped seeing each other the way other people saw us.

I had always seen King Kong as rough and ape-like, like an orangutan on steroids...but once I got to really know him, he suddenly looked different.

His gentleness with weaker and less fortunate people smoothed away all my perceptions of clumsiness and brutishness. His warm and infectious laughter could wash away all the worries of the day. And his bluntness—that was just his way of remaining really honest.

Most important of all, I knew that King Kong never saw me as Hay Bee the shrimp. In fact he never called me Hay Bee, he just called me "Oi!"

But the fact that I was not seen as a skinny, clownish runt by a friend did something

[THEME] FATE VS. FREE WILL.

Growth of the HB character.

[MESSAGE] sometimes, all we need is to be seen by someone empathetic enough to care.

To King Kong, it mattered a lot to him that HB saw him for who he really was. To be on the receiving end of HB's empathy, being his friend even when, to his mind, he had nothing to offer.

[CHARACTERISATION] of KK.

[CHARACTERISATION] :
Thanks to King Kong, HB
became more confident.

[THEME] : This change in HB
was positi a positive one to
his life, as evidenced by
his successes. For the first
time, he could try to improve
himself and it did not
end in colossal failure, like it
did with the weight-gain
fiasco.

Note the [SETTINGS].
This was considered
a type of success
back then.

inexplicable to me.

In front of King Kong I was suddenly not afraid to admit that I had dreams and ambitions. I knew I would not be laughed at and so I was not afraid to say what I thought...or even to make mistakes. I knew that I could try to be better, because if I stumbled, he would just grunt, "You want help or not?" and not judge my attempts.

Most importantly, a friend like King Kong made me want to be a better person, so that I would deserve a friend like him.

But at that age, who has the words to say all these things?

With pimples blooming on our 14-year-old faces and hair sprouting out of strange...um...places... we were too tongue-tied and amazed to say much. But although he was never one for fancy words, King Kong gave all of us the impression that he was street-smart. Somehow, he seemed to know where he was going. We knew that whatever the future held, he was going to be all right. He was probably going to be a gangster chief or a fabulously rich Chinese businessman—you know, the sort with a sexy wife who was a former Miss Chinatown. And he would wear a big jade ring and grow a long fingernail on his last finger.

As for me, I never saw anything exciting in my future. I would close my eyes and see skyscrapers...and slick, futuristic cars...and even flying cars, like in *The Fifth Element* or *Back to the Future*...and in

Just because he gained enlightenment and took the bull by the horns, change is still gradual. There are some deep-rooted issues.

[THEME] Change & Transition.

shocking, but it does lift the [mood] and lighten the [Atmosphere], bringing a return of the light-hearted storytelling [STYLE].

[THEME]: Despite his successes with free will, when it comes to his social life, he is relying on fate.

the middle of everything new and futuristic and exciting, there was skinny and scrawny me. Just the same as when I was in school. And now. [Internal Conflict]

I mean, you always read about the skinny wimps who make it big, right? Woody Allen...Bill Gates...

Adolf Hitler...cabinet ministers...

I mean, on TV and in the newspapers, you always read all these success stories of how a nerdy, gawky, little nothing guy suddenly makes it fantabulously RICH and POWERFUL because what nature did not give him in biceps, triceps, deltoids and glutes (indicates all these areas), it compensated for with brains and money-sense.

So 15 years later, you see all these skinny, scrawny sorts that your sister used to run away from, screaming...suddenly escorting top models and actresses to charity galas in tabloid photos.

And I used to wonder: WHAT ABOUT ME?

Yes, what about me? When was MY turn?

Huat Bee starts changing into a body-hugging, lurex shirt, bell-bottom pants and platform heels. One of the stagehands comes out and helps to gel his hair as he talks. ENTERTAINING! He'll look quite funny, and allows him to be self-deprecating again.

I just needed something good to happen to me.

I needed to quickly grow out of these horrible, frightening teenage years and leave all these nightmares behind. [CONFLICT: self vs. body]

I mean, the teenage years are absolutely no fun for a skinny, scrawny guy.

SCENE 5

HUAT BEE My worst nightmares were about dating girls.
Everyone was dating.
School swimmers. Top students. Dumb jocks—
stupid muscular boys with Nestum¹¹ for brains.
Everyone had a girl to make goo-goo eyes with—
everyone except me.

Disco music comes on. Huat Bee dances a bit.
I mean, who didn't have a girlfriend whom they
could bring to all the hip disco parties?
All the guys seemed to have no problems finding
girlfriends who, at least, had one of the following
attributes: was, one, either very pretty; or, two,
had a great body—i.e. her body was very “well-
developed” for a 14-year-old, never mind if her
face was kind of sweet in a stupid way, 'cos
EVERYBODY would be ogling at her “assets”
anyway, so who cared what she said...and if
you really had no choice, you went for the third
kind...the really brainy and funny girl with a great
personality—but not too ugly, please—so people
would say admiringly, “So good one, he can copy
homework and lesson notes from her, and maybe
next time, she can even support him financially.”
Only I was not the kind of boy the girls had in
mind when they were thinking of guys to date.
I mean...imagine me...at 14.
Um, like 30 pounds lighter. More pimples. Another
pair of thick, black, plastic-rimmed glasses. Hair

Hilarious, because he is
being irrational. That is
not the purpose of a
girlfriend!

BUT. We all go through this
phase at some point of
our lives, making him
very relatable. We can't
help but like him.

sticking out over my ears, which also stuck out...
Like a short-sighted, anorexic chinchilla with fur
problems. *Hilarious [visual imagery]*

Get the picture?

Cute in an only-Mother-Theresa-could-love-him
kind of way.

Well, anyway, back to the girl problems...So
we were in junior college now...you arrived at
parties—if you were so lucky to be invited—and
they were all there in their new polyester bell-
bottoms and platform shoes. And me?

Well...I had spent the whole week scouting Arab
Street and People's Park for the highest platform
shoes—two-toned leather, okay—and wide, sexy
flared trousers with a thick belt boasting a HUGE,
chunky metal buckle—I tell you that buckle was
so big it could kill a cow with one swing—and yes,
also a body-hugging nylon shirt. No body to hug
really...but who was I to fight the wave of fashion
victims, right?

An adolescent John Travolta with pimples going to
win the Saturday Night Fever contest...all cocky
and confident until...one by one they asked me,
“So Hay Bee...who you come with?”

Then I'd kind of smile apologetically and shrug my
shoulders.

Once I tried to lie. I said, “Oh...er, I came with
Julie. She's, uh, in the toilet...she's an exchange
student from, uh, Hawaii!”

I regretted it the moment it came out. But Hawaii

was the most exotic place I could think of because all my friends seemed to think that hula girls were very sexy.

[ATMOSPHERE]:
uncomfortable &
Awkward.

We pity him for
shooting himself in
the foot like that.
With every lie, he
cringe even more as
he digr a deeper grave.

[REPETITION]
With every "and they
waited", we get more
and more uncomfortable.
The suspense also heightens
as we wonder how he is
going to save himself from
this mortifying situation.

But my lie backfired when they all decided to wait to meet her, 'cos I suppose they wanted to meet the creature who would agree to date me.

And they waited.

And they waited.

"Um...she's probably making sure that her, um... bowels are very clean. She's a very particular kind of girl, you see...and...she's had, um, food poisoning this morning."

I could tell from their looks that they were all very concerned for her...

"Um, it's not really very serious lah. Those hula girls, they are built solid...like military tanks. Well, um, their, um, digestive systems are anyway..."

(embarrassed) Ooo...

And they waited.

(cringing) And waited.

(looking at his watch) And waited.

Finally one of the girls offered to go and check to make sure that she hadn't gone unconscious or something...

And off she went...

"Eh! Uh..." Oh well...

Then she came back and said that there was no one in the toilet.

So then I had to act like I had been stood up by this beautiful, curvaceous, really cute foreign

exchange student who never existed—which was 10 times more humiliating than if I had just shut up and shrugged my shoulders.

And it taught me a lesson: if you're a loser, it's better to just smile and not say anything.

Silence is still best.

The music changes. A stagehand enters, helps Huat Bee to put on a vest and places a short, crew-cut wig on his head.

It's a good lesson.
Alas, he realises this
but ~~dad~~ does not truly
learn it.
[SEE: ACT 1 SCENE 6]

SCENE 6

HUAT BEE And the teen years sped by faster as parties and exams whipped by...Soon King Kong and I were enlisted in the army.

Here's the funny thing: King Kong made it to the commandos. And so did I!

I mean...I told them, "Look, sir, I am not fit, sir. I mean that mortar launcher weighs more than me, sir!"

But would they listen? Nooo way...

They said, "You are fit what...your ECA record shows you played rugby before..."

(aside) If they only knew how. "And then you also joined swimming..." (aside) Only for a month, but that was when I finally realised that bones and skin sink...So based on my "very active ECA record", most of which involved gardening, library work and debating, I made it to commando school.

How shall I describe it?

Remember that earlier scene where I ran screaming with the rugby ball?

Well, my feeling of terror was something like that.

*unfortunate
that he can not
escape this situation*

Only this terror lasted two and a half years. Needless to say, I wasn't having a great time during NS¹².

And my social life wasn't exactly a blast either.

So one day, I found myself arriving at another party in a really rotten mood.

Someone on the bus had called me "little boy". She

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And my social life wasn't exactly a blast either.

So one day, I found myself arriving at another party in a really rotten mood.

Someone on the bus had called me "little boy". She

said, "Um, little boy...can you help me ring the bell? My hands are full of shopping bags."

Little boy! I was bloody 19 years old! If I'd been in China, I'd have been married with three children! Anyway, I knew I was going to be further aggravated at the party by that usual question again: "Hi, Hay Bee...you come with anyone?"

So when the first person asked me, I turned to her seriously and said, "I was supposed to. But she died!"

Beat. Huat Bee looks almost stunned by his own statement. Did not learn his lesson from the last scene.

Dunno why I said it.

[REPETITION]

With each repetition
he shifts from
excuses to truth.

I supposed I was tired.

I suppose I had given up hope.

[TONE]: BITTER.

I suppose I wanted them to leave me alone and never ask me again...

*Making the story up
on the fly.*

(seriously telling his fake story to an enraptured audience at the party) "You see, I had been dating Annette for 10 years already. Actually we were evidence that he is betrothed when we were young. Actually, even before lying, we were born, our parents had agreed that we were to be man and wife, but Annette's family is very rich and sent her away to study in Canada, and we saw each other only during the holidays. She grew up to be so beautiful...her face was smooth and radiant...her hair was black, thick and lustrous...and she had the smile of an angel! I was so in love with Annette. And how I waited for her to come home so that she could meet all my friends. I had wanted to surprise all of them with my fiancé...oh, didn't

LUDICROUS.

He's clearly a very skilled storyteller.

utter nonsense. Why would she fly when sick with Leukemia?

[MESSAGE] : Treat everyone as a significant person with feelings.

[DICTION] : Shows how rarely this happens. And this is what happens to people who are laughed at and never taken seriously. It is Devastating.

I mention it? Annette and I got formally engaged during the summer of her 16th birthday. Um...16 wasn't very young for Annette...she's uh, very, um... well-developed. Anyway, I brought her to the Satay Club¹³ and there along the esplanade, with the wind blowing through her long, lustrous black hair, under the first peeping stars of the twilight hours...I put an engagement ring on her finger.

But things were never meant to be for Annette and I...One day I received a letter from Canada. Annette was stricken with leukaemia! I was totally destroyed. I wanted to go...but I had to sit for my final exams.

[Her family struggled to keep her alive so that we could meet one last time...but she died a week before coming home to attend the party with me.]

By the end of my story, there were six girls crying and a whole bunch of guys, whom I had never met, came around and patted my shoulder sympathetically.

It was such a horrible lie. But for once, everybody paid attention to me. *Sad that he has to resort to this to be treated like a person.*

For once, I realised what it was like to be regarded as a living, breathing person with a life, with relationships and love in his life...instead of a cartoon which everyone laughed at.

And I enjoyed it!

Except that a few weeks later, when I met a girl I really did like, I was terrified that someone would blurt out about my fictitious girlfriend who had died. I didn't want to have to lie to Nelly.

¹³ A now-demolished open-air food centre located at Queen Elizabeth Walk, filled with hawkers selling satay, a popular local dish of meat skewers

SCENE 7

HUAT BEE Actually I met Nelly through King Kong. She was someone King Kong brought out on an outing with another four of us army guys.

Actually there was another girl in the group. But when Nelly appeared, no one paid attention to the plain-looking girl any more. Group dating can be a very cruel game.

But from the very moment I met Nelly, I knew that something momentous was going to happen.

Nelly had eyes that sparkled when she laughed. It wasn't just her silky hair and perfect skin. It wasn't just her sparkling white teeth and sunlit smile. She wasn't even beautiful in a conventional way...but she was glowing from the inside with life.

Incandescent.

The other guys were stumbling over themselves trying to please her, wanting to impress her, dying for a little hint of her attention.

As for me, I was never quite equipped with these courtship skills, because I had always considered myself out of the competition anyway.

So I remained silent. *He finally learns.* *And it pays off.*

As silent as the other plain girl who was suddenly left out.

And because we were outsiders, we began to talk. And we began to make little nonsense jokes. And we began to enjoy ourselves in a relaxed and spontaneous way. Partners in misery trying to make

the best of the moment.

Twice, beautiful Nelly looked over and smiled at me.

Twice, I was struck dumb involuntarily.

Finally, Nelly managed to position herself next to me and said, "It's nice of you to keep Carol company."

"Oh, she's a nice person, but she's a bit shy," I said softly.

"She's a nice person, but she's not shy," Nelly whispered. "The guys just don't talk to her because she's not pretty. They should be more considerate..."

I was stunned. Nelly said all these things without any sense of pride or boastfulness. She was so openly honest, so plainly perceptive, I felt like pouring my soul out to her. I felt like saying, "Me too! Me too! I am a fantastic guy but nobody sees deep inside this skinny, small body! Nobody is interested in me! Nobody wants to date me! NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME!"

[FEELING - EXCITED]

He realises that
Nelly might be a
girl who would see
him for who he is.

But all I did was smile. And in typical Hay Bee fashion, I kept silent.

And if Nelly was honest, she was also direct. She told me, "You want to help me with my birthday party or not? It's this Saturday."

I could see the other guys wanting to jump forward and volunteer. But she wasn't asking them. She was asking me.

I nodded silently, noticing the murderously envious looks in the eyes of the other guys—including King Kong.

He is sensitive enough
to notice.

the best of the moment.

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He is sensitive enough to notice.

So, helpfully, I spoke up. "Um, King Kong is also very good at organising parties!" I blurted. King Kong grinned like a chimpanzee.

"Oh, I think I have enough help for now," Nelly said sweetly, smiling at King Kong. "Too many cooks spoil the broth!"

I had NO IDEA what kind of broth she wanted to cook with me...but I was excited, nervous and terrified, all at the same time.

When the group split up, I went off with King Kong, who lived near my home.

He was silent for a long while.

Finally I said, "That Nelly, she is quite a nice girl, huh?"

"Um," he mumbled.

"She's quite smart also ya?"

"Um," he mumbled again.

"She's..."

"Will you stop talking about her?" King Kong snapped.

"But why? I thought she was your friend..."

"You got her interested in you already...so don't keep reminding me, okay..."

"Got her? Eh, wait a minute...she just asked me to help with her birthday party, not to marry her. You seow¹⁴ or what?"

"Ah, forget it. Don't talk about it already lah..."

"You interested in her, is it?" I asked.

"No lah...no lah...a girl like that where will go out with monkey like me..." he replied sarcastically.

Took a metaphorical statement and turned it literal → his brain stopped working because of a girl.

*TENSION &
SUSPENSE

[CHARACTERISATION]:
Low self esteem.

HB cherishes his friendship with KK over Nellie, that he is being self-sacrificial.

↓
PRIDE.

In picking HB, KK perceives it as him being rejected. He wants to be chosen by Nellie, not have her given to him by HB. Similar to when HB felt rejected by the Rugby team.

"If you're interested, I won't go and help her with her party lah... I will call her and cancel my appointment. Then you go and help her lah..."

"No—need—your—pity!" King Kong was really offended now.

"But what you want me to do? I already asked her if you could help but..."

"Oi, you heard me or not? I said, NO—NEED—YOUR—PITY!"

"I am not pitying you. It's just that you seem to be saying that I potong jalan¹⁵ this girl from you when—"

"I told you already, I don't want to talk about her any more! Okay? Subject closed!"

"No, it's not closed. You are angry at me for something I didn't even do..."

"You know what? You are a really irritating little hay bee! You are more irritating than a blood-sucking mosquito. I wish I could smack you with one hand and make you shaddap¹⁶ forever!"

"Then why don't you do it? Just do it lah!" I had had enough of it. Here was my best friend saying that he wanted to do what all the other bullies were doing to me at school. I was really upset and crying inside. But I was also so very angry because I felt that King Kong was being so unfair. "You want to smack me, just smack! Don't just talk!"

King Kong raised his fist and I cowered behind raised hands.

Then he said something I will never forget. He

15 [Malay] Literally "to cut a [new] road", used in the context of someone stealing another person's girlfriend

16 [Singlish] Shut up

Unfair.

said, "I really liked her, you traitor, you. That's why I brought her out with us. Damn you! You are a bloody moron!" he said. **Tone : Angry & hurt**

And with that he turned to leave.

"King Kong..." I said, mortified. I didn't know he liked her so much...

*Said in the heat of the moment.
He is emotional & blinded by rage.*

["If you ever get in my way again," King Kong said, "I swear I will trash you." **Tone: Aggressive**

Then he walked away.

I remember seeing King Kong's back blurring behind my tears as he walked away from me. But there was no one around to comfort me. King Kong was my only true friend. And somehow I had ruined that friendship.

SCENE 8

HUAT BEE All the way till Saturday, I wrestled with my conscience. **[Internal Conflict]**

DILEMMA

On the one hand, King Kong was my best friend.
 On the other hand, Nelly was such a wonderful person.
 On another hand, King Kong saw her first.
 On another hand, she chose me to help her.
 Hmm, I'm running out of hands here.
 But then again King Kong really liked her.
 But...but she was prettier than anyone I could ever dream of dating. And she saw me for who I was. And she liked what she saw. And King Kong would find many girls who liked rugby players anyway and...
 There was no fight.

MATURITY

In my desperation to lay claim to the girlfriend of my dreams, I made a whole list of excuses to dump the feelings of my best friend.

And so on Saturday morning, with a happy but slightly guilty heart, I went to Nelly's home to help her.

I met two other friends of Nelly's—both girls. For some reason, they really liked the fact that I was funny and friendly—and that made Nelly even more possessive of my company. At one point while she was laughing heartily, she reached out and grabbed my arm playfully.

At that moment, I swore never to wash that spot again. Not even if it grew mouldy and fell off...

[Hyperbole] He is so desperate for a relationship that every little thing distracts him.

At 3pm when all the others were supposed to arrive, I began to get anxious.

For the whole week, King Kong had stopped talking to me. I was miserable. I was also wondering if he would turn up for the party. I was quite sure he would not show up as he had a side that was very proud and easily offended. [CHARACTERISATION]

But he did show up. Only he avoided me totally and kept to the parts of the room I wasn't in. I tried to go over to King Kong to say hi. I really hated the tension that was building between us. But just as I brought myself next to him, Nelly came into the room announcing that her dad had forgotten to collect her birthday cake, and to speed things up she was going with him, to jump out of the car and pick it up so he wouldn't have to park.

Then Nelly turned to me and announced to the guests, "While I am gone, Huat Bee will be the host of the party!"

All eyes were on me. I heard one of the guys saying, "Who the hell is Huat Bee?"

Another girl answered, "It's just that Hay Bee guy. Didn't know Nelly knew him."

Inside, my heart swelled with pride that Nelly had appointed me her representative in absentia.

King Kong made his way to the corner of the room farthest away from me. I knew that this was not a good time to make up with him.

Besides, I was busy. I had to keep the music going, and keep the drinks flowing, and keep the

Distracted again.

guests circulating. Nelly had given me a job and I intended to do it well.

Nelly and her father were gone for about half an hour when there was a phone call. Nelly's mother picked up the phone.

We heard an exclamation. And then suddenly there was wailing.

We were all confused and silent.

Then we heard the bad news.

There had been an accident.

Nelly's father was badly injured. And Nelly had died on the spot.

Long pause. Lights fade to black, except for a spot.

[LANGUAGE]:
short sentence
structure. Also,
succinct sentences.
With every fullstop, there
is a natural but loaded
pause as suspense and
anticipation increases.

↗[ATMOSPHERE] TENSE.

SCENE 9

HUAT BEE When you joke about serious things, you have to be very very careful.

Sometimes heaven hears.

And sometimes you get punished for things you say carelessly. *This is irrational, but he is overwhelmed with grief [FEELINGS] so it is understandable.*

I used to be a clown because life didn't give me many options.

[THEME] Fate vs Free Will
Because he feels guilty, he thinks powers greater than him have a bad to play in this situation.

But I was vain and I was attention-seeking... and I made up a girlfriend who had died on me.

And then Nelly died. *→ This is a [LOGICAL FALLACY].*

Huat Bee looks up seriously and talks to God.

I want to ask you something!

You NEVER listened to me, never gave me the things I asked for.

So why were you listening when I was saying something stupid! You were NOT supposed to be there when I told them about my girlfriend who had died!

He seems to be blaming God/Fate, but he is really blaming himself
Oh Nelly... Nelly...

I went outside and I sat on the curb by the road.

Huat Bee sits and stares. And he continues to stare.

I do not know how long I sat there. I did not notice the people passing by.

I just kept seeing Nelly beaming and smiling and saying, "When I am gone, Huat Bee will host the party!"

I felt a familiar arm around my shoulder.

I didn't look up. *Just like the very first time.*

We didn't say anything for the longest time.

Then finally I said, "I killed her, King Kong. I killed her."

"What the hell are you talking about?" King Kong said.

"I killed her because I told everyone that I had a girlfriend who died...and then, when she began to like me, she was cursed by what I said."

"Nonsense lah. You were just joking. Everyone jokes..."

"How many people make up lies about their girlfriends dying? I am jinxed, you know. I am not good for anything..." [THEME] FATE VS. FREE WILL.

"Just relax, okay...just relax," King Kong said seriously. "I also wished her many bad things.

Because I was so jealous of you...and I couldn't blame you. So I blamed her for liking you more than she liked me."

I turned to King Kong and said, "I thought that you were angry with me."

"No lah, I was jealous of you. I cannot be angry with you for long." King Kong looked embarrassed admitting that.

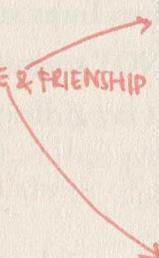
"You don't have to be jealous of me, King Kong. I am nothing compared to you."

"If you are really nothing, then a girl like Nelly wouldn't have bothered at all."

"No lah...she just saw me as a funny friend."

"You never date a girl before, right?" King Kong asked, looking at me with a fierce intensity.

[THEME]: LOVE & FRIENDSHIP



"Why do you say that?"

"Because if you'd ever dated a girl before, then you would have known that Nelly really, really liked you. Not like a brother...not because you are a joker. She really liked you..."

Beat. *→ Felt rejected. Wanted to be chosen.*

"Why did you think I was so jealous?"

As the full impact of his words and the overwhelming greatness of the loss sank in, I realised that I had just lost what could have been the greatest love of my life... *[FEELING]*
GRIEF

Huat Bee dissolves into helpless sobbing. When he finally regains composure, he wipes his eyes.

And through it all, King Kong sat by me and kept his hands on my shoulder. *[THEME] LOVE & FRIENDSHIP*

very supportive of KK, especially since he is experiencing loss as well. She might not chosen him, but it does not change his feelings for her.

SCENE 10

HUAT BEE

At Nelly's funeral, her parents wanted to let as many friends as possible remember her. I asked to read a poem I had written for Nelly. It went something like this:

"Mourn me not when I'm dead and gone,
I was not born to sorrow;
I was born beneath a laughing star,
To brighten your tomorrows.

And if tomorrow should ever come
That my life should cease,
Then listen to the echoes of
My laughter in the breeze."

After the funeral, King Kong saw me from the aisle and gave me a thumbs up for trying to read my poem. I had only gotten as far as the third line before I broke down. He had, in fact, read it the night before and said, "Oi...wah, really meaningful hor...if one day I die, can use your poem or not?" I told him that I didn't think it was funny. But he made me promise to allow him to use it as an epitaph. Just in case.

As the funeral service ended and we finally stood by the church door facing life anew, I had the distinct feeling that I had passed through another doorway into something different at last, approaching somewhere I was never going to return from.

And as each of my friends trooped out into

[FORESHADOWING]
HB brings this up
in the story for a
reason.

[THEME] Loss changes us,
and sometimes,
change is
permanent.

the afternoon sunlight, I sensed the fleeting preciousness of our lives on this earth. I was almost frightened by the fragility of all I saw around me. I suddenly, at 19 years of age, thought I finally understood mortality. I was terrified, and yet exhilarated.

And it was only King Kong's reassuring smile from amidst the crowd ahead of me that gave me the strength to keep pushing on with the flow of human traffic. [THEME : LOVE & FRIENDSHIP].

← [THEME : FATE VS FREE WILL]
choosing, once more, to take control of his life instead of being buffeted by the waves of Fate.

Consider It:

If you are the actor, how would you act out this scene?
There are no stage directions at all.
How would you capture the somberness of the situation?

ACT 2

SCENE 1

An official manila envelope with the NUS logo flashes on the screen. Huat Bee runs in, whooping with excitement.

[ACTIVE VOICE]

Very contrast in energy & atmosphere vs. venu in the last scene.

HUAT BEE

It's heeeeere! It's heeeeere!

Oh my goodness...God, let me in...let me in...I promise I'll be good forever...just let me in!

Huat Bee tears open the letter and reads.

"Dear Mr Lim Huat Bee,

We are pleased to offer you a place in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for the Academic Year 1987/88.

Please report to campus on 4th July at Yusof Ishak House to get your orientation pack and then proceed to the Administration Block for official registration and payment of fees.

A copy of the prospectus for the faculty is enclosed and we look forward to seeing you on the first day of the new semester."

YES! YES! YESSSS!

Huat Bee looks up, exhilarated. He does a little tribal victory dance.

The lights fade to black. The babble of a crowd of people gets louder and louder. Various faces are flashed on the screen. Many of them are skinny, scrawny, geeky, underdog-looking types. They are in their early twenties and all carry folders and files. They are in the sloppy-jeans-T-shirt-bermudas

"uniform" of the local undergrad. A lively rock'n'roll piece accompanies the university pastiche.

Lights come on. Huat Bee is dressed like the other undergrads. His T-shirt says "Another Brilliant Mind Spoiled by Education" and his bermudas have a smart tartan design and are just a little too baggy.

I love the university.

There are so many of my kind here!

I mean, talk about shrimps...here is a whole colony of spaced-out hay bee! *No longer standing out.* [THEME] CHANGE.

At the uni, it was like we were finally allowed into a secret society where size didn't really matter any more. *All the previous stereotypes no longer apply.* *These are the people and he is good enough.* ↗ Oh man...I was in shrimp heaven!

King Kong made it to Bazard—Business Administration.

I, as you know, made it to Arts. I did Literature, Philo and Lang. All the subjects people said couldn't earn me a living—"tang boh jiak¹⁷!"

And because King Kong and I chose different faculties, it suddenly seemed that we were swept into two different worlds.

I hardly got to see King Kong any more. It was a bit weird at first because we'd been spending so much time together in school. But here in a totally new environment, things felt...different.

[THEME] change & transition.
Not all change is good (see green highlighted paragraph)

some change is discomforting.

SCENE 2

HUAT BEE It's funny how they call the first week at university "orientation".

It's the most disorientating week you can imagine.

A stagehand enters and dumps Huat Bee with a knapsack, more files and papers, a silly-looking orientation cap and another stack of brochures.

You are herded like sheep into areas where different society reps shout at you to try to get you to sign up...Literary Society...cultural groups...

religious groups...musical groups...Students' Union...

They shove all kinds of things at you...files...instructions...maps...wah lau eh...

Huat Bee opens up a map.

Where the hell is this place...I mean, where the heck is LT 11, which is...two right turns after AS5...which is behind the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies?

Huat Bee looks at another list of names.

And who the hell are these professors?

Are they qualified to teach me or not?

Aiyah...sign up lah...sign up lah...all my friends are in this course anyway.

So at least one day when I skip a lecture to watch a 3am screening of the Oscars or the World Cup...at least there'll be friends to photostat notes from.

There, milling about with three thousand other freshies in the hallowed halls of academia, we were

[ACCUMULATION]
To show how
overwhelming it is
for HB.

[THEME] change & Transition
 ↳ Can be exciting but terrifying.
 ↳ Especially if you do not have a lot of control over the situation.

But, those who are more empathetic would realise that this is not trivial to him.

Once again, it is a sign of fitting in, being perceived as normal, and he is no longer teased for his size.
 SIZE NO LONGER MATTERS.

all feeling as intelligent as blur shrimps in space. And yet, in spite of all the things we did not know on the first day we stepped into the university, we had this vague feeling that this experience was

going to change each of us so much. We were all picking paths that would take us to new and exciting destinations in life. The only problem was, we really didn't know where exactly we were going to end up.

Or maybe, it wasn't just the uni that changed us. Maybe it was just that time in our lives where we were ready to change anyway.

But there were many people to meet...

"Hi...I'm Huat Bee..."

"Hello...Huat Bee..."

"Oh hi! Yes, we're doing the same subjects. I'm Huat Bee. And you?"

Beat.

It was the strangest experience in my life thus far...

EVERYBODY CALLED ME HUAT BEE.

Wow. *Hilarious to audience that he is [FEELING] so excited about something as trivial as this.*

Not Hay Bee...not Hay Bee Hiam¹⁸...not Sambal

Hay Bee¹⁹...not Cicak Kering²⁰...

I was, finally, just Huat Bee.

It felt good to leave the shrimp behind.

And the surprising thing I learned about myself was that up till then, I'd never realised how much I resented that name. *[ANAGNORISIS] Part of growth process → learning about*

Huat Bee. It was a hunched little piece of dried and salted nothing. It wasn't even a dish. Not even a

18 Spicy dried shrimp

19 Dried shrimp in chilli sauce

20 Dried lizard

vital seasoning. Just chewy bits of flavoured, dried, dead fibre. And in terms of flavouring, who wants to use hay bee when they can afford dried scallops or oysters?

Names are [symbolic].
They represent us.
To him, this nickname
represented he thought
was bad or flawed about
himself. [THEME]
So, with this new [change],
he is symbolically
shrugging off this
name and the shackles
he associated with it.

As Hay Bee, I was not only a piece of nothing, I
was a second-rate piece of nothing. [REPETITION] &
clarification for
emphasis
Hay Bee...it was a name that trapped me with its
insignificance and uselessness.

I never wanted to be Hay Bee again in all my life.
Change of lighting. Light-hearted rock'n'roll comes
on. Many images of university life flash on the
screen, mainly of undergraduates doing silly things.

SCENE 3

HUAT BEE

[THEME] FATE VS. FREE WILL.

He gave the nickname so much power
over his life, though. Did not choose Free Will.

Anyway, I was now running with a new pack of friends—a better class of friends, I thought, because they did not call me nicknames.

Well, actually, they did have a name for me. Instead of Huat Bee...they started calling me Huat-ers.

Don't ask me how it got started or what it meant.

Someone just said, "Hey Huat-ers, can lend me your notes or not?" And all of a sudden I was Huat-ers.

I thought that was quite sophisticated. Certainly not an Ah Ter, Ah Kow nickname.

And certainly not that awful old nickname which I refused to acknowledge any more.

As for King Kong and I, we tried to keep in touch.

After all, we were on the same campus. But our busy and hectic class schedules never seemed to match.

After several foiled attempts to just catch up for lunch, I finally made an appointment with him to lunch with my new gang and me. I was proud to show him off to my new friends and was proud to show my new friends off to him. I was totally sure they would click.

I hadn't seen him for two or three months. So I was eagerly looking forward to it.

Finally the day arrived. My new friends had all been briefed about "my long-time best friend from school" and what a great guy Hin Kong was. I was careful never to call him King Kong as I was sure he would not want his nickname to follow him to

the university.

Then, from a distance, I saw his familiar, loping walk. Hin Kong flashed a big smile. Somehow he looked very different now.

His hair was fashionably cut, he had lost a bit of fat and had obviously been weight training, and he seemed to take a lot more care with his dressing now. In short, he looked pretty cool.

"Hi there, HAY BEE!" he yelled out down the corridor.

I couldn't believe my ears. I could feel everyone in the passageway turn around to look at me.

One of the girls in my group giggled. Another guy whispered to his girlfriend and they chuckled too.

I jumped up from my chair and marched towards him.

↗ [TONE] ANGRY

When I was near enough, I hissed, "Don't you ever call me that name here! What's wrong with you?"

Hin Kong's arms, which were half-poised to give me a friendly, buddy hug, just froze and shrivelled in midair.

Hin Kong looked at me with surprise in his eyes. I could read him well enough to know what he was thinking: his best friend had changed and he didn't know if it was for the better.

When we got to the table, I introduced Hin Kong to everyone.

"Hi, I'm Norman," Hin Kong said. "Most people here find Norman easier to remember than Hin Kong. Well, unless I tell them that my nickname is

So, he thinks he has shrugged off the name but in reality, he is still tied to the negative feelings associated. He still gives the name power over him.

[THEME] changed Transition.

KK's comfort with his name is a sharp [contrast] to HB's feelings to his own.

This [juxtaposition] of their attitudes shows us a very clearly what happens if someone chooses fate or free will.

It took HB a long time to reach this stage, and finally tell jokes about how he got this nickname.

Very sensitive & sweet of him. Later, when he changes & HB does not like it, he does not extend the same level of empathy & care.

school was King Kong."

The group laughed. They were charmed by his open, friendly nature. Obviously Hin Kong—Norman—had no hang-ups about his nickname.

As I looked at him making his introductions, I suddenly realised why.

Norman had totally reinvented himself. He was a survivor. He was flexible. He was a chameleon that could change to suit his surroundings. He was no longer the gorilla-like rugby player we knew in school. He was neatly groomed, decent-looking, attentive and was the sort of guy anybody would be happy to be friends with.

He could laugh at his old nickname because he had totally outgrown his old self, so he could step aside and laugh at what he used to be.

This was really bad news for me. I mean, if I was so sensitive about my old nickname, what did that mean? That I hadn't really left the Hay Bee behind? One of the girls asked, giggling, if I was called Hay Bee in school.

I'd never noticed it before, but this girl really had an irritating habit of giggling a lot.

Norman quickly said that it was just a silly spur-of-the-moment thing he had said thoughtlessly. He was trying to downplay the damage.

The irritating giggler said that it was such a cute nickname, the whole gang should call me Hay Bee. "You don't mind, do you, Huat-ers?" the girls chorused.

"No lah, Hay Bee is such a good sport," one of the guys chuckled. "Oops...see how catchy this new name is?"

I laughed along. What was there to do?

"Actually Huat-ers is fine with me," I said, but everybody was too busy laughing to hear me.

From the corner of my eyes, I could see Norman not daring to look my way. I think he understood why I had been so upset. I think he regretted what he had done, but it was too late.

After lunch, he made his excuses to leave. Before he went off, he came up to me and quietly said, "Sorry." Sorry.

What did that mean?

I knew what Norman meant.

But what did it mean to me?

Was he sorry that I wasn't any bigger so I could beat up anyone who still called me names? Or was he sorry that I hadn't changed enough so that I didn't need to feel inferior any more? Maybe he was saying that I was just such a sorry pile of bones and skin. *HB is such a slow learner!* *still relying on fate!* Or maybe he was just sorry that my life and fate happened to be the way they were and I seemed so helpless to raise myself up and walk away from the skinny, scrawny ghost of a teenager that reminded everyone of a dried crustacean.

I didn't respond to Hin Kong's apology.

"Sorry" must surely be one of the hardest words to understand.

*THIS IS IRRATIONAL &
UNFAIR. CHILDISH.*

SCENE 4 *Change of lighting and mood. A group of people are singing the birthday song.*

HUAT BEE

I didn't meet up with Norman much in university. The only other time we met for any length of time was at his 21st birthday. But it was a big and noisy party and we didn't get a chance to talk.

By then, Norman had many new friends, and a whole bunch of admiring acquaintances. He was admired because of his charisma and humour, but more so because he had a girlfriend who was in the finals of the Miss Singapore competition. She looked like a prettier version of Nelly, and Norman looked like the happiest guy on earth.

Well, he should have been. I was told that he already had a flourishing insurance sales sideline while he was studying. His girlfriend, who was studying accounting, also helped him to set up a small company dealing with properties. Norman was already playing in a big field of big guys—and we were not even out of school yet.

Norman was going to be something in life.

No, he was going to be SOMETHING—in capital letters.

Me? I was having trouble just getting my essays in on time—and remembering not to use the same excuse twice on the same tutor for handing in work late.

Just like what he said/
predicted in Act 1 Sc.4,
except better, because
she is more than Miss
Chinatown.

[THEME] Fate vs. Free Will
HB does not seem to
understand that this
happens for KK because
he MADE it work.
His girlfriend can help
him but if he did not
put in the effort, it
would not help.
KK chose Free Will.

SCENE 5 A stagehand enters and puts a graduation gown and cap on Huat Bee.

HUAT BEE When we finally graduated, I decided that I needed to make a positive move in my life. **FINALLY!**

[THEME] As he enters another period of change & transition, he is finally choosing Free Will over Fate.

Sitting there with the thousands of other graduates looking silly in our baggy gowns and flying nun hats, I knew that I had come to a point in my life where I had to change things for myself.

I had gotten it all wrong trying to jump the hurdles of a larger and stronger world.

I needed to focus on my strengths. I needed to hone my abilities. I needed to place myself in a position of advantage...put myself in such an unassailable position that all those around me had to simply look up in admiration and admit that I was right all along...they would not argue...they would just do as I said...it was my turn to be big, strong and powerful...it was my turn to call the shots!

I decided that I was going to be a primary school teacher.

Pause, especially if there is laughter.

You laugh. But it is not funny.

When you are my size, you will find that being among the primary one and two students is very liberating. I am bigger than they are!

And if any of them calls me a name, I can wrestle him to the ground and at least have a fighting chance of winning the struggle.

[ANAGNORISIS]

He is returning to the old lessons he had learnt from KK.

Although, all the [Ellipses] shows us that he had not quite thought it all out yet.

This is normal; what matters is that he is trying.

And the best part of the whole deal is: in the classroom, THE TEACHER ALWAYS WINS!

Or so I thought. *As we have learnt before, change is never instant or complete. It is a journey.*
Huat Bee's graduation cap and gown are taken off and removed by a stagehand.

I still remember my first day teaching in Primary 2D, the class none of the senior teachers wanted to touch.

My principal had kind of warned me about the class when she looked me up and down, put on a brave smile and said, "Well...the class has its... um...share of peculiar characters...but you'll do fine..." For a split second her smile wavered and she patted me on the shoulder.

I wasn't quite sure if it was encouragement or sympathy.

Huat Bee picks up a stack of files and some books and walks with the principal to the new class. As they approach, the sound of young children talking gets louder and louder.

We heard the class before we actually saw it.

The relief teacher actually sprang out of the doors and grasped and shook my hands gratefully in the way a shipwrecked sailor would thank his rescuers.

The wall of juvenile noise died down as we entered.

Ahh...I said to myself. The little brats have finally felt the presence of one who is in control.

The principal introduced me to the class. All the boys—this was a boys' school—stood up and said good morning. By now, the relief teacher was no

*His confidence is
adorable but
baseless.*

Again,
baseless
assumption

longer in sight.

After greeting me, the boys sat down.

I presumed that they were awed by my self-assured and confident air.

Then the principal took his leave, and I found out that the person with the magical control over the kids wasn't me but the principal. I was just the mouse deer marching ahead of the tiger!

Without so much as a gradual build-up, they all surged up to me at the front of the class in a high-pitched explosion of voices...

"Teacher... Teacher... Raymond call me 'skinny bamboo'!"

"Raymond, don't call him names!"

"Teacher, he started first!"

"Teacher, Hock Seng call me 'smelly egg'!"

"No one is a skinny bamboo... no one is a smelly egg here... will you all please sit down... SIT DOWN!" I yelled.

They scampered like startled cockroaches back to their seats.

"Right... first, we have to mark attendance. I want you all to keep quiet because we have to get the attendance done. Is that understood?"

The ringleader called Raymond put up his hand... "Yes?" Raymond looked pleased that I'd noticed him at last.

"Teacher, I want to go toilet!"

"I want to go pang jeo²¹ also!"

"Cher... 'cher... I want wee wee!"

"Me also! Me also!"

"No, no, no! Nobody is going wee wee till I have taken attendance!"

The little boys then proceeded to very creatively screw their faces in all kinds of agonised expressions to show me how urgent their need to go to the toilet was.

"I will now take attendance..." I announced.

A small little hand shot up.

"What is it this time?" I said tiredly.

"Teacher..." the little boys said, "Wilson just wee wee in his chair."

"Eeeee!" All the boys screeched in unison while poor Wilson clutched his crotch as yellow drops of pee plopped underneath his seat.

And this was only the first 15 minutes into my career as a teacher.

At the end of my first week, I was glad to get a call from Norman. Through the whole flurry of final exams and job applications to our respective industries and results, we had somehow lost touch for almost half a year.

Now Norman had landed himself a high-flying IT job, made new and powerful friends and had just joined the first of a string of expensive country clubs.

I was invited for a little dinner to meet some of his friends.

Lights fade to black.

[JUXTAPOSITION]
of their new careers
for effect.
KK seems to be doing
better, as usual,
whereas HB seems
to be floundering
despite his efforts

SCENE 6 *When lights come up again, Huat Bee is seated on an expensive, plush restaurant-type velvet chair. He is wearing casual jeans and a T-shirt, over which he's been forced to wear an oversized formal jacket (better if he's wearing coat-tails) which is totally mismatched with everything else he is wearing.*

HUAT BEE

[STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS]
 We are hearing his thoughts as they are playing out.
 No filter, no reflection.
 He is extremely uncomfortable & feels out of place.
 Once again, HB feels like he does not belong.

Some people should be shot for forgetting to tell me about their club's dress code.
 But more than that, the club's GM should be shot for allowing this...
Huat Bee holds up the ridiculously large jacket he is wearing.
 I mean, you've got to wear a collar to eat a fancy, over-priced meal?
 And what did that restaurant captain say?
 Um..."This is to maintain the ambience and high standing of our club's restaurant."
 What ambience? I wasn't feeling atmosphere...I was feeling oppressed!
 I tried to use my mobile phone...They offered to take it away—so I wouldn't be bothered while having my meal.
 I looked at the menu. It was in a foreign language.
 Whatever was in English was more about copywriting than about food...
 "A succulent escalope of beef tartare ensconced in a creamy nest of wasabi fluffed potato, drizzled with honey-sage mayonnaise, with a side of brandied apricot chutney liberally dusted with

finely crumbled goat cheese."

You want me to write a poetry review or eat the
bloody thing?

Man, I HATE this jacket!

Huat Bee sniffs at it.

It hasn't been washed in months.

Talk about creating ambience...

Oh oh...someone's talking to me!

Oh, hi...hi...I am Huat Bee...Norman's friend
from school.

Oh yes...his best friend. That's me.

No, he exaggerates. I am just a teacher. You are...
wow. CEO of...oh, you mean that company that's
just been listed. Oh wow.

Hi hi...I'm...

You are...

(to audience) Vice President, American bank.

(as if talking to a bank VP) Lim Huat Bee. I'm a...
in the education business. *Trying to fit in.*

(to audience) Sounds a little bit more impressive
than just "teacher", right?

(as if talking to a variety of other people) Hello. I'm
Huat Bee. Education specialist.

Hi there. Huat Bee. I'm a consultant in education
services.

Lim Huat Bee. Special consultant in information
assimilation services. Ministry of Education.

(to audience) Wah lau. Each one of them was
a Power Ranger in his or her field. CEOs, Vice
Presidents. Regional managers. CFOs. *What the*

HB has spent so much time, energy and effort trying to fit in, trying to find "his people" so that he'd belong.

And he eventually did. But with this one event, he is thrown back into those feelings of being the odd one out again.

Immediately, he feels inferior again. For all that he has changed a lot & grown, an inferiority complex is difficult to overcome.

A confirmation that he was not built for greatness. that mediocrity is his lot in life. Just like the ill-fitting jacket, he would always be ill-fitting.

heck was I doing shaking hands with them?

I didn't even speak the same language.

They spoke in words that had too many numbers with a lot of zeroes in them.

Words like "real estate". Like "blue chips". Like "annual turnover". Like "PE ratios". Like "luxury cars". Like the 60,000-dollar diamond ring a stockbroker's wife wore, which was much admired.

I was a storm-drain guppy thrown into the Pacific Ocean. [METAPHOR] ↳ small, worthless ↳ large, great

It's not that I was jealous of them. I mean who needs their Armani shirts and Versace belts and Rolex watches and Gucci spectacles and...and... Beat.

And I was sitting there squirming in this...

Beat. Huat Bee looks at his incongruous clothes.

Well, heck...yes, I was jealous of them. No, I was more than jealous. I was greener with envy than imperial jade.

But don't get me wrong...it's not the things I was jealous of. I mean, I could have saved up and bought myself a diamond-studded Rolex. On what the MOE pays me, I'd probably have to save up forever—but if there's a will, it can be done...

I was jealous that these confident, big, bright and beautiful people could just sit there...under the crystal chandelier...on expensive velvet chairs... eating off Villeroy and Boch, using Christofle silver and crystal...they were all so...so comfortable in it. And I felt totally out of it. Totally in a different

→ Completely forgot the lesson about having different strengths and paths.

universe.

I know Norman meant to be kind. I know he meant to share.

But did he even notice how much I didn't belong?

I mean, look at him there, expertly picking up the escargot...how he uses the correct fork, how he tilts the shell at such a precise angle...how the succulent, buttered flesh slips out from the shell... how even his bread roll is broken up so expertly into such neat little perfect bits...

How did he get there? And how did I get stuck here?

Was there an instruction booklet he'd read that I'd overlooked? *This is so relatable. Any one who has transitioned to an age of "maturity" would have felt like this at some point.* Suddenly Huat Bee's reverie is interrupted by one of *some* the guests. *This makes HB's character so relatable because we see ourselves in him. His Bildungsroman is ours.* Oh...uh, hi! Well no, this seat here's not taken.

Hi Gabriel. I'm Hay...um, Huat Bee.

You are Norman's...best friend? Oh I see...at work.

I was his best friend in school...or at least he was my best friend. *It is depressing to realise that HB still has a long way to go, that the foundations of his confidence are still so shaky.* He's told you all about me? Well...it must have been a very short story...ha ha...there's nothing much to tell, is there...

Oh, you guys are going to start an e-commerce company together? No, Norman didn't say...

Immediately after the wedding? What wedding?

Norman and Sarah are getting married next month.

I see.

Well, maybe the invitations have just gone out.

Well yes, I'm sure I'll get one. He'd better not

He is completely discombobulated.

[FEELINGS]

With each new revelation, we feel even more tense. We can imagine HB

perceiving each ~~per~~ update as yet another

slap of rejection. ∵ The one consistent fact in his life is no longer there.

The [PARALLELISM] of this ~~alliteration~~ is poignant. The slight differences in [IDIOMS] emphasises all the things HB is upset about.
"get" vs "stuck"
"there" vs "here".

As he unravels, he becomes uncertain about everything he believed to be true. Including the authenticity of their friendship.

forget his old friends...ha ha...

Suddenly there's a perceptible change in Huat Bee's mood and expression. Huat Bee's smile is getting strained.

You're the best man?

Oh.

Well, yes, I'm sure Norman mentioned...

I'm sure...

I see...well, yes. Of course I'll see you at the wedding.

Lighting change.

(to the audience) It's a sad day when you discover that you and your best friend are on roads that have forked in such separate directions.

You suddenly realise that the road had parted long before you noticed it, and now the point of separation is too far behind to go back and re-trace. I had, really, till then, expected to be Norman's best man when he got married.

If I were getting married, he would have been my best man.

A photo of a younger Norman and Huat Bee laughing, with arms around each other's shoulders.

Lights fade to black.

[THEME]
Love & Friendship.
The cost of ~~the~~ deep love
& friendship is ~~in~~ the risk
of pain.

Heartbreaking.

SCENE 7 *In the dark, a phone starts ringing. Lights come up on a telephone seat with a telephone on the pedestal attached to it. It rings for some time. Huat Bee comes in with nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist. His hair is wet.*

HUAT BEE *Ya lah, ya lah...at home the whole day, dowant to call...once I turn the shower on only...*

Hello?

Oh, hi. King Kong...no...no...I was just, well, actually, I just came out of the...sure, sure...I know it's tomorrow. Of course I'll be there.

You must be very busy now. Oh, sorry I couldn't go to the stag party they threw for you at the club last night. Had exam papers to mark. Then this student from my class got into trouble for shoplifting a yo-yo...He had no one to turn to, so

*I had to bail him out. *He is making choices, prioritising what is most important to him.**

*Ya, kids these days... *This is yet another step taken choosing free will over fate. [THEME]**

A favour? Why...sure...um, I mean, what is it?

Beat.

What? Your best man Gabriel has got chicken pox?

Lighting change. Huat Bee turns to the audience.

Right. It's one thing in life to realise that you are no longer your best friend's best friend.

It's quite another thing to be made a spare tyre as well!

Lighting goes back to normal. Huat Bee is gleefully and delightedly pretending to be very sympathetic.

Oh...I am so...sorry to hear that.

Did it hit him bad? I mean, I've heard that some people get the itchy bubbles under the tongue, under the eyelids, in the deep dark corners of unmentionable areas...

Well...what are you going to do?

Me as best man?

Well, I don't think I can...

Well, ya, we are still best friends...

(covering the receiver and addressing the audience)

Can you believe this guy?

(speaking into the receiver) But I really have so many exam scripts to...I was just stealing some time to attend your dinner, you know...It's a really bad time of the year for us teach—

What?

(to the audience) He wants to know if I'm offended because he didn't ask me to be the best man... the nerve!

(exaggeratedly sweet) Noo lah...do you think I am going to be so petty about things?

Aiyah...going there to celebrate as best man or as guest...it's all the same, right? It's just that...

(to the audience) Man, this guy is really pushing his luck!

(to Norman) No, Norms...I really, really am busy with...

Look, why don't you just drive him to the doctor's for a shot of Zovirax...

I mean, then we could plaster him with foundation and no one else will know the difference...

THIS IS DISAPPOINTING. HE
SHOULD HAVE CONTRADICTED,
WORKED THINGS OUT.
FREE WILL IS ABOUT WANTING
TO MAKE THIS FRIENDSHIP WORK.
NOT JUST LETTING WHATEVER
HAPPEN.

[ATMOSPHERE]

Tense. With every
reply, the ~~atmosphere~~
tension in the room
increases.

He bottles up his feelings,
never dealing with the
perceived "Betrayal",
never trying to make the
relationship work.

When KK was angry with
him, he realised he could
not stay angry with HB.

Now that the tables have
turned, HB is not offering
him the same kindness.

[THEME] Love & Friendship
takes WORK & EFFORT!

No, it's not that I don't want to do it...

Look, I told you already, I am not offended!

I am just...

I just feel...

Look, I was not offended, but now I am getting
really irritated.

I'm irritated because you keep saying I am
offended.

And if you keep on doing that, I am going to get
really angry!

Okay! Okay! You really wanna know?

You really wanna know?

If you wanna know, I was really pissed off, man...

I was pissed off because I was your best friend for
12 years. Twelve years, man...and then this guy
pops up...and he knows you for...for...

One year? Is that how long you've known him?

Bloody hell! Now I'm really mad!

Beat.

Well, you'd better have a really good explanation!

Pause.

Mmm.

Mmm.

Uh huh.

Long pause.

Oh. Oh dear.

I didn't know.

I see.

Oh.

Oh, okay.

Yeah, I know you know that I'll always be there.

Right.

I'll be there.

No problem.

Huat Bee puts down the phone. His face is lit up with happiness. Beat. He speaks to the audience.

That guy Gabriel, he's Sarah's only living relative here. His family took care of her when she was suddenly orphaned as a child.

Norms said Sarah couldn't say no to Gabriel when he wanted to be the best man for the wedding.

Norms had wanted ME to be the best man from the start.

I suppose between choosing me as best man, and making his wife happy on their wedding day, there was no choice, was there?

A big grin breaks out on Huat Bee's face.

Norman is so very happy that Gabriel has chicken pox!

Lights fade to black.

[comic relief] after a very tense scene.

comic relief & humour is

so important. These elements help the audience sit through this roller coaster journey, processing all those emotions, without becoming too fatigued.

SCENE 8 *Lights up on Huat Bee reading a very long list.*

HUAT BEE

That he would even
have such a list is
comical. He is so
busy but would waste
time like this is
[IRONIC].

It is a very efficient
way of telling us a
few things though:
KK is becoming wildly
successful in a very
classic way.
So much so that he
has parties for
nonsensical reasons,
like christening a
boat.

A list of excuses you can make when your best friend invites you for occasions filled with people you cannot click with.

A photo of a big, three-storey towkay²²-type house appears on the screen.

Occasion: housewarming.

Place: big towkay mansion in Bukit Timah.

Guest list: about 150 people.

Guest breakdown: family, friends, business associates.

Wanna-go score: 2.5 upon 10.

Reason given for absence: have to mark exam papers.

Note: Norman is not going to buy this excuse a third time...even if it is true.

A photo of a sleek 50-foot yacht appears on the screen.

Occasion: boat christening.

Place: Raffles Marina.

Guest list: about 50 people.

Guest breakdown: very important business associates, even more important business associates, and can-I-suck-up-and-light-your-cigarette-level business associates.

Wanna-go score: 1 upon 10.

Reason given for absence: holding a support group for battered and abused kids which I started for the school. *HB's own life is becoming meaningfully successful. In its own way.*

Note: Norman is sympathetic and sends a

200-dollar cheque to help us along, but says that I have no more excuses to miss his get-togethers.

A photo of the Christmas decor at Raffles Hotel, perhaps of the tree in the main lobby, appears on the screen.

Occasion: Christmas party.

Place: Raffles Hotel.

Guest list: about 250 people.

Guest breakdown: family, friends, business associates, very important business associates, even more important business associates, and let-me-grovel-and-kiss-your-feet-level business associates.

Wanna-go score: nil...0 upon 10.

Reason given for absence...

Reason given for not wanting to go...

Lighting change. Huat Bee picks up the phone.

So you see, Norms, I really won't be able to go.

Who's the kid?

Well, he's one of the boys from school. I'm just making progress with him, drawing him out...

His parents don't care. They just throw money at him and expect him to cope. He's totally introverted, hypersensitive...and really, if you saw him, you'd think he was six instead of 10 years old. Bring him?

I can't. The party is too big. It'll scare him...your parties scare even me!

I'm just taking him to a movie with this other kid whom I hope can be his buddy. You know, like you and I used to be...

Very disappointing of HB.
Once again, he is not
putting in the effort to
make this friendship work.

[THEME - LOVE & FRIENDSHIP]

What do you mean, I can do this any other time?
 It is precisely because it's Christmas that this kid
 needs the company! You have 250 people there.
 They are not likely to get lonely in the Raffles
 Hotel ballroom...

(change of tone, gentler and warmer) Yes, I know.
 You want your best friend there too. But Norms,
 this is more important—not to me but to the boy.
 I hope you understand.

Wait. This is not fair. My students are not more
 important than my old friends. Come on...
 Well, I'm sorry you feel this way, Norms. It also
 means that you feel your frivolities are more
 important than my work!

Yes, frivolities!

Hello?

Hello?

Shit, he hung up.

And he called me a bloody idiot!

How dare he call me a bloody idiot and hang up!

The phone rings again. Huat Bee picks it up.

What?

Well, you are a bloody idiot too.

Ya...

Ya...

I think that's better.

Right.

And you're not a bloody idiot.

Not any more.

Huat Bee looks a little pleased.

[THEME - Love & FRIENDSHIP]
 On the one hand, it
 is adorable that they
 can make up so easily
 and quickly.

↳ On the other hand, it is very
 childish of HB. Would it be so hard to
 explain that he does not like such things
 but would love to meet KK privately?
 The argument was unnecessary.

Consider It:
 How true is this
 statement? If KK's
 parties did not make
 HB feel out of place,
 what is he more likely
 to prioritise?

Once again, it is obvious that KK is the empathetic one. HB is the baby of the friendship.

This is extremely unfair. He could have just told KK, upfront, instead of making him jump through hoops.

Norms and I are going out together. Just like old times. Just the two of us for a drink...probably at an old coffee shop or hawker centre.

He said he knew what was wrong, why I kept trying to avoid his gatherings.

I just don't like big crowds.

Took him more than a decade to realise.

What an idiot.

Lighting change. Huat Bee gets into a simple short-sleeved shirt.

So the day came.

Norms came to pick me up, in a Jaguar as long as his yacht, I swear...

It was deep burgundy in colour...shiny as anything...and the soft cream-coloured leather seats were like velvet clouds that wrapped themselves around you...

Man, I thought, the people at the coffeeshop are going to be so impressed.

"So where are we going?" I asked. "Geylang?"

I meant the soya bean curd coffeeshop that was famous in that infamous district.

Norman looked at me and grinned. "It's better than Geylang. It's a surprise."

We arrived at the entrance of an expensive-looking club.

I'd never in my life seen such a club before.

It was designed like...like...you know in the style of those very rich Chinese businessmen who put Italian marble flooring in their three-million-dollar

fake European homes—and then spoil it by putting a chrome, leather and mirror bar in the corner of their sitting room? That kind of style...you see it in Taiwanese serials all the time.

Ya, the club was like that. But worse.

And at the entrance, two very beautiful receptionists sat smiling sweetly at us.

“Werlcum to Crub Roxy!” they said in unison.

Oh God. It was the clichéd “rich businessmen’s club” one always hears about...

I REALLY didn’t want to go in there.

I mean, ALL the women there were taller and stronger than I was.

And some of them could throw me on the floor and pin me there for hours.

“Good, ya?” Norman said with undisguised enthusiasm and excitement.

Then he just pulled me through the bevelled glass doors.

He started introducing me to all the hostesses there before I could protest. *He's clearly a regular.*

It was a slow night. The economic crisis had just started to kick in.

To the girls in the empty club, we were the most attractive men in the world—that is, the kind that was still spending. Well, Norman anyway, not me...

I whispered to him, “Norman...are you sure? This looks...expensive.”

He waved my concerns aside the way one waves off summer flies in Australia.

[LANGUAGE] The colloquialism of their greeting is grating and we are immediately filled with dread, just as HB is.

"Norms...maybe we should go to a coffeeshop or hawker centre..."

He waved off my protests again...This time his face was in the neck of a beautiful, fair hostess who could have been a former Miss Hong Kong...

I made polite conversation with the hostesses fawning over us.

Norman looked over at me. "So which one of these ladies looks nice?" he asked.

"They all look beautiful!" I said.

"Wah lau..." Norms said. "I can't afford all of them for you leh..."

The girls all giggled. One of them said that I was so cute...

I was stunned.

"Afford? Pay them...for what?" I blurted aloud.

There is a beat as the realisation sinks in.

Oh my goodness.

Beat. Huat Bee crosses his legs and clutches his chest modestly.

"Norms..." I said.

But Norms was too busy examining the two most promising qualities of one of the girls in a tight dress.

"Norms!" I said in a high-pitched voice as one of the girls slipped her hand into my shirt.

Another girl laid her hand on my thigh...

(high-pitched) Argh!

Huat Bee's mobile phone starts to ring. He jumps up.

Thank God! Thank goodness!

Hilarious stage direction.
Audience likely to laugh at
his prudishness. As far
as we know, he's still a
virgin.

His relief is palpable.

He-hello?

Um...excuse me, miss...will you please stop...stop doing that...I need to, um, concentrate. Thank you...

Hello? Ya, Soon Meng...what's the matter?

You what? Why did you do that? And now you...

Aiya!

Don't do anything...don't...just stay there...I am going over right now. I'm on my way...

Huat Bee puts away his mobile phone.

Hey Norms, one of my kids is in trouble. I gotta go.

No really, it can't wait...this is quite serious...

No, I don't dislike this club...well actually, to tell you the truth, I'm not very comfortable...

No, it's not that it's not good enough for me...

Listen, thanks for everything but...

Oh come on...I am not choosing my students over my friends again.

It's just that I can't sit here and...and do this...

while...while one of the kids is out there in a mess...you know...

Listen...I'll make it up to you some other time. I'm just not up to it this time, okay? Okay, Norms?

Pause. Silence.

Okay?

Silence.

Norms?

Norms folded his arms and turned away. He actually seemed hurt.

Last I saw him, the girls were trying to cheer him up.

He's trying.
It becomes evident
that when his kids are
in the picture, he
is more likely to
choose Free Will over
Fate.

This him choosing
his path instead
of doing something
he does not like just
because others tell
him to.

He didn't want to look at me. He was drinking brandy like it was tap water. **[foreshadowing]**

I remember thinking that the time was probably right to say goodbye to a friendship that had grown too strained. My heart was heavy but I had urgent things to do...and partying with Norms wasn't at the top of my list.

Lights fade to black.

[THEME] FATE VS FREE WILL

HB is exercising his
Free Will to do what is
good for him.

SCENE 9 *When the lights come up, Huat Bee is a little older, dishevelled, in a cardigan with different spectacles.*

HUAT BEE

Norms stopped calling—for the next few years.

Strangely enough, I didn't notice much.

Time flies when you have so many things to do that you are fighting to breathe.

My work with troubled kids had taken me to new areas where my passion to help required more skills.

In three years, I completed another part-time degree in child psychology.

I was now equipped to face the most vicious of samseng²³ kids.

Well, that's also because I took up aikido.

I learnt that in many forms of martial arts, size doesn't matter.

You just need to channel your opponent's energy, make it your own, and make them fall the way you want. *The story is beginning to come full circle, with the [RESOLUTION] of past conflicts/struggles.*
It was such a cool philosophy.

Once I understood that concept, I was ready to work with bigger and tougher kids.

In fact I was working with young teenagers who were in the primary six repeat...I mean...Normal... classes.

These two boys in particular frightened me a little. They were in gangs which were into stealing, glue-sniffing and smoking. It was only a matter of time before they got into more trouble...and probably drugs.

[THEME]
CHANGE & TRANSITION.
He is putting in work
& effort. Making things
happen the way he
intends.

Growth. Bullies are still trying to scare him but he is no longer running away.

Their gang wasn't happy that I was trying to turn their friends around.

Since I'd started working with the two boys, I'd had my car tyres slashed...my cupboard broken into and vandalised and even had essays written about me on toilet walls. I actually took a red pen and corrected the bad grammar—to show them that I wasn't scared.

The principal wanted to expel the two boys so as to remove the presence of the whole gang from the school...but I knew that this was psychological warfare, and if we removed the boys, then the gang would win.

I was making such good progress with the two boys, and unlike the Hay Bee of old, I was NOT about to give up!

SCENE 10

HUAT BEE But soon, the phone calls started coming.

At 2am.

At 4am...

They must have gotten my phone number from the phone directory.

It is a sad day when primary school teachers have to get unlisted numbers.

Lights fade to black. A phone starts ringing in the dark. Huat Bee comes out in pyjama pants and a singlet. It is obvious that he's just been awakened from sleep. He picks up the phone.

Hello.

Hello?

Hello?

Weird.

Huat Bee puts down the phone and staggers back to bed. Immediately the phone starts ringing again.

Huat Bee hurries over to the phone.

Hello?

Eh...who is this?

People got to sleep, you know!

There is a loud click. Huat Bee staggers back to bed. Lights slowly fade to black. In the dark, the phone starts to ring. It rings for a while. Huat Bee staggers out, wearing a different pair of pyjama pants and T-shirt. He doesn't answer the phone. It keeps ringing while he speaks.

Every night for three nights, at some strange hour,

the phone would ring.

Not incessantly, you know.

Sometimes a couple of rings.

Sometimes a bit longer.

When I picked it up, I knew there was someone there. Sometimes the person just put down the phone.

After the third night, the calls stopped.

The phone stops ringing.

Ahhh. Silence. Peaceful nights.

Then, one week later...

The phone rings three times and stops.

Three short rings.

I was mystified.

I bought caller ID.

Two nights later...

The phone rings. Huat Bee picks it up.

Hello? Hey you! I've got caller ID, you know. I know where you are calling from!

There is a click and silence.

Well, I suppose that takes care of that!

We won't hear from this weirdo again.

Huat Bee starts walking away from the phone. He stops. He is curious.

Hmm. I know I should leave well enough alone.

Beat.

But this idiot has been bugging me for more than a week.

Why should I give him any rest?

I'll call him or her back.

Another example of his growth. Learning to confront things that make him unhappy.

At least I can find out why this is happening.

Huat Bee checks the caller ID for the number. He starts dialling and listens.

I'll bet it's that kid I barred from the exam for cheating.

He looked like the vengeful sort.

I'm sure he found out my number from the phone book...

Hmm...no one's answering.

Good!

I will let it ring and ring and ring.

I hope it keeps you awake!

I hope...

Oh! H-hello? May I know who this is?

Staff nurse Lily Tan?

Where is this? Someone's been calling my phone at night and...

CDC?

What's CDC?

Communicable Diseases Department?

Tan Tock Seng Hosp—

Why would any of your staff want to call me in the middle of the...

Uh...no...no...I do not know who...no, never mind. Thank you.

Huat Bee puts down the phone, mystified.

Who do I know who works in a hospital and...

hates my guts?

Who would...

The phone suddenly rings again. Huat Bee jumps.

Hello...hello!

Hey you...I know you are there. I know where you work! If you don't stop calling...

Pause. Huat Bee looks at the audience.

He called me "Oi!"

(*into telephone receiver*) H-hello...do I know you?

Beat.

(*to audience*) He called me Huat Bee.

(*into telephone receiver*) Yes. This is Huat Bee here, who is...

Hin Kong? Is that you?

Wah lau...you idiot! You've been making prank calls, is it?

Beat.

Hin Kong? Hello?

Shit.

He hung up.

Why would Hin Kong call me from the CDC?

Only people with rubella or AIDS go to...

Huat Bee staggers almost imperceptibly as the realisation hits him.

Suddenly my world took a spin.

It wasn't rubella.

Damn.

It was Hin Kong trying to call me all those nights.

It was my best friend trying to tell me something he didn't have words for.

I struggled to get my clothes on.

Huat Bee talks distractedly as clothes are brought in and he dresses.

[CLIMAX]
 THIS is the turning
 point in the story.
 Some might think the
 Club Roxy scene is the
 climax but the
 split was somewhat
 inevitable. The
 looming pending loss of KK,
 however, wasn't.
 They could always make
 up and continue. ~~Not~~
 Might not anymore now.
 [ATMOSPHERE] immediately
 becomes tense with shock.

& [CONFLICT] as a result
 of communication gaps.

It was already ten thirty at night.

I wasn't sure what the visiting hours were at the CDC.

I wasn't sure they had visiting hours for people who were that sick.

Hell, I wasn't sure what condition the guy was in.

All I knew was that I had to be there.

Beat.

All the way there, I kept rehearsing what I wanted to say...what he needed to hear.

(*putting on a cheerful voice*) Hi Hin Kong! How are you doing...shit!

You don't ask a person with...with...how he is...

Uh, hi Hin Kong...I came as soon as I realised...

Too patronising...

Hey buddy...are they treating you all right here?

DAMN! There is no etiquette guide for talking to someone with such a disease!

SCENE 11 *Lighting change. Huat Bee turns to one side.*

HUAT BEE Uh...hi. Good evening. Um, this is the CDC unit, right? Yes, well...I am here to see one of your... I know. I know visiting hours are... Well you see, one of your patients, Norman Lam Hin Kong, he's called me and I... He's asleep? No, but he just called me and... I know he's very ill, but he's been trying to call me and... I know it's against...

[FEELINGS]
He is very emotional.
Stressed, anxious, regretful
perhaps.

I know they need their rest... PLEASE! MY BEST FRIEND IS DYING AND HE'S JUST BEEN TRYING TO CALL ME THE WHOLE OF THE PAST WEEK...

Please. Let me see him. Okay?

Beat.

Thank you.

(to the audience) By that time, I was so stressed out, I had run out of opening lines to try out. All I knew was that I had to see Hin Kong. I needed him to know I would be there when he needed me.

I decided that I was going to give him a big hug when I saw him.

Words were not enough.

Lighting change.

When the nurse showed me in, I took a deep breath for courage and breezed into the room brightly and...and...

[CLIFFHANGER] creating
[SUSPENSE]

SCENE 12 *Huat Bee stares ahead as if seeing Hin Kong for the first time. Tears form in his eyes. He bites his lower lip. He starts sobbing uncontrollably.*

HUAT BEE

[APOSIOPEYSIS]

He is so overwhelmed with emotions that he struggles to be coherent.

This amplifies the [SUSPENSE] because the audience cannot see KK. We are kept in the dark and we are anxious to know what is going on!

He has always been empathised, but now, he is literally in HB's shoes.

I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I...

This wasn't supposed to happen like this...

I...how?

Hin...I...I'm so sorry...for being such an idiot...

Huat Bee kneels down where he is standing on the stage. With great effort, he makes himself calm down.

The guy on the bed was hardly recognisable as Hin Kong.

His body had shrunk.

He used to have muscles, but now his arms were skinnier than mine. *The [COMPARISON] is shocking.*

His legs were like twigs.

And his face was hollowed out. Haunted.

Then he spoke.

"Now I know what it's like to be skinny and small."

He gave a small, bitter smile.

I kept quiet. I knew that my voice was still quivery when it needed to be brave.

"I wasn't sure if I should have called you," he said, turning away so I couldn't see his face. *[FEELING]* ~~ashamed~~

"If you didn't call me, I would never have forgiven you."

There was a long silence.

"I just didn't want you to remember me like this." He sighed heavily. He had some problems breathing.

[THEME] Sometimes, things change so quickly that we do not have the luxury of time to adjust.

↳ Like drunken prawns. Things keep changing & Mr and Mrs Tan are constantly playing a game of catch-up.

"Like what? Like alive?" I got some of the old fire back in my voice.

"Like a piece of rubbish," he said. "I've messed it all up. My family has thrown me away...the wife refuses to let the kids see me this way...God, what a way to go."

"They are adjusting."

"I don't have time for transitions!" Hin Kong started coughing.

I went over and patted his back.

It was bony and drenched.

It was just as well I hadn't gone and hugged him as I'd wanted to. I would have broken him in two. Hin Kong had deteriorated that badly.

(angrily) "Dammit! Why didn't you call me earlier? What kind of friend are you when you can't even call me when you need help!"

"I...am...not...used...to asking...for help," Hin Kong said. "I am not used to being weak and helpless."

All of a sudden, a little flicker of rage welled up in me.

I know it wasn't appropriate.

I know that is not what you want to inflict on a dying friend.

But I could not help myself.

Huat Bee takes a moment.

"You listen here, Norman Lam Hin Kong. Weak and helpless don't have to go together.

I should know. I am the champion of the skinny,

HB's [SOLOQUY] as a form of [RESOLUTION], showing us all the ways in which he has grown & learnt.

weak nerds! I am Hay Bee, remember?
But you know what? I have never thought of myself
as helpless.

If that's why you became friends with me, then I'm
sorry, you became my best friend for the wrong
reason.

Don't interrupt...there's more.

From that moment you put your arm on my
shoulders and made me feel better for failing at
rugby...from the moment you decided to become
my friend, I knew that if I was weak, at least I
was not helpless. At least I could touch people. At
least I could make friends whom I could keep for
life. That meant a lot to me. That had to be worth
something, right? I mean that had to mean that I
couldn't be all that helpless.

Wait...I haven't finished...

And then you got rich...and then you started
throwing money at your friends...buying us endless
dinners at all those expensive places...taking us on
your boat...showing us your different houses...

Throughout it all, your so-called friends around
you, you know what they were doing? They came
for every meal, every party...and then behind your
back they called you a big show-off!

You accused me of being jealous. But you know
why I stayed away from you?

It was because I felt so sad that someone as
wonderful as you...someone as kind and caring
and good-hearted as you had become so dependant

[RESOLUTION]
He is being firm &
authoritative
(finally).

[THEME] Love
& Friendship

on admiration. You didn't know who you were any more!

I don't care if you are rich or poor. I don't care if your car is big or small or if you are sick or in perfect health...I just want you to go back to the basic person you are and just BE the Hin Kong that we all admired and loved. Just be the guy that we all miss so much!

Okay...now you can talk!"

For a long time there was silence. Hin Kong looked stunned.

Then he said words I will never forget. He said, "There was only once when I pitied you. That was that day on the rugby field. But once I got to know you, Huat Bee, I always envied you. I never pitied you again."

(to the audience) Envied me? The guy is not only ill, he's seriously delirious! **[DIGRESSION]**

Then, as if reading my mind, he said, "You have been the most consistent person in my life, Huat Bee. Somehow, even as a kid, I knew that no matter how far I strayed, no matter how badly I did, you were the rock on which I could build my life..."

(to the audience again) His condition was worse than I'd thought. **[DIGRESSION]**

Then he changed the subject abruptly: "I never told you about my family, did I?"

I shook my head.

"That was because I never had a family. My mother had me illegitimately and left me with my so-called **rejection #1**

[Characterisation] This is surprising since this is a play about HB's growth, maturity and transition. BUT, he was always there for KK. The fundamental aspects of HB remained consistent.

He keeps **[DIGRESSION]** because this scene is intense & depressing. It is also emotionally charged. By digressing, the scene is broken up into more manageable sections because we already know it will not end well.

[PLOT TWIST]

rejection #2 →

rejection #3 →

father. He, in turn, married another woman and dumped me with her and disappeared. The woman re-married and had three other children, but I grew up like the family servant. I was made to eat last—if there was any food left. The woman did one good thing for me and that was to put me through school. But I had no allowance. During recess time in primary school I used to eat what the other kids left behind. That was when a teacher caught me doing it and referred me to social services.

Now do you know why I worked so hard? Why I tried so hard? Now do you know why I was throwing money, gifts and meals at my friends?

These things were never mine to give. And I just liked the feeling...you know...I just liked the feeling of making you guys happy."

Lighting change. Huat Bee reflects with the audience.

Oh man. I never knew. And there I was, all those years, jealous of him.

And there he was all those years, envying me.

Wanting my life and wanting to be me.

Then Hin Kong turned to me and held on to my arm.

"Huat Bee," he said, "you are the biggest person I know. But even you can't help me now. I am so afraid. I am so afraid of dying alone...back where I started, with no family and no one...no one to..."

Hin Kong started to cry. [APOSIOPEYSIS]

And that was when I hugged him. In spite of his small frame, his hug was strong and tight. I

[MESSAGE] Instead of jumping to conclusion & judging others, we should be ~~more~~ kind enough to ask and find out why first. It might be wrong but there's always a reason. And maybe, in knowing the reason, we can guide them down an alternate path.

↳ Like MRT.

This confession is heartbreaking. KK is [FEELING] so afraid. In gaining so much, the losses he bears are just as great.

SHRIMPS IN SPACE

returned his hug in equal measure.

At the end of everything there is to say...you really need to say very little.

Pause. Silence. Huat Bee allows himself a moment to cry.

That night, there in the middle of the CDC, I learnt a lesson about big and small.

It isn't the size of your body, your muscles or your bank account that matters at the end of your life.

It is the size of your heart and how warmly those arms of yours hug.

[MESSAGE] Empathy, sympathy, compassion
(They are not the same thing!]

SCENE 13 *Organ music comes on. A hymn is playing.*

HUAT BEE "Mourn me not when I'm dead and gone,
I was not born to sorrow.
I was born beneath a laughing star
To brighten your tomorrows.
And if tomorrow should ever come
That my life should cease,
Then listen to the echo of
My laughter in the breeze."
At his funeral, I read for Hin Kong the epitaph I
wrote for Nelly.
I was there when he died.
And so were a whole bunch of the friends who had
enjoyed his hospitality, his love and his warmth.
I MADE them all come. *Depressing that he had to
make them.*
And you know what...as he was fading, in his last
moments, all skin and bones and covered with
lesions, he looked around and smiled.
And then he pulled me close to him and then he
said weakly, "You are the best, Hay Bee...I mean,
Huat Bee."
[TONE : regret] He could have
(to himself) Huh...me...the best. *been a better friend.*
A moment of silence. Huat Bee looks up, teary-eyed,
towards heaven.
Oh God... *some things just cannot be resolved.*
It's all right, King Kong. It's all right.
You rest easy now.
And you can call me Hay Bee any time. [RESOLUTION]
Lights fade to black.

[THEME - LOSS]
Why do we wait till we
have lost someone to
regret not doing more?
↳ ~~Teachew~~ Teachew
Porridge.

Family?
His wife &
children?