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Mooncakes and Marshmallows

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

Mooncakes and Marshmallows

written by

Jessica Schleiff

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Carl Goodson Honors Program meets the criteria for acceptance and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Amy Sonheim, Thesis Director

Dr. Johnny Wink, Second Reader

Daniel Inouye, Third Reader

Honors Program Director

April 15, 2011

To my sister, Emily

(And to Starbucks. I could not have done it without you, buddy.)

Mooncakes and Marshmallows

by Jessica Schleiff

1

Hannah Jones awoke on the morning of her first day of school in a cold sweat. All summer she had dreamed the same dream. It was about her first day of 10th grade, her first day of high school. Her dream first day was fine. Nothing went wrong. It was a normal first day.

Normal day.

Normal Dream.

Normal Hannah.

But then why did it freak her out?

Hannah rubbed the sleepies out of her eyes and looked around her room. A picture of her and Noah, her brother, at Disneyworld sat atop her nightstand. Purple paisleys her mom had stenciled bordered her yellow walls. The words "you are special" hung in cross-stitch above her bed.

She pulled off her covers and moseyed to the bathroom, sliding on her fuzzy slippers on the way. She combed through her straight, brown hair, hanging to her shoulders. She splashed some water on her face and brushed her teeth. After pulling on the jeans and button-down blouse she had picked out the night before, Hannah headed downstairs for breakfast.

As she reached the kitchen, the cheerful voice of her grandpa greeted her,

"Have a glass of OJ, sugar." Her grandpa smiled at her over the *Dallas/Fortworth Gazette*.

"Morning, Pappaw" she croaked.

Pappaw Lee put down his paper and took off his reading glasses. Even though he had retired from his accounting position fifteen years ago, Randall Lee McQuary still awoke at the crack of dawn each morning. He was always ready in slacks and a dress-shirt by the time Hannah saw him at breakfast. The only exception was on Saturdays, when he traded in his business clothes for the more casual sleeve-less undershirt and pajama pants.

Hannah still hadn't gotten used to the idea of Pappaw Lee living with them. Her mom had persuaded him after three years as a widower to move out of his little house in Hope, Arkansas, and into the Jones's place in the Dallas suburbs. Even after two months, Pappaw Lee still surprised Hannah with his chipper morning spirit.

"I won't have my granddaughter lookin' so pretty around high school boys. My shotgun's still back in Hope," Pappaw said.

"No worries, Pappaw," Hannah assured him, taking a bite of Lucky Charms. "I don't like boys."

"Riiiggghht," he said with a wink.

Nancy Jones walked into the kitchen. Without saying a word, she poured herself a bowl of cereal. *That's odd*, Hannah thought. Her mom was usually already dressed and at the table when Hannah came down. Nancy Jones was a morning person like Pappaw. Hannah sometimes chose not to set her alarm, just so instead, she could be awakened by her mom's smiling face.

But this morning her mom wasn't smiling.

Hannah watched as her mom poured coffee into her bowl of cereal. "Mom, are you ok?" Hannah started.

“What?” her mom said. Then, noticing the cereal, “Oh! Gracious, what’s wrong with me?”

Hannah was about to ask the same question when her brother bounded down the stairs.

“Good morning, family!” said Noah. He was beaming. He already had his backpack slung over one shoulder. Noah gave Hannah’s back a pat as he headed to the pantry. Hannah picked up her spoon and let three pink marshmallows fall one by one into her bowl of milk. She started to pick up her glass of orange juice, but set it back on the table. Her dream still bothered her.

Noah came back to the table with three granola bars and two bananas. He looked around at everyone, smiling, trying to catch someone’s eye and invite them into his enthusiasm. His eyes fell on his mom, and his smile faded. He looked over at Hannah, eyebrows raised. She shrugged and returned to her breakfast. Breaking the silence, Noah asked,

“Where’s Maddie?” Hannah hadn’t yet noticed her little sister’s absence.

“The 2nd graders have a first-day, father-daughter breakfast, so she and your Dad left early.” Nancy replied.

“Jealous,” Noah replied. “I should propose a Senior Mom and Son breakfast to the Student Council.” Noah winked at his mom, but she stared at her cereal. He tried again.

“We have a soccer meeting this afternoon, so I won’t be home until later.”

“That’s fine,” Nancy said, looking past Noah at the wall. “Hannah can ride with Grace.”

“Sweet,” Noah said.

He kissed his mom on the head and gave Pappaw Lee a pat on the shoulder. Randall Lee McQuary looked up from his paper and gave the two of them a thumbs up. He then returned to a story about how Texas developers were outsourcing jobs to New Delhi.

As they drove to school, Noah Jones bobbed his carefree head to the radio, and Hannah Jones contemplated her entire life.

Her dream had filled her with such a sense of dread, but she didn't know why. Nothing about her first day of 10th grade was especially terrifying. Maybe that was the problem. Nothing terrifying. Nothing excited. Same 'ole, same 'ole. But that would be irrational. And Hannah Jones was not an *overly* irrational 10th grade girl.

Hannah thought back over the past few years of school. Elementary school had been a war zone. Daily she had battled terrible foes. In kindergarten, it was Miss Hoffenschteiner, the librarian with long, pink claws. In first grade, it was that nasty Mr. Multiplication Tables. And in second grade, it was Tether Ball the Terrible. (Hannah still suspected she had permanent brain damage from one dirty blow from behind).

But Middle School had ushered a season of un-adventure into Hannah's life. No longer did she hide in the Big Tire on the recess playground with her best friend Grace, avoiding Tabitha "the Tiny Terror" Cho. (Cho loved leading her posse of disgruntled 3rd graders in their own twisted version of dodge ball—ten against one, no subs and no elimination. Hannah and Grace had been her favorite victims. Their tears were her inspiration.)

Middle School may have been unthreatening to her person, but Hannah had taken on a new foe: awkwardness. Yet in spite of this rough season, Hannah managed to conquer lockers, seven periods of classes, the Spring Dance and the transition to the training bra with a general level of painlessness.

In Junior High, Hannah hit her stride. She started enjoying school on both the social and scholastic level. She made good friends. She joined the student council and book club. She got along with both teachers and peers. Everybody who knew her pretty much liked her.

And Tabitha Cho moved to Milwaukee.

Things were comfortable, indeed.

As Hannah thought back over the many “first-days” leading up to this first day of High School, she frowned. What was the matter with her? Why couldn’t she shake this funk? She was a happy person in general. She didn’t write angsty poetry, wear black trench coats, or kick puppies. Maybe she didn’t dance around in fields of sunflowers, but she wouldn’t be opposed to it if the weather were right. Surely the absence of problems in her life couldn’t be a problem in itself, could it?

And then there was the weird way her mom had acted at breakfast. What was going on? Maybe it was because Noah was a senior. Maybe the reality of Noah’s impending move to college had finally hit her.

Hannah looked over at Noah. He smiled and bobbed, unfazed by the breakfast peculiarities. He pulled into a parking spot in the section dubbed “the senior’s lot” in front of the gym. Hannah grabbed her bag and headed to the high school wing with him. Noah spotted his best friend, Alex Remos, and stayed behind to chat.

For first period, Hannah had biology with Ms. Roy. She fought through the crowd of 500 other 10th graders swarming the halls. Hannah didn’t want to answer “how was your summer?” a hundred times, so she tried hard to look very engrossed in her schedule. She found the science hall and turned the corner marked with blue concrete walls and a giant poster of the Periodic Table. She walked straight into room 113 and plopped down in a desk near the back of Ms. Roy’s classroom. She looked up at the chalkboard:

Ms. Roy

10th Grade Pre-AP Biology

Supplies: 5” White binder, pencil, red pen, college-ruled notebook paper, Occam’s razor, skills
of observation

Hannah was not excited about this class. She had never really struggled with science in the past, but it was certainly not her best subject. She hoped for a sympathetic teacher to ease her into “real” science—i.e. 10th grade Pre-AP Bio. Her hopes dissipated as Ms. Roy clicked into the classroom with a large stack of papers and a furrowed brow. She wore an ankle-length black skirt with a large, green floral pattern. Her pastel green shirt was a little too short, revealing a peek of her panty hose and belly button when she walked. Ms. Roy’s black chunky-heels reminded Hannah of what the Puritan wives must have worn as they walked off the Mayflower. Ms. Roy wore black, thick-rimmed circle glasses and had short, dirty-blonde, disheveled hair. Hannah guessed her to be about thirty-five.

Ms. Roy walked over to close the door just as Hannah’s best friend, Grace Stewart, scooted into the classroom. Grace hurried to grab the open desk seat next to Hannah. Hannah noticed a slouching football player sit straight up as Grace rushed by. Grace wore a pink cotton dress with a yellow poppy pattern. Her golden blonde hair was pulled into a poofed-ponytail that came down to the middle of her back. Grace smiled at Ms. Roy and apologized for her tardiness. Ms. Roy frowned.

Graham Nelson, a quiet, red-headed boy sitting in front of Grace, dropped his pencil. When Grace returned it, his face turned the color of his curly locks. Across the room, Sarah Keller waved at Grace and rolled her eyes in the direction of Ms. Roy.

Hannah and Grace endured an hour of syllabus-reading. When the bell announced the end of first period, the girls rushed out of the room, eager to get away from the science hall.

“Can you believe we have to do three projects, ten labs, AND a fish dissection?” Hannah lamented.

“And did you see the look on her face when I walked in two seconds late to class?” Grace complained. “What a toad. It wasn’t like I was doing drugs. Just couldn’t find a parking place at all. There were two spots open in the senior lot, but I didn’t want Manuela to get keyed or anything.” (Manuela was the name of Grace’s beloved 1982 station wagon.)

“Lame,” Hannah said. “What do you have next?”

“Health Class. You?” Grace replied.

“English.”

“Nice!” Grace said. “Think of me when you’re swooning through some Jane Austen. I’ll be practicing CPR on a crusty, rubber dummy.”

Hannah made a face. “See ya at lunch!”

Grace waved and fought against a crowd of students trying to press through the double doors.

Hannah enjoyed her 2nd period. Her English teacher, Mrs. Gladwell, was also the head of the Morris Academy book club, so Hannah already knew and liked her. Mrs. Gladwell was short and plump, a smiling woman with a curly white bob and button nose. She reminded Hannah of a younger Mrs. Clause. Mrs. Gladwell’s syllabus looked a little strenuous—five novels, two Shakespeare plays, and a long list of poetry—but Hannah looked forward to it. The class would start with *The Joy Luck Club*.

When the bell rang, Hannah headed to the cafeteria. She found Grace sitting at their usual table. She sat down with her sack lunch and pulled out a turkey sandwich. “Where’s Abe?” Hannah asked. Abe Cohen was a quirky 10th grade boy, and the third member of their best-friend triune.

“He has B lunch,” Grace said, “but he’s going to meet us at The Parlor after school.”

“Oh, ok, cool,” Hannah said. She had missed their daily chats over ice cream during the summer.

As Grace chatted with Amy Smith, another member of their usual lunch table, Hannah looked around the cafeteria. Everyone sat in the same place with the same people they had known since kindergarten.

After lunch, Hannah headed to her 3rd period class. All 10th graders had to choose some sort of practical life skills elective. Hannah chose Parenting. As she walked into room 204, she was surprised to see Coach Bud Roberts, the special teams coach for the high school football team, sitting behind the teacher’s desk. Hannah did not know what to think of Coach Bud’s molding their minds in the ways of child-rearing. A thirty-seven-year-old, pudgy bachelor with an intense, blonde widow’s peak, Coach Bud seemed the least qualified for instructing the class. *This could only be awkward*, Hannah thought.

Hannah looked around the room to see if she knew anyone. She recognized most of the students but didn’t see anyone she was really friends with. She chose a desk toward the back behind Missy Snyder and Ashley Phillips, who talked in hushed voices. Hannah could overhear most of what they said.

“Yeah, what the heck?” said Ashley. “If everyone already thought you were pregnant, you wouldn’t try to prove them right.”

“For real,” Missy replied. “And look, she’s sitting on the front row. I guess she doesn’t want to miss anything,” Missy said, snickering.

“As if Coach Bud would know anything about kids anyway,” Ashley remarked and rolled her eyes. Missy smirked and looked across the room. Hannah followed her eyes to the target of their gossip.

Samantha Conner! Oh my gosh!

Sam had gained a reputation for being easy when she started dating Brent Bowers, the quarterback, her freshman year. Bowers was a senior this year and the longing of many a Morris Academy-girl's heart. Sam, on the other hand, was only Hannah's age. Hannah had never heard much about her other than that she lived with her mom and was great at math. Sam didn't hang out with many other students besides Brent.

Naturally, her peers filled in the missing details about Samantha's life with their own stories. Hannah didn't really know Sam and had never had any particular feelings toward her. However, as she listened to Ashley and Missy trash her, Hannah couldn't help but pity her. No, she didn't pity her.

Hannah *envied* Sam.

Hannah wondered if *she* was ever the subject of talk. But why *would* anyone talk about her? She wasn't engaged in any indecent behavior--especially with a star athlete. She didn't have any tattoos. She didn't read Manga. She wasn't bulimic, anorexic, bipolar, or depressed. She had never even worn a scandalous costume to a Halloween party. And she wouldn't know how to do drugs if someone gave them to her.

Face the facts, Hannah Jones, she thought to herself, you are boring.

The more she thought about it, the more Hannah realized that at exactly this moment in time, she could rest assured that absolutely no one was slandering *her* in the halls of Morris Academy. What would they talk about? How nice and well-rounded she was? Doubt it. Hannah's heart sank as she faced the truth: her fifteen-year old life was the opposite of juicy.

She sighed and pulled out her notebook as the bell rang.

Coach Bud picked up a stack of papers and stood up from his desk. His blue windbreaker swished as he walked the rows of desks and passed out several handouts. For the next hour and a half, Coach Bud read through the entire outline for the semester. He didn't look up from his notes as he talked, and he blushed each time he said the words "human reproductive system." Hannah's mind wandered as Coach Bud droned on. Before she knew it, the bell had rung for the end of 3rd period.

Hannah watched the clock hands crawl toward three o'clock during her 4th period Algebra II class. She finished the review worksheet her teacher, Mr. Simon, had given them in little time. For the rest of class she doodled while she counted down the minutes until freedom.

When the clock stuck three, Hannah sprinted out the doors of Morris Academy and headed down the street toward The Parlor. Car-pooling mini vans and yellow school buses lined the roads as she hurried to meet her friends.

Hannah walked through the French doors. Grace and Abe polished off their waffle cones in a booth in the corner. "Thanks for waiting on me, guys" she teased and headed over to the counter for a scoop of rocky road. Abe and Grace hashed out the events of the day as Hannah slumped down into their booth. Abe, a 5'6", lanky sixteen-year old with dark, curly brown hair and thick-rimmed glasses, lamented to Grace about a mandatory physical endurance test in his P.E. class.

"Am I boring?" she interrupted, point blank.

"What?" Abe replied, startled.

"You know," Hannah said. "Is there *anything* about me that makes me interesting? Anything that says, 'hey, let's talk Hannah Jones. Now *there's* a subject full of intrigue!'"

Abe looked down and fiddled with his copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Grace broke the silence, "Of course you're not boring, Hannah!" she reassured. "Would we hang out with you if you were?"

"Well, we're kind of boring, so that's not saying much," Abe interjected.

"Whatever, Abe," Hannah argued. "You're like the most unique person I know. Shooting for a Pulitzer by age eighteen. And..." Hannah waved her arms with exasperation, "...you're the only Jew I know who lives in Texas."

"Unorthodox, thank you very much," Abe said. "My family couldn't find a tabernacle with a GPS."

"Fair enough," Hannah replied, "but at least that's *something* to talk about."

"Well, if you're boring, so am I," Grace protested.

Hannah and Abe smirked at each other and turned to her in disbelief.

"Please," Hannah said.

"Yeah, seriously, Grace" Abe agreed, rolling his eyes. Grace looked genuinely confused.

"Co-captain of the pep squad? Editor of the yearbook? The apple of every M. A. boy's eye?" Hannah said.

"Eh-hem," Abe interrupted, "not *every* boy's eye, thanks. Grace's powers are lost on me."

"Thanks, Abe," Grace said, glaring at him.

"Plus, you have a single mom. You're like an Oprah special waiting to happen. *American Teen Blooms through Adversity.*"

"Ok, ok, I get it," Grace conceded. "Even if I *am* all that. That doesn't make you weird because you're not."

"That's it," Hannah moaned. "I'm not weird. I'm not anything. I'm perfectly well-rounded. Perfectly dull."

Hannah took a bite of her cone to keep from crying. Abe fidgeted some more with his book, and Grace searched for something consoling to say. Unsuccessful, she returned to her waffle cone and polished off the final couple of bites. She looked at her phone.

“Sorry, Hannah, but I have to leave for pep-squad practice,” Grace said.

“It’s cool. Call you later?” Hannah, said.

“Definitely!” Grace replied as she picked up her bag and got up from the table.

Abe panicked as Grace stood up. This was not a dilemma for a sixteen-year old boy to solve. He was not Dr. Phil. He looked at Hannah, then back at Grace.

“Um, it seems I am late for something too...uh...with Mr. Hamilton...going to go over some ideas for my...uh...new short story...and stuff. Yeah.” Abe scrambled to put his books back in his messenger bag and hurried out behind Grace as she waved to Hannah and blew her a kiss. Grace tried to give a reassuring wink, but Hannah didn’t feel encouraged.

As Abe and Grace walked out of The Parlor, Hannah tried to find something to occupy herself with as she finished off her rocky road, alone. She had hoped time with her best friends would make her feel better.

She pulled out her copy of *The Joy Luck Club*. The picture of a Chinese dragon on the cover intrigued her. Hannah flipped it over and scanned the back. It read: “dim sum, mahjong...shared loss...secrets.” She didn’t know what mahjong or dim sum were, but they sounded un-boring. Maybe she needed a dose of dim sum in her own life. Some dim sum and some secrets.

She didn’t have any secrets.

Just then it dawned on her that Grace was supposed to be her ride home. Hannah sighed. She would have to wait for Noah to get out of soccer practice.

2

Hannah meandered through her first week of 10th grade with little to report. The only adventure the students of Morris Academy saw those first five days was the great escape of lab mouse #22 from the biology lab on Wednesday. Mouse #22's Houdini-ing only lasted for two short hours, however, thanks to the exterminator skills of one spry janitor.

Otherwise, no excitement occurred inside their halls.

Inside the Jones house, however, was another story.

All week long Hannah observed peculiar happenings in their home. The coffee in the cereal was only the beginning of Nancy Jones's strange behavior. Tuesday, Nancy forgot to pick Hannah up from school, forcing her, once again, to wait for Noah's practice to end. Wednesday, Hannah's mom left the house right after Hannah got home from school and was not seen again until after supper that evening. Nancy offered no excuse for her mysterious absence. For some moms, perhaps, this was normal. But not for Nancy Jones. Hannah knew no one more predictable than her mother.

And Robert Jones was a whole other mystery. Granted, he was *always* in a good mood, but this week he had been over the top.

Every night he came home from work extra bubbly. Three nights out of five he brought home presents for the family. Last night, Hannah awoke at 1:00AM to the sound of singing. When

she got up to see what on earth could possibly be the source, she found her dad in the kitchen, belting an Irish folksong, and rummaging through the fridge in his bathrobe.

“Dad, do you *mind?*” she had said. He grinned and returned to singing as if any normal person would be crooning “Danny Boy” in the middle of the night.

Hannah did not know what was going on, but one thing was for sure: strange things were afoot at the Jones’s residence.

Hannah wracked her brain over what could be the source of these oddities. Perhaps her dad had gotten a promotion. But why wouldn’t he have told them? And where could her mom be going all the time?

Tuesday night Hannah dreamed her mom took a part-time job as a rodeo clown. Clowns were terrifying enough by themselves, but the image of her own mother, with a red nose, chasing pigs in a ring disturbed Hannah all day long.

Today, though, Hannah thought she had solved the mystery.

Nancy Jones must be pregnant.

It had to be the answer. Sure, maybe her mom was a bit past the child-bearing age. Maybe Robert and Nancy did both insist that three—and only three—was the magic number. Yet, a baby number four seemed the only logical explanation.

Hannah had only seen her mom act this way once, right before the coming of baby Madelyn. It *would* explain why they had eaten Chinese takeout twice this week. Nancy Jones would never have craved that unless hormones encouraged her.

Hannah was determined to hear the truth from her lips.

She walked into her house at 3:30 that Friday afternoon prepared to confront her mom.

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She walked into her house at 3:30 that Friday afternoon prepared to confront her mom.

However, before she could begin her rehearsed interrogation, she spotted her dad sitting on the couch.

“You’re home early, Dad,” she said, dropping her backpack off at the door as she came in.

“Hmm? Oh yeah, I guess,” he said, returning to his golf magazine. Nancy Jones walked into the living room.

“Oh hi, Han, back so soon?” Nancy said, smiling a bit too much.

“Umm...yeah...this *is* when I usually get back from school,” she said. “Except of course when people forget about me,” she mumbled under her breath.

Nancy rearranged the pictures over the fireplace. She walked over to the coffee table and restacked the magazines. She grabbed the issue Robert was reading and mixed it into the pile. Robert stared at her, but Nancy didn’t notice. She was too busy fidgeting with several unopened letters on the kitchen table. She opened one letter and stared at it without reading it. Putting it back down, she walked over to the fridge and opened the door, staring at its contents for a long time.

Hannah watched her. She looked at her dad, confused. He smiled and busied himself with another magazine.

Hannah couldn’t take it anymore.

“Ok, what’s going on?” she said, interrupting the silence.

Her dad looked up.

The fridge door slammed.

“What do you mean, Han?” Robert Jones said.

“You know what I mean,” Hannah said. “You guys have been acting weird all week.”

Robert Jones chuckled, "Weird, huh? I hate to break it to you, kiddo. But, we're always this way," he said.

Hannah was not convinced.

Nancy Jones chimed in from the kitchen. "Maybe we should go ahead and tell her, Rob," Nancy said.

"Weren't we going to wait for the whole family, Nance?" Robert said.

"Well," he continued, "I guess there's no problem in giving you a little heads up. The thing is...hmm. I don't really know how to tell you this. You, see...your mom and I. Well, all of us really, we're going to--"

--Have a baby?" Hannah said, interrupting.

"What?" Robert said.

"I figured it out," Hannah said. "It's the only thing that makes sense. And I think it's great. Weird. But great."

Robert stared at her and cocked his head to the side.

"No," he said. "That's not exactly..." But before he could finish, Cheetoh burst through the doggy hole, pulling hard on his leash. Hannah heard a loud thump against the front door. An angry Madelyn followed in behind.

"Cheeetoooooh!" she said. "No fair! I can't fit through *your* door! I'm going to have such a big bruise!" Madelyn stomped through the living room. Cheetoh dashed into the kitchen and straight to his bowl of water. He slurped away with no regard to Maddy's injuries.

Pappaw Lee moseyed in behind Madelyn, chuckling. He ruffled her bright red hair. "You're okay, sugar," he said. "Purple bumps on the noggin are the thing these days."

Hannah tapped her foot. She couldn't take the suspense.

“So dad, you were going to say...?” she said. Robert Jones shot an uncomfortable glance at his wife. She didn’t return it, going over to refill Cheetoh’s water bowl instead. Cheetoh panted while he waited, thumping his big, golden tail against the linoleum floor.

“Ok, ok. Everyone, sit down,” Robert said. Hannah sat down on the couch. Pappaw Lee meandered over to his comfy chair. Madelyn stopped petting Cheetoh.

“Are we in trouble?” she asked.

“No, you’re not in trouble,” Nancy called from the kitchen.

“You’re mom and I have something to tell you, Maddy,” Robert said.

“Ooooh a surprise!” Madelyn said.

Hannah wished they would spit it out already.

“Actually, maybe we *should* wait for Noah,” Nancy said.

Hannah sighed. If they weren’t going to say it, she would drop the bomb herself.

“Mom’s pregnant,” Hannah said.

Robert shook his head in his hands.

“Hannah, your mom is definitely *not* pregnant! We’re moving. *That’s* the big news.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “Well that’s not anything to freak out about! Why didn’t you just tell us?”

So where to? Pinelands? West Park?” Hannah asked, getting excited. A move would put a little adventure into the Jones’s life. Also, on second thought, Hannah realized it would have been weird to have another baby. Noah was practically old enough to have his own.

Gross. Noah as a father? What a disturbing thought.

Maybe not quite old enough.

“No, Hannah, I don’t think you understand. We’re not moving neighborhoods. We’re moving...”

But before Robert Jones could finish his sentence, Noah burst through the door. He bounced a soccer ball on his head, then to his feet, then dribbled it into the living room.

"Hey, family! Awesome practice today! We're going to be so good this year. I cannot wait to take on Mckinney next week in the pre-season tourney. You should have *seen* the sweet bicycle kick Alex had..." he said whistling.

Nancy Jones put her hands on her hips. "Noah Lee Jones! How many times have I told you not to bring your muddy soccer ball inside," she scolded

"Oh, sorry Mom," he said, throwing the ball through the doggy door and running over to give her a hug. Nancy returned the hug, holding on for longer than normal.

"Ok, there, Mom," Noah said, "Love you, too." He patted her back and tried to pull away.

Just then, Noah noticed everyone sitting down.

"Whoa, are we having like a family meeting or something? Glad I was invited. Thanks a lot." Noah laughed.

"Noah, maybe you should sit down," Robert Jones said, taking a serious tone.

"Ok dad. Wow, you're home early." Noah frowned and plopped down next to Hannah. He sat a little too close, trying to get a rise out of her. But she didn't push him over. She was too engrossed in the news of their impending move.

"Ok, let's try this again," Robert said. Hannah mumbled to Noah, "Just to catch you up: we're moving." Noah wrinkled his brow.

"The thing is...my boss decided to transfer me to one of the new company branches. I'm getting promoted!" Robert said.

The family stared at him, waiting to hear the rest before starting the congratulations.

"But that means that I will have to live where the new branch is..." he paused, looking around for some encouragement. Nancy nodded at him. She twisted a dishrag in her hands and bit her lip.

"And the branch is in Beijing."

Silence gripped the Jones family living room.

"Beijing, *China*?" Hannah said.

"No, Beijing, Texas, Hannah." Noah said. He bounced his legs up and down and stared at his dad.

"Ok..." Noah said, "But you won't be moving anytime soon, right? Like not until next year, after I've graduated...*right*?" Hannah detected a slight quiver in his voice.

"Not exactly," Robert said. "I'm sorry, Noah. But, my boss wants me to move as soon as possible."

"And when he says 'as soon as possible,'" Nancy added, "apparently that means next week." Hannah's mom chewed on her lips and looked as if she was about to lose it completely.

Noah shot up from the couch.

"Next *week*? Is this real? What about the McKinney game?" Noah started pacing around the room.

"What about our season? Not to mention the Senior Christmas Parade. Prom? Graduation? Am I just supposed to skip those things?"

The heat rose up Noah's neck as he continued pacing around the room.

Hannah sat without saying anything. She looked at her mom.

Nancy picked at pieces from her dishrag.

“Didn’t you think maybe you should have asked for some family input in this *family* decision?”

Noah yelled at his dad.

“I thought you guys would be excited about this.” Robert said. “It’s such a great opportunity for my job and for our whole family! How many American teenagers can say they lived in China?” Robert said, pleading with Noah to calm down.

Nancy Jones chimed in, “I know it’s a lot to take in, Noah. And I know it’s your senior year. It’s hard. But we don’t have much choice. It was more of an order than an offer.” She had a sudden thought: “Plus, I’m sure the international school there will have a prom!” She offered a reassuring smile and headed over to hold Noah, but he escaped.

“Whatever!” he yelled. “That’s fine. You guys go. Have fun. But count me out.” And with that, Noah stormed up the stairs. Hannah cringed as she heard his door slam. She looked around the room. Hannah’s mom and dad stared at each other. Pappaw Lee fiddled with a magazine from the table. Cheetoh ran over to Maddy and started licking her hand.

“What is Beijing, China?” Madelyn asked, breaking the silence.

“Well, it’s really far away, honey. We’ll get to ride an airplane to get there! It’s where Mulan is from,” Nancy Jones said.

“Oh!” Madelyn said, wide-eyed. She looked down at their golden retriever. “Cheetoh will love it there! Ooh, and he’ll have so much fun on the airplane!” Nancy’s face fell. She looked at Cheetoh and the tears started rolling down her cheek.

“Cheetoh can’t go, Maddy. He’ll have to stay with Uncle Peter and Aunt Sandy.”

Madelyn looked at Cheetoh then back at her dad. Her little lips started quivering.

Hannah couldn’t take it anymore. She bolted from the house. Madelyn’s pink bike lay in the middle of the yard.

Hannah hopped on it. It was far too short for her. She had to peddle twice as many times as usual to get anywhere, and Maddy's handlebar tassels hit her in the face as she raced--well, more like scooted--around the block. She looked ridiculous, but she didn't care.

Hannah tried to process what just happened.

China?!

Sometimes she joked that Abe was from the other side of the world. And his family was only from New York.

But China. *China!* They could not possibly move any farther away.

Slap! The handle bar tassels hit her face.

Hannah thought about Abe and Grace. They had been her best friends since kindergarten. Was she supposed to simply forget about them? And what about her classes? What would become of those five hard days of intellectual labor she had already put in? Was it all for nothing? Would that effort transfer to her new school?

Slap! Another tassel, this time in the eye.

Her mom had mentioned an "international school." What on earth did *that* mean? Would she have to learn a new language? A thought struck her as she spit out a big piece of purple tassel:

Would she have to learn Biology in *Chinese*?

English was bad enough.

Slap!

Hannah made another not-so-glorious loop around the block. The wind rushing through her hair helped her think. Though, the badgering tassels had a way of interrupting her internal monologue.

And to think, five days ago, Hannah had lamented her life's normality. She had concluded that she was boring. But she was dealing with it. She had just started to come to a place of acceptance.

And here they had to go moving to China.

Talk about the adventure of a lifetime. Now if only it was someone else's lifetime, and not Hannah Jones's.

Hannah pulled back into their driveway and nearly fell off Maddy's bike in the dismount. She went back inside to discover her family members in the same places, staring at each other.

Noah came running down the stairs with a packed duffle bag and pillow.

"Where are you going, Noah?" Hannah asked.

"Call me when you guys come back to the real world. I'll be at Alex's. Where people make sense." Noah said, pushing past Hannah and through the door. Hannah heard his car start and zoom away.

Nancy looked on the verge of breakdown. Maddy sobbed into Cheetoh's fur.

Hannah wondered how many of the Joneses would actually make it to the airport.

Or if they would even make it at all.

3

The week following the Jones's big announcement was nothing short of a whirlwind. The days blurred together in a fury of packing, shopping, and goodbyes.

All the while, Noah Jones remained MIA.

Hannah had bumped into him once at school on Monday. Her parents let her go one last day to clear out her locker, tie up loose ends with her teachers, and say goodbye to her friends.

Hannah had called Grace and Abe first thing after hearing the news. At first, Grace cried. But then, that made Hannah cry. So instead, Grace tried to be strong, attempting to console Hannah as she bewailed the miseries China was sure to bring.

Grace had tried to point out all the exciting things about moving to Beijing—starting a new school, learning a new language, interesting food, the Great Wall, Jackie Chan, Yao Ming. Hannah wasn't convinced she would ever see either of the last two, but Grace's encouragement had helped a bit.

Hannah knew, though, that in spite of Grace's optimism, her absence would be hard on her best friend.

Abe, on the other hand, was jealous when Hannah told him. "*China? Seriously?*" he said. "*Why can't my parents move me somewhere cool like a communist country? What a hotbed for creativity! Do you realize the kind of work I could produce if I were oppressed?*"

Hannah was *not* reassured by Abe's comments. She hadn't even considered the political implications of living in China. Surely her dad's company wouldn't move them somewhere dangerous, would they? Maybe she should get a book on this or something. Or at least, Google it.

Hannah was astounded by the fame she had received in one weekend after news of their move spread. As soon as Grace's mom heard about the Jones's move, she told all the other pep squad moms, who, in turn, told all the football moms, who in turn, told their friends and their prayer groups which ended in all of Morris Academy knowing that Hannah, Noah, and Madelyn Jones would be moving to China in t-minus five days.

On Monday, Hannah was amazed to realize that in two short days, she had gone from an unnoticed, amiable desk-filler to the talk of the entire school. People she hadn't talked to since middle school were suddenly her best friends.

Everyone wanted to know all about Beijing—Where would they live? What they would eat? Would they have running water? Would they have to wear green jumpsuits? Which two children would they sacrifice for the one-child policy?

The news of the Joneses quickly pushed both Samantha Conner and Mouse #22 out of the limelight. And Hannah did not know what to do with it. By the end of the day, all she wanted to do was hide in her locker.

But not before she confronted the eldest Jones child. Noah Jones had not returned any of their calls. Mrs. Remos tried to talk him into going back to his family. But at the threat of sleeping on a park bench if they turned him out, the Remoses let him continue crashing on Alex's couch.

When the bell rang on Monday, Hannah marched up the hill to the soccer practice field. She found Noah laughing and juggling a ball back and forth with one of his teammates.

How could he laugh when he caused his family so much strife? Hannah was not sure Nancy could take another day with her son away from home. The dishrags were definitely suffering. She had gone through three in her worry, picking away until she reduced them to shreds.

Hannah walked straight up to Noah, ignoring his friend. "Noah Jones, we need to talk!" she said.

"Can't you see I'm practicing here?" Noah said, keeping his eyes on the ball. Hannah snatched the ball out of the air and handed it to his friend. "Can you excuse us for a moment?" she said. The teammate dribbled the ball away from them.

"Noah, you have to come home. What are you thinking? We're flying to Beijing on Saturday!" Hannah said.

Noah stared at her. "I'm sorry Hannah. But there is no way I'm coming," he said. "It's not fair. They didn't even talk to us about it. It's fine for you. You're just a sophomore. You'll make new friends. But I am a senior! What am I supposed to do?"

"That doesn't mean you can just abandon us," Hannah said.

"I'm not the one doing the abandoning here."

"Please, Noah," she pleaded.

But Noah would not be moved.

"No," he said, giving Hannah a pat on the back and running off to join his friends near the goal.

Hannah slumped back down the hill, defeated, and close to tears.

The only member of the family who rivaled Noah in bringing Nancy Jones grief was Cheetoh. Cheetoh had a way of frolicking in and looking lovable anytime Nancy started to get a grip on the tears. She couldn't look at him without losing it. All the while, Cheetoh remained oblivious to the dramatic change his life was about to take.

Nancy had taken to avoiding him. Anytime she would hear him click, click, pitter-patter into the adjacent room, she found a reason for being somewhere else.

Robert took Cheetoh to his brother and sister-in-law's on Wednesday. The goodbye to their golden retriever had been rough, ending in Madelyn sobbing into the carpet while gripping Cheetoh's leash and Nancy making an extended break to who-knows-where. And the afterward reminders of Cheetoh's absence were everywhere—a chew toy in the yard, a yellow fur ball under the couch, the doggy entrance in the front door.

Hannah hoped that things would simmer down in the lives of the Jones family once they made it to China. She could dream, right? Maddy's moping did not make it any better. She took Cheetoh's departure hardest of all. Her sadness even managed to puncture Robert's enthusiasm.

Hannah thought of the coming Saturday like she thought of her own death.

Sure, she knew it was going to happen, but it was so foreign that she struggled to believe it would actually come. In between the rush of packing and squeezing in final hangout time with friends, she had crammed in all the information possible about what to expect when you're expecting, well, China.

She could not even begin to wrap her mind around what was coming.

But, as unreal as Saturday seemed, it did indeed come.

Saturday arrived with the pressing absence of Noah staring them in the face. They had tried everything: confronting him at school, calling his cell phone at least 1,000 times, and even busting into the Remos' house.

He would not be moved.

And Nancy Jones was on the verge of total meltdown. She packed his things into suitcases like he was going with them. Hannah thought this was a bit irrational on her mom's part. Let's

face it. No one could force Noah to come. Hannah was pretty sure the security workers would be suspicious of a family dragging an eighteen-year-old boy onto the plane in a straightjacket. And the Joneses would be hard-pressed to get the boy into a straightjacket in the first place. Who would wrestle Noah to the ground? Pappaw Lee?

Yet, to the surprise of them all, it was, in fact, Pappaw Lee who came to the rescue that Saturday morning. Their flight was scheduled to leave at 2:00p.m. that afternoon. It was Maddy who first noticed Randall Lee's absence. "Mom, where's Pappaw?" Maddy asked. Nancy was in the middle of forcing all of (what was supposed to be) their toiletries into Ziploc bags.

"What?" Nancy said, dropping the baggy that contained her toothpaste, a pair of socks, and a jar of peanut butter.

"Pappaw Lee? I haven't seen him. I'm sure he must be around here somewhere. Maybe he went to get a newspaper for the trip," Nancy said, zipping a pair of Pappaw's suspenders into a bag.

By 11:00a.m., thirty minutes before the family needed to head to the airport, the sound of the front door slamming startled the Joneses.

"Noah's back," Pappaw Lee called from downstairs. The family dropped their last-minute packing and ran into the living room to see if it could be true. They found that yes, it was true! Noah would indeed travel with the Jones family to China, whether he liked it or not. Pappaw Lee stood at the front door, pulling Noah by his collar and wearing a look of satisfaction.

Noah stared at the ground, red-faced.

"Just had to talk some sense into him, that's all," Pappaw Lee said. Hannah thought she noticed Pappaw's holster poking out under his jacket. She wondered how much 'talking' had actually occurred in their encounter. She hoped the Remoses hadn't been too scandalized by the

whole affair. Pappaw Lee could be quite a firecracker when riled up. Hannah was often suspicious of his claim to be a “retired accountant.”

The whole family stared at the two of them, not knowing what to say. Finally Maddy broke the silence with a cheer.

“Hurray!” she said. “I wish you were Cheetoh, but I’m glad you’re coming too,” she said, hugging him. Noah couldn’t help hugging her back.

But that didn’t mean he would talk to the rest of the family. He would not so easily forget the injustice they had served him.

Many tears, one connecting flight, and thirteen hours later, the Jones family landed in Beijing. Hannah made the mistake of watching a documentary about the Boxer Rebellion on the trip over. The stories of foreigners forcibly moved and killed at the hands of Chinese nationalists left Hannah wishing she had taken the sleeping pill her mom offered instead.

What had the family gotten themselves into? What would the Chinese think of them? Did they like Americans?

Hannah’s dad had reassured her that many foreigners lived in Beijing. But he hadn’t mentioned anything about how the Chinese felt about that fact.

The drowsy Joneses had to go through a visa check line before picking up their luggage. Hannah’s insides churned as a lady in a blue uniform scrutinized her passport. Ms. Official Booth Lady looked at her picture, then at her face without smiling. After what seemed like forever, the lady stamped Hannah’s passport and nodded for her to continue on.

The family unloaded all twelve of their gigantic suitcases from the conveyor belt and boarded the air train to customs. Hannah was amazed at the way everyone kept pushing in and pushing in until the doors could hardly close.

No one seemed bothered by their present spooning with the stranger next to them. Hannah tried to use her suitcases to create a bubble of personal space, but the train guard came over and readjusted her bags for maximum people-squishing.

If she had not been so sleepy that she struggled to remain on both feet, Hannah would have been embarrassed by the Jones's level of conspicuousness. No one could miss their Caucasian family of six, standing high above the crowd, dragging enough luggage to build a shelter for an entire colony of homeless people.

Hannah soon became aware of the stares of those around them. She didn't know what to do. Should she stare back? Should she pretend not to notice that all eyes were on the Joneses? She opted for studying her shoelaces.

Four guards leading German shepherds greeted the Joneses at customs. As soon as she spotted the dogs, Madelyn dropped her suitcases and ran over to pet them. Noah caught her before she could touch the nearest dog, which had already started to growl. Nancy Jones grabbed her heart.

"Madelyn Rae, those are NOT pets. They are not like Cheetoh," she cried to her daughter.

Nancy regretted that last statement as soon as she said it, for Madelyn's bottom lip started to quiver, and soon she began to outright wail.

The guards eyed the crying Madelyn as they led the dogs through the sniffing of all twelve suitcases.

Hannah had a sudden thought. Would they search for food, too? Hannah wondered if her mom had packed the mounds of snacks from their kitchen table. Surely drug dogs could sniff out Velveeta! But much to Hannah's relief, the dogs passed Nancy's bags without barking.

Pappaw Lee's bags were another story. As soon as the biggest German shepherd got within three feet of Randall Lee's bags, he started barking. Soon, the other three joined in, yelping and pawing the ground. Hannah's face went white. Pappaw Lee looked at the guards with a guilty smile.

"Dad!" Nancy said, "What do you have in there?"

The lead guard opened up the suitcase and started rummaging through it. Before long, he had piled six bags of beef jerky on the ground.

"Nǐ bù néng dài jīng lái," the guard said, returning Pappaw's grin with a stern stare. The other guards gathered up the contraband and put it in a bag.

"Oopsy there, fellows! Sorry!" Pappaw said, looking sad as he watched his beef jerky disappear.

Hannah wondered what would happen. Would all their suitcases be scrutinized? Would they be fined? Jailed? Strip-searched?

But apparently, Pappaw's stunt called for no other consequences, and the four guards waved them through the door. The Jones headed to the airport exit, where a bubbling Chinese woman, who introduced herself as "Shirley" greeted them. She led them onto a bus hired by Robert's company.

After a long time of fumbling with suitcases, the Jones family boarded what was to be their taxi home. As soon as Hannah slumped into her seat, she laid her head against the window and surrendered to the overwhelming fog that now muddled her brain. She did not awake again until

they pulled into Paradise Gardens and to house number 2621. When Hannah opened her eyes, she found herself looking at her new, Chinese home.

BEIJING DAILY

SEPTEMBER 2

BABOON ESCAPES FROM BEIJING ZOO

ON SATURDAY, ZOOKEEPER YANG Hèn Li opened the door to Fèi Fèi's room like he does every Saturday morning. Fèi Fèi, a seven-year-old male baboon, has dwelled in the Primate House of the Beijing Zoo for four years now after being relocated from a game reserve in Mozambique in 2008. Mr. Yang reports that "Fèi Fèi has shown himself to be an "admirable" and "good-natured baboon." He adds, "well, at least, for the most part." Yang says, "Fèi Fèi never causes trouble with the other monkeys in the Primate House." The only complaint ever reported has been concerning Fèi's tendency to become aggressive when hungry. Fèi Fèi has been known to stare down those visitors to the Primate House carrying sustenance in their hands. He has, at times, commandeered the lunches of other primates in the Primate House.

Each Primate House resident enjoys the luxury of private sleeping quarters with his or her family. Fèi, being a bachelor, has a suite to himself. This past Saturday, Mr. Yang opened the door of Fèi's room to discover that Fèi Fèi was missing!

Mr. Yang immediately called Zoo Management. After several subsequent calls and some correspondence via walkie-talkie, Yang received the full story. Apparently, a new, young, zoo-hand had been responsible for feeding Fèi earlier that morning. Unfortunately, the boy forgot the most important instruction: only enter Fèi's room when there are no passersby. Given the close proximity of Fèi's quarters to the entrance of the Primate House, the risk of escape was high. Any small child walking by with a popsicle or banana in his hand would be cause enough to send Fèi scrambling out the door toward snackery and freedom.

As luck would have it, the young employee forgot this important rule on Saturday morning and happened to open the door to feed Fèi at exactly the same time as young Maya Halvorsen strolled by, sausage-on-a-stick in tow. Five-year-old Maya, who had been visiting the zoo with her Aunt, reports, "Ja, there I was walking



along, looking at the cute, little marmosets, when all of a sudden, this giant, ugly monkey jumps out at me and snatches my hotdog right out of my hand! I wasn't even done with that thing, thank you very much!" Her aunt reports that she saw her niece's life flash before her eyes as Fèi stole the snack and bolted out the door.

The young employee was found later, hiding in the aquarium, too ashamed to report Fèi Fèi's escape to the zoo authorities. *Beijing Daily* has since been informed that the employee, who wishes to remain unnamed, has resigned from his post in the Primate House. He left no comment.

The Beijing Zoo authorities have commenced a city-wide search for Fèi Fèi with no results thus far. They request that any sightings be immediately reported to the head Zoo office. They caution any spotters to avoid attempts to catch Fèi and warn those in close proximity to him to hide all food from view. The Zoo will not be held liable for any injury that may occur if untrained attempts to secure the baboon are made.

4

Hannah slouched at the kitchen table, staring at her unopened Chinese phrasebook. She had been in the same spot for almost an hour now. She was still in her pajamas, even though it was the middle of the afternoon. Her mom had awakened her around noon and encouraged her to do some exploring.

They had been in Beijing for three days now, and she had yet to leave the house. She was too intimidated. What would happen if she got lost? No one would know how to find her. She had no phone, no language skills. And the fog clouding her brain hindered any remaining sense of adventure she had left after two straight days of travel.

Pappaw Lee flipped through channels on the couch in the living room. Hannah heard him grumble about the lack of options.

"I just don't know how these people survive without ESPN. All I wanna see is some golf. Is that too much to ask?" Hannah flipped to a page in her phrasebook, without reading it.

"Oh, will you looky there, 'Hong Kong Idol.' Sure, *that's* more important than the PGA. For Pete's sake."

Noah came down the stairs and into the kitchen. He didn't look at Hannah but instead opened up the fridge, sighed, then slammed it. He opened up the cabinets one by one and slammed them shut.

“Uh, *hey* Noah?” Hannah said, getting irritated. Noah grunted in reply. He continued his search through the kitchen, finally finding a coke and huffing back up the stairs. Pappaw Lee continued flipping, landing on a channel that showed traditionally dressed women with white painted faces. The ladies belted out warbling, high-pitched melodies to each other and flicked their heads back and forth. “What the heck?” Pappaw Lee exclaimed, slowly, putting emphasis on each word. “Sounds like cats in heat!”

“I think it’s Peking Opera, Pappaw,” Hannah corrected, though she had to agree that she wouldn’t exactly be downloading it on her iPod.

Just then, Hannah’s mom walked through the door, carrying what seemed to be a very light shopping bag. She looked tense. Without saying anything, she walked into the kitchen and slammed each item down onto the table. Eggs, toilet paper, and a pack of Chinese Mentos. Hannah stared at her mom, confused. Nancy Jones maintained a stiff grimace. “What’s for dinner, Nance?” Pappaw Lee called from the living room. “Waan—taans?” he said, laughing. “Mushu pork?” “Flieed Lice?”

Hannah shook her head. She hoped Pappaw would keep his Chinese ‘jokes’ to himself outside of their home.

“Scrambled eggs” Nancy called back through a tight throat. Hannah watched as the tears started rolling down her mom’s cheeks.

“Mom?”

“It’s fine. I’m fine. It’s just...” Nancy started, in between deep breaths, “I got so overwhelmed. I couldn’t find anything I needed. I finally found the flour, but there were like seven different kinds...” she continued, choking back the tears “...and every five minutes or so a worker would come up to me and say something in Chinese and smile, but I didn’t understand them, and I just

wanted to search in peace. And I finally found the meat, but it wasn't in packages like at home. You had to get it from this girl at the counter, and I couldn't tell which meat was which, and I didn't know how to tell her what I wanted. So I finally just left with what I had. And I think I overpaid for my groceries, but I don't even care," she finished, blowing her nose into some of the newly purchased toilet paper.

Hannah searched for words. She didn't often see her mother so frazzled. "Um, it's ok, Mom. It'll get better. You'll figure it out." Nancy nodded and wiped her eyes. "I know I know. It's just so basic. How can we eat if I can't even buy food?" As Hannah's stomach growled, she decided this was a legitimate question.

Nancy went over to the stove and added water to a pot, placing it on the stove to boil. "And we have to boil water to drink? How...third world!" Nancy grumbled.

"I know, right? It's like we live in China or something," Hannah mumbled, trying to ease the tension. Noah came trudging back down the stairs and went to look inside the shopping bag. Finding nothing of interest, he started to complain. Nancy's hand tightened around the pot handle, and Hannah shot Noah a look that quickly silenced him. He turned and stomped back up the stairs, mumbling something under his breath about malnutrition and Sudanese refugees eating better than they were.

Pappaw Lee wandered into the kitchen. He took one look at the table. "Eggs, huh? Perfect for a little egg drop soup, Nance, you reckon'?" he said. Hannah gave him a look that said "this is not the time." Nancy wiped another tear and sniffed. He frowned, confused. "Mom had a bad day at the grocery store," Hannah explained.

"I see," Pappaw replied. He rubbed his scruffy chin, thinking. "Hmm...what do you say we take on the grocery store, Han? Give your mom a break." Hannah looked down at the pajamas she was still wearing and sighed.

"Ok, sure," she said.

Nancy smiled at both of them gratefully. She opened her purse and pulled out 1,000 Yuan.

"Um, I think this should be enough," she said.

"Thanks, mom," Hannah said, knowing ¥1,000 was enough to feed a family four times the size of the Joneses.

Nancy handed Randall Lee her shopping list. He looked it over and scratched his head. Hannah grabbed it out of his hand and handed him the shopping bag. "Here, Pappaw, you can man the cart and bags." He smiled at her, very relieved.

As they headed out the door, Hannah's mom called out directions to the grocery store. "Long walk," she said. "Wear good shoes."

On their way out of the compound, they spotted Madelyn at the neighborhood playground, petting a friendly mutt, whose owner was tapping her foot and holding the leash nearby.

"Madelyn Rael!" Pappaw Lee called after her. "We're goin' to the store. Wanna come?" Maddy looked up from her new furry friend and trotted in their direction. "Yes, yes!" she said. Hannah wondered if her mom even knew where Madelyn was.

After twenty minutes of walking, they found the nearest grocery store. Beside the hanging plastic flaps in the doorway, a sign said *Please take care when step*. Hannah snickered. But as she headed inside, Hannah's foot caught the concrete lip, and she stumbled through the flaps. "Ni hảo!" the two young girls behind the cash register greeted her, laughing.

"Um...Ni hảo" she answered back, slowly.

Hannah pulled out the list her mom had given her. She assigned her grandpa and Madelyn snack duty, while she headed to the fruit and vegetables section. She finally managed to find all that she was looking for, or at least close enough. She contemplated adding one of the fruits she had never seen before to her basket. She picked up a round yellow one that looked a lot like a grapefruit, only bigger. She stared at it. “Nèige jiao yóuzi” an old man standing beside her and wearing an orange store uniform said.

“Tài hǎo chī le.”

Hannah smiled, nodded, and stuck the yellow fruit in her basket. He gave a nod and grunted, apparently pleased.

Next, Hannah looked around for spaghetti noodles. She spotted an aisle solely devoted to different kinds. There were thin squiggly noodles, thick noodles that looked like bird’s nests, brown noodles, and even purple noodles. She noticed some skinny, brittle, yellow noodles that she thought would do.

Hannah looked around for the meat section. She spotted the lady at the counter her mom had described. The lady stared blankly at Pappaw Lee, who scratched his head and rambled on about something. Hannah walked over.

“Hi there, Han. Maybe you can help me. I was trying to tell this nice young lady about how we are in need of some bacon.”

“I don’t think she understands you, Pappaw.”

“I was startin’ to get that.”

Hannah crossed her fingers and tried speaking to the girl, “Um...chicken?” she said. The girl stared at her. “Ground beef?”

"Ting bù đồng a," the girl replied, irritated. Hannah understood why her mom had been so overwhelmed.

Madelyn came skipping over, carrying a coke, a package of "Texas Barbecue" flavored Lays Potato Chips, and a Chinese version of *Toy Story*. "Look what I found!" she squealed. "Please can we buy them?"

"How are you going to watch that movie, Maddy? You don't speak Chinese."

Maddy shrugged.

"Ok," Hannah conceded, adding Maddy's finds to the basket.

"Yay! Oooohhh look at all that raw meat! Grrrooosss!" Maddy cried, wrinkling her nose up she peered through the glass counter. "Is that a *octopus*?" Maddy said, awestruck.

"I think it's a squid," Pappaw Lee corrected. "Mmm...Calimari!"

"Now if only we knew what everything else was," Hannah mumbled.

Madelyn pointed to a minced pink meat. Hannah was horrified as Madelyn proceeded to push up her nose with her finger and start grunting like a pig to the girl behind the counter. Hannah shook her head in her hands. She heard the sound of mooing and didn't want to look, afraid her grandpa had joined in the antics. To her surprise, she raised her head to discover that the cow sounds were coming not from her little sister or grandpa, but instead, from the lady behind the counter.

One by one, Maddy and the girl took turns pointing to a piece of meat and making the appropriate animal sound. They neighed, oinked, clucked and quacked. Hannah was amazed as the previously irritated girl laughed and began to spice up her animal sounds with charades.

The fun abruptly ended, however, when Maddy mistakenly identified one meat with sheep “baaa-ing” and the girl corrected with a “ruff ruff.” Hannah watched Maddy’s face go white with horror and her lower lip begin to quiver.

“Um, I think that’s enough animal sounds for one day,” Hannah interjected. She looked at Pappaw Lee for support. He was beside himself over the encounter.

“Hmm, right. Ok,” he said. “Now which one was the “moo” and which was the “cluck cluck?” The girl behind the counter pointed to the beef and chicken. Pappaw Lee nodded at the girl and gave her a thumbs up. She began to put small quantities of each into plastic bags. After weighing and sticking a price tag on each bag, she handed them to Pappaw Lee. Pappaw nodded and smiled. “Thank you very much,” he said, a bit too loudly. Hannah pulled on his arm.

“Alright, alright. Let’s check out and go,” she said.

Just before they reached the counter, Hannah spotted a box of Lucky Charms cereal.

“Mmmmm...we have to get them!” Maddy said, grabbing the box.

Hannah looked at the price tag. They were four times the price they would be at home and past the expiration date. But she didn’t care. She threw them into their basket and approached the counter. Any taste from home would be really nice right about now.

The girl at the check-out rattled off the price in Chinese. When Hannah didn’t understand, she tried a couple more times before finally jabbing an impatient finger at the total on the cash register screen. Hannah fumbled with her money but came up with the appropriate ¥350.

On the way out of the store, a man rode toward them on a bicycle with a large cart on the back.

“Ice cream, Ice cream!” Maddy cried, looking up hopefully at Hannah.

“Ice cream to celebrate our success!” Pappaw Lee announced.

“Hurray!” Maddy screamed, scanning the different choices in Mr. Icecream’s ice box. She grabbed one with a picture of a brown bean on the front. “Must be chocolate,” Hannah said.

“Fudgesicles, great!” Pappaw Lee said. “We’ll take three of those.”

The man stared, and Hannah held up three fingers, pointing to Maddy’s fudgesicle. He nodded and pulled out two more of the same kind.

“Sān ge. Liù kuài,” the man said. Pappaw Lee pulled out his billfold and handed the man a 100-Yuán note. *13 dollars*, Hannah thought. Pappaw Lee looked triumphant over his first successful Chinese transaction. Hannah decided to let this one go. The man on the cart beamed over his great luck.

Hannah opened her ice cream. It was a strange, dark red color. She took a small bite. It was gritty and sweet. It tasted like a cross between a sweet potato and a jelly bean. Definitely not chocolate. Hannah puckered. She looked over at her grandpa and little sister. Pappaw Lee licked his “fudgesicle” and looked confused. Maddy devoured hers. Hannah caught Pappaw Lee’s eye and chuckled. He shrugged, and they continued choking down their not-chocolate fudgesicles all the happy way home.

5

Hannah's mom shook her awake.

"Hannah. *Hannah*. Hannah, you gotta wake up, girl."

Hannah groaned and peeled open her eyes. As her vision cleared she looked toward her nightstand for her clock. It wasn't there. Where was her nightstand? Everything about her room looked different. The door was in the wrong place. The furniture was all wrong. And where was her fluffy blue comforter? Oh yeah. She wasn't home in her comfy bed in Dallas. She was in a strange bed and a strange house and a strange country.

Her heart sank.

"Hannah, it's 6:45. You slept through your alarm," Nancy Jones said.

Hannah bolted up in bed. 6:45? She was supposed to have left for school already. She leapt out of the covers and hurried to get dressed. Frantic, she looked around the room for her closet but then remembered that all of her clothes were still in her suitcase.

It had been a week since they had landed, and Hannah had yet to find the energy to unpack.

"What should I wear?" she asked. She hadn't even thought about what the dress at her new school would be like.

"Do they wear uniforms?"

"Yeah," Nancy replied. "But I talked to the headmaster, and he said that you could just wear a nice shirt the first day. They sell uniforms in the school bookstore. I'll send you with some money."

Nancy made a face, "Oh! I hope they take *dollars*."

Great, Hannah thought. Not only was she going to be late to her first day, but she was going to stand out! Two weeks ago she had longed to be noticed, but now the thought made her want to throw up.

Hannah scrounged through her big suitcase and pulled on the first collared shirt she could find. She was disoriented. Even though it was morning, she could have sworn it was the middle of the night. She yawned and kicked herself for not unpacking the night before. In fact, she couldn't remember much from the day before, or even going to bed for that matter. She vaguely recalled lying down on the couch. Her dad or grandpa must have carried her up to her new room.

"Han, I'm going to run down and pack you a lunch. Peanut Butter good? It's all we've got."

"Mmm," Hannah grunted, as her mom disappeared around the door.

She tried desperately to shake herself awake. She fought a rising panic from her stomach that was beginning to form a knot in her throat. She rushed to the bathroom, ran a comb through her brown hair, splashed some water on her face. Forgetting to brush her teeth, she ran down the stairs where her mom was waiting for her with a glass of water and a travel-sized bag of teddy grahams. Nancy Jones looked apologetic.

"Sorry. *Some* breakfast, I know."

"No worries, Mom," Hannah replied, as she gulped down the glass of water and searched for her backpack. It was still full of the travel necessities from the trip over. She hesitated but

decided to take it anyway. At least some paper was in there, even if she didn't have any books. She looked around the room, "Where's dad?"

"He's already in the car with the driver and Madelyn. Mr. Bái is going to drop you guys off at school before he takes your dad to work."

"What about Noah?"

"He's still in his room. It's locked. Guess that means he's not going this morning."

"Great," Hannah replied through the lump in her throat that grew by the second. She hurried out the front door as her mom called after her.

"Love you, honey. It's going to be great!" Nancy tried to reassure her. Hannah didn't stop to look back for fear that she would totally lose it.

Hannah climbed into the back seat of the black Audi that was apparently to be their new form of transportation. Yesterday, Hannah's dad had seemed embarrassed about the car's fanciness, but today he was much more comfortable as he sat in the front seat and tried to speak to Mr. Bái, their driver. Mr. Bái nodded a lot as he listened to Robert Jones, but the expression on the man's face told Hannah that he didn't follow at all. Maddy was already buckled in the back. She smiled a dimpled smile over at Hannah.

"Good morning, Han!" she squealed. "Guess what! We're going to the same school! Do you think we'll be in the same class? Daddy said my teacher's name is Mrs. Qián. Do you have her too?"

"No," Hannah clipped back. She wasn't in the mood to deal with Maddy's bubbling questions. She had too much on her mind. Madelyn looked a bit dejected but shrugged it off and started chattering to her dad about all the things she had learned about their neighborhood.

Mr. Bái pulled out of the driveway. Hannah tried to get her mind off of what was ahead of her. She soaked in the houses in her neighborhood for the first time. Each was very similar to her own. Tall and skinny blue buildings with wide windows on each floor. A smattering of apartment complexes in between. All the buildings had orange, thatched roofs. Some had red silk banners with gold Chinese sayings hanging from their front doors. Many houses had stone animals or warriors decorating their lawns. The lawns were much smaller and rockier than those nurtured by Hannah's neighbors in Texas, though. The houses were closer together than what she was used to, as well.

Hannah wondered what her friends back home would think of their new neighborhood. Their house looked so small from the outside. And it was dingy. A thin layer of gray dust covered their driveway and roof. Would they think it was cool that she lived in China? Or weird.

Hannah thought about Mr. White, the leader of their neighborhood homeowners' association. He always badgered the neighbors about landscaping and unsightly lawn ornaments. When Pappaw Lee moved in with them, Mr. White filed a complaint about Pappaw's old green pickup:

The residents of Pleasant Valley work hard to keep their living environment pruned and perfect. We have never experienced the value decline like that of many surrounding neighborhoods. In light of that fact, something must be done about the abomination in your driveway. We are proud, working Americans, Mr. Jones. Not Hillbillies.

The conflict had ended in a raccoon with an arrow through its heart on Mr. White's doorstep. Attached to the arrow was a note:

We had leftovers. Thought it was our neighborly duty to share the good eats.

Neither Pappaw Lee nor Mr. White ever talked about the incident.

Hannah wondered what Mr. White would have to say of their current "living environment."

As they pulled through the gate of their complex and out into the road, a man in a green military uniform waved six ladies on bicycles through the gate. The ladies wore floral shirts with two rows of buttons down the front. They all had on brightly colored pants and black loafers. They chattered to each other as they rode in a little group into the compound and disappeared. Hannah thought it was odd to see so many grown women riding bicycles.

They pulled onto the street. Mr. Bái slammed on his brakes as a man riding a bicycle with a cart full of vegetables on the back swung in front of him. Mr. Bái laid on the horn and yelled something in Chinese out of his window. Mr. Vegetables continued on his merry way as if nothing had happened. Hannah's dad looked back at Hannah with raised eyebrows.

"Hannah, kiddo, you ready for today? We're gonna be a bit late." Robert Jones chuckled. Hannah was not amused. She sighed and didn't reply. She returned to the window and swallowed hard, fighting the tears that so threatened to spill over at any moment. Robert did not notice her anxiety and chattered on to fill the silence.

"Well I, for one, am so excited. I talked to my boss yesterday, and he said I would spend the day getting used to my new workspace and meeting my coworkers. I think I am only going to meet the American correspondents for the marketing campaign today, but hopefully by the end of the week, I will get to know some of the Chinese busin..."

Robert droned on, practically talking to himself about all the things he hoped to accomplish his first week at the office. Hannah tried to concentrate on the sights flashing by her. She started to feel nauseated.

Maddy and her dad reveled in the excitement of everything new. Could they not see that she was freaking out here? Did they *mind*? Their enthusiasm stressed her out all the more.

Mr. Bái had pulled onto the highway. Hannah watched in amazement as what was supposed to be four lanes somehow managed to fit eight cars across. For a moment, Hannah forgot all about her first-day-of-school worries as Mr. Bái weaved in and out of the giant smorgasbord of traffic, narrowly missing a few cars by less than an inch.

Hannah's dad stopped chattering. He gripped his seat. Mr. Bái honked as a little yellow and orange taxi swiped in front of him and slowed to a crawl. He approached an intersection and signaled to turn left. Hannah could not imagine how turning in this traffic could possibly work!

The cars continued to double up in the lanes as they approached the red light. The vehicles around and behind their Audi also blinkered left, while a few more attempted to merge into their lane. Apparently, this entire chaos would be turning together.

Hannah squeezed the arm of her little sister. The light turned green. Hannah's and Robert's mouths dropped open as the entire group of cars formed a caterpillar that crawled onto the next street.

They turned into the new highway, and Hannah gulped as she noticed the standstill of traffic ahead. She looked at the clock on the dashboard. 7:45. No way. They were not going to make it in time for her 8:00 class. Hannah shot a look of desperation at her dad, who seemed to be much calmer now that they cruised at a safe speed of zero miles per hour. He looked back at Hannah and attempted a reassuring smile.

Hannah hugged her knees up against herself and closed her eyes. She tried to pretend this wasn't happening. That she wasn't here in Beijing in a strange car with Mr. Drives-with-a-Death-Wish Bái. That instead of being late to a new school where she knew no one, she was atop her big bed, curled up in her comforter, about to get up for a day at Morris Academy, where she would be punctual and invisible.

Mr. Bái's yells interrupted her daydream. He rolled down his window to complain to a driver nearby, who had gotten out of his car to smoke a cigarette. Other cars tried to bully their way ahead by inching closer and closer to the cars in front of them.

They honked.

A lot.

As if the protest of their horns would blast a hole through the blockade of vehicles. After Mr. Cigarette shrugged and got back into his car, Mr. Bái enlisted the honking-inching-yelling method. When it didn't work, he settled for venting to Mr. Jones.

"This happens every day. Always same. Same. Same. These drivers. They are so stupid." Mr. Bái waved his arms at the cars in front of him and honked some more. Mr. Jones nodded and smiled, finding the whole thing amusing. A car beside them tried to squeeze into a tiny space without success. Robert laughed. Mr. Bái looked at him like he was crazy. Mr. Bái did not see what was so funny about the situation.

And neither did Hannah.

After what seemed like hours, the cars started moving again. Hannah opened her eyes to discover that it was now 8:30. *Great, she thought, just great.* After a few more miles of weaving, Mr. Bái pulled through the front gate of a complex that had four giant gray buildings, tennis courts, and a huge stone dragon. The words **Beijing International School** hung in huge red letters on the first building.

Hannah's insides suddenly felt like jelly. As much as she had wished Mr. Bái would get here, she now longed to be stuck back in traffic. He pulled through the drop-off zone. Madelyn looked out her window and cheered,

“Hurray! New School!” She gasped, “Look at the playground! It’s soooo much bigger than the one back home!”

She grabbed Hannah’s arm and pulled her out of the car as Mr. Bái came to a stop in front of the main doors. Robert Jones leaned through his window and gave Maddy a kiss on the forehead and Hannah’s shoulder a squeeze. He called after them,

“Have fun! It’s going to be great!”

Madelyn pulled Hannah through the front doors. As soon as they entered the building, Maddy hugged her and ran off down the hall without hesitation, yelling, “bye, Hannah! See ya after school!”

Hannah suddenly regretted her decision to stay home the day before when Maddy and her mom had visited BIS.

Hannah found a bench near the entrance and pulled out the schedule her mom had picked up yesterday. The top of the sheet read:

1st Block: Elementary Chinese 1—Miss Yu, 8:00-9:15, room 2A.

Hannah looked up at the big clock hanging on the wall. 8:45. Thirty more minutes of class left. Now if only she could find room 2A. She decided to try heading in the opposite direction as Maddy, thinking that the school buildings might be divided by age like at Morris Academy.

She walked down the first hall and read the numbers above the doors--5A, 6A, 7A, 8A. That couldn’t be right. She tried the next hall—2L, 3L, 4L, 5L. *This makes no sense*, she thought. When she turned the next hall, the letters had jumped to Y. Her stomach dropped, once again. As she turned each hall, she could hear the seconds ticking away. Her vision blurred, and she started to walk faster—9K, 10K, 11K. She struggled to read the numbers as a tear started to edge its way over her lower lid.

Just then her whole body smacked into something.

She stopped, surprised and confused. She must have hit the wall.

“Oh, sorry! Are you ok?” she heard a man’s voice say in a British accent. She looked up to see that she had not run into a wall but instead, a tall, very good-looking young man. She blushed and tried to wipe away her accursed tears.

“Uh..I...I...I’m fine. Just fine. Thanks.” She tried to look up and convince him with a smile, but as soon as she met his exceptionally big blue eyes, she colored once again.

“I’m Mr. Gallagher,” the man said, as he stuck out his hand and pulled her to her feet. “Are you sure you’re alright? Why are you out of class right now?”

“Oh. I’m...um...Hannah. I am going to class...um...just as soon as I can find it,” she stuttered out, staring at her schedule.

“Oh. You must be new. Well it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Hannah.” He grabbed her schedule out of her hands to read it.

“Ah, Miss Yǔ. You’re going to like her. You’re not that far, actually, just up the stairs here. Follow me.” Hannah was relieved. Even though she was slightly mortified to be seen in such a state--especially by this ‘Mr. Gallagher’--she was grateful to be rescued from her classroom goose-hunt.

She followed Mr. Gallagher as he led her up the stairs. He stopped in front of room 2A, knocked on the door, and then went in.

He cleared his throat, and greeted the slender Asian woman in front of the classroom with some expression Hannah didn’t understand before saying,

“Miss Yǔ and class, I would like to introduce your new classmate, Hannah...oh sorry, I don’t believe I caught your last name...”

“Jones,” Hannah replied, blushing.

“Ah, yes. Hannah Jones,” Mr. Gallagher finished, and with a wave, turned and headed back out the door. Hannah was left standing awkwardly in front of the classroom, with thirty unfamiliar blank faces staring back at her.

Hannah suddenly became very interested in the straps of her backpack.

The young Asian woman Hannah assumed must be Miss Yǔ spoke to Hannah for the first time,

“Huān yíng nǐ, Hannah. *Class?*”

“Huān yíng nǐ,” the class repeated in unison.

“Hannah,” Miss Yǔ said, “You can take that open seat at the back of the class. Here is an extra book you can use for now until you can get your own. We are on page forty-five, ‘Talking About Your Family Members.’”

Hannah found her seat. She opened her book to page forty-five. The title of the page was in Chinese characters with a Romanized transcription underneath that she didn’t understand.

“Charles,” Ms. Yǔ said, nodding to a blonde freckly boy on the front row, “Nǐ de jiā yǒu jǐ kǒu rén?” The boy called Charles’ face turned red as he frantically looked back at the page.

“Uh...um...sorry, Miss Yu. Uh...could you repeat that?”

“Nǐ de jiā yǒu jǐ kǒu rén?” Miss Yǔ said again. Charles fumbled with his text book. Miss Yǔ smiled at him.

“That’s ok, Charles. Měi shì.” As Miss Yǔ looked up and scanned the room, a girl sitting on the row next to Hannah shot her hand into the air.

“Yes, Mi-Young Kim?” Miss Yǔ asked the girl.

“Wǒ de jiā yǒu wǔ kǒu rén,” Mi-Young said.

“Very good, Mi-Young. That’s correct. Your family has five people. Does anyone else

want to--” but before Miss Yǔ could finish her sentence, Mi-Young interjected,

“Wǒ yǒu Bába, Māma, háiyou liǎng ge mèimei,” Mi-Young rattled off.

Miss Yǔ tried to maintain a smile as she responded to Mi-Young, “Very good. Mi-Young said she has a father, mother and two sisters. That’s correct. We will learn those words by the end of class today.”

The girl called Mi-Young Kim beamed, obviously pleased with herself. She looked around the room as the two girls next to her gave her high-fives. Hannah looked over at Charles, who still stared at his book, his face red. Even though Hannah had no clue what all had just passed in Chinese, she was quite sure that the situation was not fair. This girl must be from some sort of Asian country. Surely she had an advantage over this poor, red-faced boy.

“Hannah,” Miss Yǔ, said, and Hannah quickly looked back at the front of the room. “Hannah, why don’t you tell us about *your* family?” Hannah colored. She had temporarily forgotten she was a member of the class, not merely an invisible observer.

She fumbled for her words, “Um, I’m sorry, but I don’t speak Chinese.”

“No problem!” Miss Yǔ replied. “You tell us in English, and I will translate for the class.”

“Ok,” Hannah muttered. “Well, I have a Dad, a mom, a grandpa, a little sister and...” Hannah paused. A thought struck her. *Should she tell Miss Yǔ about Noah?* What if he got in trouble for skipping school without an excuse? She decided not to risk it.

“... Yeah, that’s all,” she finished.

“Excellent. Your family has five members total,” Miss Yǔ replied. She turned to the class and said something in Chinese once again. She tried to listen as Miss Yǔ translated what Hannah had said to the class, attempting to grasp some of the words she’d heard previously.

But, alas, it was hopeless. All Hannah could follow was the melodic up and down pitches of Miss Yu's speech as it rose and fell from one word to the next. She couldn't catch anything familiar. Surely she would never be able to learn this language.

That, however, was a concern for later. Right now, there were more pressing things at hand, like surviving her first day at Beijing International School.

Hannah looked up at the clock near the front of the classroom. 9:00. Class would be over soon, and Hannah would be on her own to find her 2nd period. She looked around the room. About twenty-five students filled up the class. The boys mostly sat on the left side. The girls huddled together in clusters on the right.

Hannah was surprised to see how many Asian students were in the class. She hadn't thought about it much until now, but she had assumed everyone in her new school would look like her. She wondered if these students were Chinese. But why would they go to international school? She noticed that everyone sat with those that looked like them. Brown with brown. Olive with olive. Peach with peach.

As she scanned the room, she observed three boys slumping in the back. They did not pay Miss Yü any attention. Hannah watched out of the corner of her eye as one boy made a field goal out of his thumbs and index fingers. The other two flicked small paper triangles through. *At least that's one thing familiar*, Hannah thought.

She looked up at Miss Yü, who seemed unfazed by the boys' behavior. Miss Yü turned and wrote Chinese characters on the board. Beside each character, she first wrote words in Roman letters with lines above them. Next to the words, Miss Yü wrote the English translation.

As Miss Yū wrote each word, the long sleeves of the bright pink shirt she wore swished back and forth. She was extremely pretty, with long, silky black hair. Hannah thought she couldn't be more than twenty-five. She wore loose, shiny pants to match her shirt.

As she turned around to address the class, she smiled and met Hannah's eyes. Hannah smiled back. She took a long breath. The tension that had built up inside her eased. Maybe she would be alright, after all. She felt a fragment of hope for the first time.

As the bell rang for class to end, Miss Yū wrote down the assignment for the next class period. *Write a paragraph (characters only) about your family. Five sentences or more. Be prepared to read to the class on Friday.*

The glimmer of hope rushed away as Hannah scrawled down the assignment in her notebook. She gathered her stuff and got up from her desk, bracing herself for another frantic adventure through the halls of BIS. As she headed for the door, Miss Yū stopped her, "Hannah. Wait just one moment, please." Hannah turned around.

"Hannah, I was wondering if you might want a Chinese tutor," Miss Yū said.

"No that's ok, thanks," Hannah murmured, before she could even think about it. All she could concentrate on was getting into that hall and into her next classroom.

Why did I say that? Of course I need a tutor, Hannah thought. Miss Yū leaned in close and lowered her voice, smiling.

"Really, I think it could be helpful." Miss Yū looked at a boy sitting in the front seat. He scribbled down notes from the board with one hand as he searched through a Chinese dictionary with the other.

Miss Yū called out, “Min-Ki, come here a moment, please.” The boy looked up from his writing, startled. He blinked several times, looking at Miss Yū, then at Hannah, then back at Miss Yū again.

“Min-Ki, you will be Hannah’s tutor,” Miss Yū asserted, still smiling.

“Ok, Yū Lǎoshī,” Min-Ki replied, nodding. He somehow managed to shove his books in his bag, which was already packed to the seams. He walked toward Hannah and stuck out his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Hannah,” he said, gripping her hand. Min-ki was about six inches shorter than Hannah, with round black glasses, and shaggy black hair. He wore a button down shirt tucked into khaki pants. He threw his bulky backpack over his shoulder and turned to leave, nodding once to Hannah and then again to Miss Yū.

Hannah was a bit taken aback by the abruptness of the introduction.

“Great,” said Miss Yū. “Min-ki is my best Chinese student. He will be a good tutor for you.” Hannah didn’t think there was much else she could say. All had been decided whether she liked it or not. She forced a smile. “Thanks,” she said as she turned and left.

She took a deep breath, bracing herself as she entered the rush of students pouring out into the hall. She tried to stay up against the wall and out of the way as she pulled out her schedule.

2nd period: Biology—Mr. Kwan, 9:30-10:45, room 6C.

She groaned. *Biology!?* Hannah thought she had left Biology behind in Texas. Her mind flashed back to images of Ms. Roy and her pecking panty-hose. At least escaping *that* teacher was one thing Hannah could be thankful for.

Hannah started following students in the direction she hoped would be room 6C. Thankfully, this time, after only one flight of stairs and one u-turn, she found 6C and went inside to find a

seat. Instead of desks, this classroom had lab tables. Hannah did a quick scan of the room and spotted an empty table at the back. She pulled out her notebook and proceeded to gaze at it.

“Hey, what’s up?”

Hannah looked up, startled to see that a tall, shaggy-haired brunette boy had taken the other seat at her table. Hannah thought she had seen him before but couldn’t figure out where. She stared at him, searching for something to say. He spoke again, “My name’s Chad. Chad Rogers. I was in that Chinese class you came late to just now.” He grinned. Hannah paused, still searching for words.

“Hi. I’m Hannah. Nice to meet you.” She realized where she had seen Chad. He had been one of the boys flicking paper footballs in the back of her Chinese class.

“Cool. Well, just so you know, this class is way lame. Mr. Kwan...well you’ll see.”

“Yeah, what?” Hannah asked, suddenly concerned.

“I mean he’s just a... douche, if you will. Typical Korean.” Chad replied. Hannah was shocked by the harshness of his statement. But she nodded anyway, grateful to be making a friend.

“Oh. Yeah, I know what you mean.” She said, nodding. *Know what you mean?* She didn’t even know any Koreans.

“No worries, though,” Chad continued, “me and the boys do what we can to make sure he stays in line.” Chad nodded towards his friends across the room. Hannah looked over to see the same two guys who had been with Chad in Chinese. They looked her way, smiling. She tried to smile back. One was a bit stocky with buzzed, brown hair and the other tall and lanky, with shaggy blonde hair and a smirk on his face. The lanky one winked at Hannah. She reddened.

“We’ve got your back, Hannah. We Americans have to stick together, yeah?” He chuckled, pushed his chair back in, and went back to join his friends. Hannah looked down, still startled by the interaction.

The bell rang as a middle-aged Asian man walked through the door carrying a brown brief case. He slapped down a stack of papers, and paced to his desk, where he typed something on the computer before taking his spot behind the podium.

Hannah watched the man. He must be Mr. Kwan. He wore a button-down blue shirt, with a red tie and navy cardigan. His pleated dress pants were a dark khaki, and he wore dark brown leather hush puppies.

The rumble of chattering in the class died down as Mr. Kwan looked up, ready to start.

“Class. I was both pleased and disappointed by what I saw when I graded your tests from Friday. Some of you could label a cell with your eyes closed. Other couldn’t tell mitochondria from a ribosome. The results? 7 As, 2 Bs, 1C, 4Ds, and 9 Fs.” The class broke out into a collective whisper.

Hannah watched as some students exchanged worried glances with their friends and others suppressed smiles of pride. Hannah noticed the boy named Min-ki thumping his desk with his pencil and eyeing at the graded tests in Mr. Kwan’s hands.

Mr. Kwan proceeded to walk around the room and hand out each student’s test. Just then, a petite, slender Asian girl rushed into the room. She wore blue flowery tights under her generic navy skirt. Hannah wondered if that complied with school uniform. Her hair was in a bun high on her head. She sported a sheepish grin, darted in the door. Mr. Kwan turned to face her, raising his eyebrows.

"So sorry, Mr. Kwan! There was an...um...accident in my foods class," the girl said.

Hannah noticed that the girl had flour down her skirt and a small burned hole at the bottom of her white blouse, which was half-untucked.

Mr. Kwan sighed. "It's fine, Terese. Just don't let it happen again." Mr. Kwan continued to hand out papers. Hannah realized that this girl, Terese, was heading to the empty seat at Hannah's table. Terese smiled a huge grin at Hannah and pulled out her work.

For the rest of the class Mr. Kwan went over the test. Hannah tried to take notes over the material he covered, hoping she could grasp something. It seemed, though, that her Biology class back in Dallas was far behind Mr. Kwan's. Hannah would just have to work really hard on her own to catch up. She was terrified by the idea of asking Mr. Kwan for help. He had not yet acknowledged her presence in class. Maybe he hadn't noticed. She preferred it that way.

As the bell rang for the end of 2nd period, Hannah gathered her stuff and prepared to leave. As she was walked out, Mr. Kwan caught her by the arm.

"Hannah. Hannah Jones," he said. Hannah was stunned that he not only noticed her, but knew her name.

"Hannah, I spoke with your mom yesterday. Lovely woman. I told her that you shouldn't worry if you are a little behind. I have put together some notes and practice worksheets over the material we've covered so far. You'll be fine. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask. Here's your textbook. You can just pay the bookstore when you get around to it."

Mr. Kwan smiled and waved her on before she had time to respond. Hannah turned and headed out the classroom door. She was shocked by Mr. Kwan's friendliness, but grateful nonetheless. Her heart lifted. She began to wonder about Chad's comment.

Hannah had lunch next. She thought 10:45AM was a bit early. It looked as though she would have a whole hour to eat! Wow! At M.A. she had to cram down her food in twenty-five minutes.

She looked around for some sign of the cafeteria and noticed a boy carrying a brown lunch bag at his side. She followed him down the stairs and back towards the main entrance where, lo and behold, the cafeteria stood right in front of her.

She took a deep breath as she entered the large open room already filling up with students. They waved at each other and took their trays and lunch sacks to tables to join their friends. Hannah looked around for anyone familiar or even friendly.

The faces all looked the same.

Every student seemed engaged in his or her conversation. Just then she spotted Chad. She hesitated, then, remembering their conversation about Mr. Kwan earlier in Biology class, decided to duck back out and find somewhere else to eat.

Hannah walked out of the main entrance. She wasn't sure whether or not students were allowed to leave during the day, but she was willing to risk it. A firing squad of teachers and principals seemed more appealing to her right now than chartering the lunch room alone.

She walked around the playground until she found a bench that looked apt for her and her PB and J. It was hidden behind a giant red dragon statue. Convenient. She wasn't too keen to be seen lunching alone.

The statue looked like something straight out of *Mulan*. Hannah did *feel* like she was in a movie. Though conquering a new school did not seem comparable to conquering the Huns. And let's face it: "conquering" did not even really describe what she was doing right now.

Hannah began to process the events of the day. On a positive note, she was still alive. She had made it through at least the first half of the day with few scrapes. Both Mr. Kwan and Miss Yü seemed to be especially nice and helpful, no matter how hard their subjects.

As Hannah pulled out her Biology notes and began to look them over, she thought she heard someone calling her name.

“Hannah, Hannah!” a voice called, getting closer. She looked up to see Min-ki, her new Chinese tutor, running in her direction and waving something in his hand.

6

“Hannah! I finally found you!” Min-ki said, struggling to catch his breath. He hunched over and grabbed his knees, still holding the paper he had just been waving. Hannah strained to see what it was.

“I have been looking everywhere for you! Yǔ Lǎoshī gave me some extra notes for you.” Min-ki handed Hannah the notes, which were now a bit crumpled.

Vocabulary: Chapters 1-5.

Hannah scanned the foreign words on the first page. She observed the way each word had markings over the vowels. She wondered what they were for.

wó, nǐ, wómen, nǐmen, hǎo, mā, máng, bù.

“Thanks,” She said. “It’s Min-ki, right?”

“Yep! Min-ki Cho. 10th grade.” Min-ki grinned. Hannah couldn’t help but smile back.

“I brought you some other things to help you practice.” Min-ki started pulling out more notes from his backpack, along with a couple of workbooks and a Chinese textbook.

“Umm...thanks?” Hannah said, chuckling.

“This will get you started,” Min-ki said. “I have more things at home, once you start improving. Are you free tomorrow at lunch for tutoring?”

Hannah thought for a moment. That would save her from the cafeteria for at least one day.

"Sure," she replied.

"Great. We can just take our lunches and meet in Miss Yü's classroom."

"Ok, cool," Hannah said. She put Min-ki's notes and books into her bag.

"Sorry I couldn't meet after school," Min-ki said. "I have Academy until 6:00."

"Academy?" Hannah asked, confused.

"Yeah. Lots of Korean students go. It's extra college preparatory work plus--more math and science. Keep our Korean fresh."

"Sounds...um...fun?" Hannah said, raising her eyebrows.

"It is!" Min-ki said, confused. "Plus, it is the only way to get into an Ivy league."

"Hmm..." Hannah said. She hadn't even started thinking about college yet! Regular school was bad enough. She thought there were about 1,000 other things she would rather be doing than going to *extra* school. Being a guinea pig for biological-weapons testing. Watching paint dry. Cleaning out rabid ferret cages...at *least* 1,000 other things.

Man, these Korean students were hard workers. But why were there were so many Korean students at BIS? Maybe she would ask Min-ki. But was that an offensive question? She pondered. It was an international school after all. That would explain it. They were international students.

A thought struck her. *She was an international student too!* But international students were supposed to be German or Czech or Japanese. It was so weird that she was now included in that group. And so were these Koreans. Weird.

The bell rang and both Hannah and Min-ki gathered their stuff and headed back inside.

"Ok, great. See you tomorrow at lunch," Min-ki said.

"Cool. Thanks," Hannah replied. She pulled out her schedule as they headed inside.

3rd period: English—Mr. Gallagher, 12:00-1:15, room 4C.

Hannah's stomach leapt a bit. From her encounter with him in the hall, Mr. Gallagher seemed really nice. Hannah had never had a young teacher before, not to mention a handsome British one. Surely, this would be a good class. Hannah didn't think she could make it otherwise. Plus, it was English, her best subject.

"Hannah, do you know where you're going?" Min-ki asked, noticing Hannah scan the halls in search of signs of 4C.

"Yeah, I think...ok, not really, actually." Hannah answered.

"No problem. I'll show you how to go." Min-ki said, looking at Hannah's schedule.

"Oooh, Mr. Gallagher. He's so cool." Min-ki grabbed Hannah's arm and pulled her along. She was surprised by this gesture but thankful, nonetheless. Maybe she would make it to at least *one* class on time.

Hannah followed Min-ki all the way to hall C. As they grew closer to Mr. Gallagher's classroom, Hannah realized she had already been there this morning. She looked down the hall and, sure enough, spotted Miss Yū wafting into 6C. Hannah caught sight of Maddy bouncing in behind her. Maddy smiled as she skipped hand in hand with a pig-tailed Asian girl who wore pink bows in her hair. Maddy must have been telling the girl a story because her lips flapped up and down, and she gestured with her free arm. The little girl nodded in awe.

At least Maddy seemed to be settling in nicely, Hannah thought. She fought the feelings of jealousy bubbling in her stomach. She tried to be glad her sister had found a friend, even though she felt so alone.

"Here's your stop, Hannah. See you tomorrow," Min-ki said, as he waved goodbye and hurried off in the opposite direction. Hannah took a deep breath and walked through the door. She looked around the room, half of which had rowed desks. In the other half sat a maroon

leather couch and comfy brown chairs on top of a Turkish rug. The walls were lined with mismatched wooden bookshelves filled with antique books. In the corner stood floor reading lamps that looked like lampposts one might find on a street corner in downtown London.

Hannah wondered if she was in English class or the Gryffindor Common Room.

She searched for an open desk.

"Ah, Hannah, just sit anywhere you like; we do not have assigned seating in our class," Mr. Gallagher greeted her.

"Thanks," Hannah mumbled and found the nearest open seat behind a pretty Indian girl who was reading a fashion magazine.

"Don't you want to be working on today's sentence, Kunjana?" Mr. Gallagher said to the girl.

The girl rolled her eyes and eased her magazine in her messenger bag, pulling out a notebook and pen in its stead.

Hannah spotted the Korean girl from her Chinese class who had already known the whole day's material. She sat close to her two sidekicks, and they all scribbled and erased markings on their papers with fury. Periodically, they took quick glances at the board and scanned the progress of their peers around them.

The bell rang and Mr. Gallagher announced that the class could have a few minutes to finish diagramming the sentence. Hannah pulled out a piece of paper from her bag. She breathed a sigh of relief. She had always enjoyed sentence diagramming and had never really struggled with it. She looked up at the chalkboard.

William Wordsworth fancied a strong cup of tea.

Hannah drew a long line on her paper and started putting words in their proper places.

“Late again, Claudio. You too, Giovi. I’m sure you could have wrapped up that story you were awing your friends with a little quicker,” Mr. Gallagher said, suppressing a smile as the boy called Claudio threw his hand over his heart in an expression of hurt at the accusation. His friend, Giovi, chuckled as he pushed Claudio through the door and to their seats.

Hannah finished her sentence and twiddled her thumbs as she waited for class to start. Mr. Gallagher walked up and down the rows, checking each student’s work. He stopped at Hannah’s desk.

“Hannah, it’s alright if you just want to observe toda--”he started to whisper, stopping mid-sentence, “—oh, you’ve already finished. Let me see.”

He looked over her work and gave her a wink and a thumbs up. “I see you’ll do just fine in here.” Hannah’s face went red as her stomach did a flip flop. Mr. Gallagher continued walking up and down the rows. Hannah fought back a grin. She wondered if they had English club at BIS.

Mr. Gallagher clapped his hands, “Ok, class, who would like to identify the part of speech for each word in today’s sentence?” Hannah saw the girl from her Chinese class shoot her hand in the air. “All-right, Mi-Young. Let’s hear it.”

Mi-young smiled cleared her throat, “Eh-hem. ‘William Wordsworth’--*subject*, ‘fancied’--*verb*, ‘tea’--*direct object*, ‘a strong cup of’--*adjectives*, modifying tea.”

Mi-Young smiled triumphantly.

“Oh, so close but yet so far. I’m sorry, Mi-Young. Thanks for playing, but better luck next time.” Mr. Gallagher chuckled and winked at Mi-Young. Mi-Young was not amused. She huffed as her face turned red. She turned sharply to her friends and shared some angry Korean words with them. They nodded in agreement, sharing in her woe.

Mr. Gallagher looked around the room for another volunteer. No one raised their hands. The boy named Claudio raised the hand of Kunjana sitting in front of him. She gasped and shot a look at him that said “you have seconds left to live.”

“Ah, Claudio, thank you so very much for volunteering,” Mr. Gallagher said. Claudio started to protest but surrendered instead, whipping his paper up to his face.

“Well, Mr. Gallagher. You see, I think the correct answer should be,” he started in a thick Italian accent, “‘Wordsworth’--*subject*, ‘William’--*adjective*, ‘fancified’--*verb*, ‘strong’--*direct object*...yeah ok, that’s really all I have.” Claudio shrugged and gave Mr. Gallagher a big grin.

Mr. Gallagher shook his head in his hands.

“Have I taught you people nothing? Can *anyone* tell us what the correct answer is?”

Mr. Gallagher scanned the room again. Crickets. Hannah stared down at her paper, hoping she wouldn’t be called.

“Ok, Hannah, it’s up to you to rescue us, since I seem to have failed teaching this lot. Headmaster Qián can be expecting my resignation tomorrow.”

Hannah looked up at the board then back at her paper once again.

“Um...I think it’s...‘William Wordsworth’--*subject*, ‘fancied,’--*verb*...um...‘cup’--*direct object*, ‘a’ and ‘strong’--*adjectives*, ‘of’--*preposition*, and ‘tea’--*object of the preposition* with the...er...phrase modifying ‘cup.’

“Excellent, Hannah, well done! Class, it looks like we need a newcomer to show us how it’s done. I expect better performance tomorrow or I’ll have you doing laps around the school while I recite “The Waste Land” over my megaphone.”

The class laughed. Hannah looked back down at her paper, pleased to have not made a fool of herself in front of the class on the first day. Mr. Gallagher pulled up a stool next to the board, plopped down and opened a copy of Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

“Alright, now where did we get in the reading yesterday? Ah, yes, Stephen Dedalus has just decided that he will become a priest.” As Mr. Gallagher read a passage to the class, Hannah heard whispering close by. She looked over to see where it was coming from and spotted Mi-Young throwing malicious glances in her direction. Mi-Young muttered something to her friends. Hannah met Mi-Young’s eyes but then darted them away, eager to avoid a stare down. *Awesome*, Hannah thought. It was only the first day, and she had already made enemies.

After finishing the passage, Mr. Gallagher pulled up a power point with lecture notes and began discussing the reading. As he pulled answers about Stephen’s character one by one from students in the class, Hannah felt a fuzziness start to form behind her eyes. She fought to stay focused but found her eyelids getting heavier and heavier. She nearly fell out of her seat when the bell finally rang at 1:15 for the end of class. Hannah jerked upright. She must have dozed off. She fumbled for her things and headed out the door, feeling entirely disoriented.

She looked at her schedule, grateful she only had one more period to endure that day. The words swam around on the page as she struggled to focus, and the 4 fuzzy lines of

4th period: P.E.—Mr. van der Merwe, 1:30-2:45, gymnasium,

finally came together at the bottom of the page.

Hannah spotted orange curls bobbing and weaving in between walking legs in front of her. Madelyn. She sped up to catch her little sister. “Maddy, Maddy,” she whispered. Maddy looked up and beamed at her. “Hi, Hannah! Where are you going?” Hannah looked down at her schedule again. “Um, P.E.? How about you?”

“Ooooh...I had that this morning. It was soooo much fun. We played four square and then we started a new sport, fuzzby! It’s like football but you never stop and you can’t throw forward or Mr. Fanda Mother blows his whistle, and you tackle all the time, except we weren’t supposed to tackle, just pull each other’s flags, but this one kid Justin forgot and smashed Mèi down, and then she hit him in the eye, and he stormed off and Mr. Fanda had to chase him and then we all got to just play H-O-R-S-E the rest of the time and then...” Hannah struggled to keep up with Maddy’s story, nodding groggily. “Uh, Maddy,” Hannah interrupted, do you think you can point me to the gym? I don’t know how to get there.”

“Yeah!” Maddy said, grabbing Hannah’s hand and pulling her along. Maddy chattered all the way to the gym as Hannah dragged behind her. When they made it, Maddy skipped off in the opposite direction, waving and smiling at Hannah as she left. As Hannah headed for the gym entrance, she noticed Chad from her Biology class and some other boys taking shots with a soccer ball against the side wall. She hurried inside to avoid being seen. As she walked in, girls came out of the dressing room wearing athletic clothes. Oh no! She hadn’t brought any P.E. clothes!

Hannah looked around the room for the teacher. She spotted a large, broad-shouldered man with a thick neck and balding head. He stood by the basketball goal, wearing a blue and white striped polo jersey. He had a whistle in his mouth. Hannah headed over to him.

“Um, excuse me. Sorry. I’m Hannah Jones. I’m new.” The big man looked down at her. “Oh ja, right. Hannah. I heard you were coming. Had your baby sister in gym this morning. Energetic little missy, hey?” he said chuckling.

Hannah forced a laugh. She fought the fog that had formed in her brain.

“I’m Coach van der Merwe. That’s fan—der—mur—vuh. Sometimes trips up you American lot, but I’m used it by now. Been in this country too long to care about proper pronunciation of things.” He shook his head. “So, do you have clothes or anything?” Hannah shook her head. “Right, that’s fine for today. I’ll let you off, but I expect to see you dressed out and on the line tomorrow.” Hannah nodded.

She plopped herself down on some bleachers and watched as the students in the class stretched and then lined up on the volleyball court. With horror, she spotted Mi-Young on the opposite court. She watched as Mi-Young took down a small eighth-grade girl in front of her and spiked the ball into the ground. She dreaded having to play with this girl.

Hannah watched as the sights of students serving, setting and spiking started to blur. She fought to keep her eyes open without success.

She awoke at 2:45 to the sound of the bell and of students filing through the door with their gym bags, dressed back into their day clothes. She looked around the room and tried to figure out where she was.

She spotted Coach van der Merwe scooping up two volleyballs with one hand, and she suddenly remembered. She must have fallen asleep on the bleachers. Mortified, she pulled herself up and wiped the drool off of her cheek with her sleeve. She stumbled out of the bleachers and headed for the door.

On her way out, she caught the coach’s eye. He waved.

“Jet lag is a brute, eh, Hannah?” he called, laughing, “See ya tomorrow!” Hannah waved and found the exit.

Hannah realized her dad hadn't told them how they were supposed to get home. Would he pick them up? Should they catch a taxi? Hannah didn't think she could tell a driver how to get to her house in *English*, let alone Mandarin.

She wandered around until she found the front of the school where they had been dropped off that morning. She spotted Maddy out front, climbing the dragon statue with a blonde boy who looked about her age. Maddy waved. Hannah motioned for her to climb down and come over. She hopped down and ran in Hannah's direction, her backpack bouncing up and down with each stride.

"Is dad coming?" Hannah asked, starting to become concerned. Maddy just shrugged. Just then a black car glided in beside them. Hannah was relieved to see Mr. Bái behind the wheel. He climbed out and walked over to the other side of the car. Opening the back door, Mr. Bái motioned for Maddy and Hannah to get in. As Mr. Bái pulled away and started the drive home, Hannah leaned her head against the cold window. Before she could even begin to process the events of the day, the fog muddied her thoughts, and her eyelids drooped. In seconds, she was out. She didn't stir for the rest of the way home.

Fèi Fèi strolled onto the lot. He wandered over two steel beams that waited for the crane to lift them to the sky-scraper's fourth floor. Men yelled around him, and the sound of a jack hammer distracted the baboon for a moment.

His breakfast of dumplings, which he had procured from a restaurant's trash bin earlier that morning, started to wear off. His stomach growled.

Fèi picked up a wrapper from the ground and licked it. It tasted garlicky. It reminded him of the earlier dumplings. He spotted a pomelo lying next to a hat on the ground. He meandered over and sniffed it. But before he could begin peeling open the fruit, he felt something hard hit him in the back of the head.

He turned around. A man ran at him, waving his arms and yelling. Fèi began to scurry off in the opposite direction, gripping his find under his arm. The fruit was too big though, and the man gained on him.

In a moment, Fèi decided to leave his find behind. He dropped it and darted across the street to safety.

He looked back after he had crossed. The man stood staring at the edge of the street, his pomelo still lying where the baboon had dropped it.

Fèi continued on, following his nose as it caught a fishy whiff...

7

"Your assignment for Wednesday is to read chapters eight and nine in the book and do all the odd numbered exercises at the end," Mr. Kwan announced to the class as the bell rang. Hannah gathered up her stuff. On her way out, she passed Min-ki asking Mr. Kwan a question about the lecture. He smiled, and she waved. Hannah was beginning to really like Min-ki. She didn't know if he was a friend, but it was at least nice to know one friendly face.

And Miss Yü had been right. He really was excellent at Chinese. Even after only three lessons with him, Hannah felt like she was catching on.

As Hannah walked out into the hall, she spotted Noah leaning up against the wall. She smiled at him. She was relieved he had finally started coming to school.

Mom couldn't really force him to go. She couldn't ground him. Where would he go anyway? She couldn't take away his possessions. What things did he have in China? Nancy and Noah had been stuck in a stalemate until Noah made the first move. He agreed to go to BIS, but that did *not* mean he was going to be happy about it. And it did *not* mean that he was ok with being in Beijing. And it did *not* mean he would apologize for barricading himself in his room for two weeks.

Noah barely acknowledged Hannah as she walked over to talk to him.

"What's up?" Hannah asked.

"Not much," Noah mumbled.

"Well, what are you doing here? Is your class on this hall?" Hannah pressed.

"Nah. I'm just waiting for Chad and the guys. Grabbing lunch."

"Oh. I didn't realize you guys were friends."

"Yeah, we're friends alright," Chad interrupted, "Noah and I go waaaaay back," Chad said, slinging his arm around Noah's shoulders and turning to smile at Hannah.

"But how, may I ask, do *you* know Noah, Hannah? Is he a long lost love of yours? Did he follow you all the way to Beijing just to be near you?" Chad raised his eyebrows.

"He's my brother," Hannah replied, not amused.

"Ah, good to hear," Chad said, winking. "Your *sister* and I are lab partners," Chad said to Noah.

"Actually, *Terese* is my lab partner. She just wasn't here today" Hannah replied, coldly.

"Well, naturally, I couldn't leave Hannah alone to dissect her rat. That would have been so ungentlemanly of me." Chad flashed a charming smile Hannah's way. She glared back.

"Well, thanks, bro. I'm glad someone is looking out for my baby sister," Noah told Chad. Hannah shot him a look that was intended to say, "Are you kidding me?"

Noah didn't get the message.

"You're coming to lunch with us, Hannah, right?" Chad said.

"Umm...uh...actually--"

"—right, I see you have your lunch. Perfect. I'll show you where we sit," Chad interrupted, pulling Hannah by the arm as he promenaded through the hall with his other arm around Noah. He chatted the whole way about how he had bravely aced the rat dissection, making it sound as if Hannah had been watching from the sidelines, swooning and cheering, the entire time.

Hannah thought she might throw up. She fought hard to keep from rolling her eyes again and again, checking herself for Noah's sake. She was glad he had made friends. Even if his friends *did* totally suck.

Hannah followed Chad and Noah into the cafeteria and sat down at their table. They all pulled out their sack lunches and started to tear into them. Hannah took a hesitant gander at the contents of her sack, hoping for the best.

Her mom had gotten better at navigating the grocery store, but they still had eaten some weird meals. The night before, Nancy had slaved for three hours to make homemade tortillas. They noticed, though, when they bit into their tacos that the meat seemed off. Hannah and her dad tried to be polite, exchanging secret looks to see if anyone else tasted what they did.

Pappaw Lee, oblivious to any difference, polished off three tacos before they could even force down the first. Noah glared at his plate without saying anything, and Maddy finally broke the ice with "hey, Mom, these tacos taste funny!" After that, everyone felt free to chime in with their agreement. Hannah had watched her mom become quiet and tense.

"Ok!" Nancy blurted out. "We'll just have peanut butter again. It's fine."

But it wasn't fine. The food issue steadily wore on the Jones family. And Nancy struggled to try to hold things together with a string of peanut butter sandwiches and left over cheese she had smuggled from the airplane.

Yesterday, though, Hannah's mom had returned from the grocery store looking triumphant. "I found bread and lunch meat!" She said. Maddy had cheered, "No more PB & J!" and Hannah had hugged her mom, scrutinizing the loaf of bread from the corner of her eye and observing its yellow hue.

As Hannah opened her lunch sack and now examined her “turkey” sandwich, Chad relived the glory of the weekend’s soccer game.

“You should have seen us, Noah. We totally schooled Tianjin. I wouldn’t have wanted to be in the locker room after that game. I had this spectacular goal in the second half where I dribbled around two of their midfielders, their sweeper and left D and then nailed it from twenty feet out, right over the goalie’s fingertips. Look out, David Beckham. I’d like to see you bend it like *that*.”

“That’s awesome, dude,” Noah replied, trying to look impressed. “I’m stoked to get to dress out this afternoon. Haven’t properly played in like a month.”

“Yeah, can’t wait to see what you’ve got. Good luck holding your own with Rich, here, though. He’s a real beast, aren’t you, Rich?” Chad said, nudging the stocky brunette Hannah always saw with him.

“Oh, you know,” Rich replied. “I just try to keep ‘em in line.”

“You should’ve seen what Tianjin’s right forward looked like after Saturday’s game. Kept him in line, alright,” Chad said, looking over at Hannah and winking. Hannah looked down at her lunch. As Chad continued to give Noah a play-by-play, Hannah tried to brave her sandwich.

She took a bite and fought the urge to spit it right back out. The bread was about ten times sweeter than she expected. Her sandwich tasted like turkey on French toast. And the turkey tasted spoiled. Perhaps it wasn’t really turkey, but some mysterious “other white meat,” like the tacos last night.

Hannah opened her sandwich to take a closer look. The turkey looked normal, but the lettuce was definitely weird. She had never seen lettuce that big and white. She pulled it off and

put it to the side. She looked at Noah to see if his sandwich was as weird as hers. He ignored her, seeming engrossed in everything Chad said.

“What, don’t you like cabbage, Hannah?” a male voice said from behind her.

Hannah turned around to find Min-ki coming up to sit by her.

“Huh? Oh, what about cabbage?” Hannah replied, startled.

“Why did you pull the cabbage off of your sandwich?” Min-ki asked.

“Is *that* what that is? Huh. I thought it was lettuce. Gross.”

Min-ki shrugged. “Sorry to bother you,” he said. “I was just wondering if you are still free this afternoon for tutoring. Miss Yù said we can use her classroom again. I’ll ask my mom about studying at our house sometimes, too.”

“Yeah, sure.” Hannah replied. “Thanks!”

“No problem. I will see you later.” Min-ki got up and quickly walked over to a Korean girl who summoned him, “Min-ki, Miiiiinnn---kkkkiiiiii.”

Hannah looked back at Chad and the guys who had stopped talking and now stared at her, stunned.

“What was *that* about, Hannah?” Chad said.

“What do you mean? Min-ki just tutors me for Chinese,” she muttered.

“Right, ‘tutors’” he said. “Sounds like a study date to me. How do you feel about *that*, Noah? Your baby sister is running with that little Korean punk. Ah, I hate that guy, you know? Always sucking up to the teachers, always killing the curve for everyone else.” Hannah could feel the heat rising up her neck.

“I mean, it’s not his fault he’s *smart*,” Hannah said, struggling for words. “He works hard. He’s a good student. And a good tutor.”

“Yeah or a good something else,” Chad said, frowning as his friends chuckled.

“Whatever.” Hannah said. She could feel the tears coming up. She looked at Noah, pleading for support. He stared down, fumbling with his sandwich.

“Well, I have to go,” Hannah said abruptly. “Mr. Kwan said he wanted to meet me about a class project,” Hannah lied.

“‘Class project,’ right.” Chad teased. “Have fun hanging out with your boyfriend, Binky.

Hannah hurried away from the table, fumbling to throw her backpack over her shoulder. The room started swimming. She brushed her cheek quickly. In the background she could still hear the sound of Chad and the other guys laughing. She thought she heard the sound of Noah’s voice too.

Just wait until we get home, Noah Jones. She thought. I am still your sister.

Mr. Bái pulled into the driveway, and Hannah hopped out and walked up the stairs into their house. She found Maddy and Pappaw Lee playing Connect 4 in front of the TV. Every now and then, Maddy would take a break from the game to sing. She tried to mimic the nasally, warbling sounds of the performers on CCTV. Apparently the Joneses could only get three channels at their house, and one of them was 24/7 Peking Opera. Hannah didn’t care much for it, but her Dad found it fascinating, and everyone else found Maddy’s imitations hilarious.

Hannah spotted Noah through the glass door connecting the living room to the kitchen. He sat at the kitchen table, drinking a coke and looking sweaty and tired. Apparently he had gotten

to practice with the team after all. Hannah let her stuff fall to the floor. She went into the kitchen, grabbed some water out of the fridge, and let the door slam loudly.

“How was practice, Noah?” she sneered.

“Fine,” Noah replied.

“Fine, huh? Was Chad the all star athlete he makes himself out to be?”

“Ah, Han, Chad’s not that bad. He’s just a guy.” Noah replied, trying to laugh off the tension Hannah exuded into the room.

“Just a guy? *You’re* a guy, and *you’re* not a jerk like that. Or at least you *weren’t* a jerk like that before we moved here. What’s happened to you?”

“What?” Noah, snapped back, his voice rising.

“You’re usually one of my friends. And you’re always nice to everyone! But here, you’ve just huffed around all the time. Slamming doors, holing up in your room for hours, being mean to Mom. It’s not like you!”

Noah got really quiet and glared at the table.

“And what’s with these stupid friends you’re hanging out with? Why do you put up with those guys? They’re not that nice to you anyways. Chad only started getting all buddy-buddy with you when he realized I was your sister,” Hannah retorted.

Noah slammed his empty coke can down.

“Whatever, Hannah. I don’t care what you think.” Noah hurled the can into the waste bin, and left the kitchen. Hannah heard him stomp up the stairs and slam his door. She slumped into his empty chair and let her head rest on the table.

Mr. Wu sat at his desk, thumping his pencil and pondering. He had just spent six hours in a board room with a team of Chinese and German engineers. The project, a hotel close to the Exhibition Center, was simple enough. His firm had chosen him to direct the team. The government hoped that the new hotel would cater to clientele from around the world who would come to the area for everything from antique car shows to book fairs. Their job was to construct something that would appeal to all.

Today's meeting had been the worst yet. The team could not come to a consensus on a design. Even when they finally agreed upon a rough sketch of what the structure would look like, then there were the materials and the timeline to determine.

His Chinese team valued cost-efficiency and speed. They were on a deadline and a budget here. The government had hired their company out for this job. Mr. Wu went pale as he envisioned himself walking into Hu Jintao's office and apologizing: "I'm sorry, sir, actually it's going to take three more years than we thought. Oh, and do you mind if we spend two billion more yuán than we had originally intended? Great, thanks!"

Mr. Wu shuddered. Maybe he could pass off this project to his assistant and opt for an early retirement. There was no working with these Germans. They had no concept of a time-constraint. They valued slow, meticulous design. It was a wonder they had ever finished any project. They went round and round on the details, fretting about each one. If Rome wasn't built in a day, Munich must have taken centuries. Millennia even.

And then there was the issue of the budget. Didn't they know that expensive did not always mean quality? The figures for the building materials they wanted to use were astronomical.

Wu knew he would be white-headed before this project was completed.

He sighed and looked out his seventh floor window. He saw a flash of something brown and furry. He rubbed his eyes. The stress must be making him hallucinate. He thought he had seen a monkey strolling past the bus stop. Maybe it was a dog. He looked again.

Jumping out of his rolling chair, he hurried to the glass as Fèi climbed onto the top of the trash can and began to rummage through its contents...

8

Hannah scribbled down notes as Mr. Kwan drew a diagram of photosynthesis on the chalkboard. She had already gone through four pages today in her effort to keep up with Mr. Kwan's lecture. She looked up at the clock. Only ten minutes left in class. My, how the time flew when one was drawing chloroplasts!

Hannah heard scribbling next to her and looked over to see Terese bent with her face very close to her notebook. Hannah leaned in to see what Terese had drawn. It was not, in fact, a diagram about plant cells but a very elaborate picture of a pond. In Terese's pond floated a sleeping fisherman in a little boat. As he rested his head on the stern and feet on his pole, several fish leaped over him to the other side.

Hannah smiled. She had observed her lab partner's artistic doodling for several days now. Every day Terese went through the same routine. She would rush in a little after the bell, always looking like she had narrowly survived some epic disaster.

This morning, she came running in almost ten minutes late, black bun on top of her head smoking and her thick-rimmed square glasses missing a lens. Hannah wondered what could possibly be happening in Terese's 1st period Foods Class! Perhaps a feisty bread pudding or a stubborn roast duck had it out for Terese.

After Terese finally situated, she would doodle some fantastic nature scene. Hannah wondered if Terese took lessons or merely sketched to make it through Biology. Either way, she was quite good.

Though Hannah tried to stay engaged in Mr. Kwan's lectures, she had begun to appreciate the distraction Terese's doodling provided from Chad and his friends, who daily tried to find some way to either frustrate Mr. Kwan or get Hannah's attention.

Hannah looked up to find that Mr. Kwan had stopped writing and had begun handing back their tests from Monday.

"Really well done, Hannah," Mr. Kwan said as he laid her paper on her notebook. Hannah was delighted to discover she hadn't missed any!

"I can see you have been working hard."

It was true. Hannah really had worked hard. She had devoted many hours to catching up with the rest of class. She even had Pappaw Lee quiz her with questions from the back of the chapters. Everything had started to click.

Mr. Kwan sighed as he walked over to Terese's side of the desk. She did not notice his presence and continued adding details to the perimeter of trees around her pond. Mr. Kwan sighed again and tapped the desk with his pen.

"It's funny, Terese. Those trees don't look anything like the ones I drew in my diagram," Mr. Kwan said. Terese looked up at him and grinned. He rolled his eyes and handed back her assignment.

"Perhaps if you spent a little more time with your head in my classroom, you would make better grades."

Terese shoved her picture in her science book in between other overflowing drawings and notes. As Terese picked up her test, she gasped and then suppressed a giggle. Hannah stole a glance at Terese's paper to see several checkmarks and a big red "D" scribbled across the top. Terese shrugged, raising her eyebrows. She seemed to be taking this quite well.

As Mr. Kwan gave some closing remarks to the class about the assignment for Monday, Terese grabbed Hannah's test from her hand.

"Wow, you are soooo smart! Congratulations!" Terese said. Hannah blushed.

"Thanks!" she whispered back. She smiled and then turned back to face Mr. Kwan, who looked over in their direction as the bell rang.

"Hannah, Terese, can you please stay behind a moment?" Mr. Kwan asked as the rest of the class packed up to leave. Hannah nodded, blushing. *Great, she thought. Here I am just starting to do well, and now this crazy Indonesian girl has to get me in trouble!*

She gathered her stuff and headed to the front of the classroom, Terese trailing close behind.

"Y-y-yes, Mr. Kwan?" she stuttered.

"Right. Hannah, I want you to help Terese with her fish dissection," Mr. Kwan said, cutting right to the chase.

Terese grabbed her heart in astonishment.

"Mr. Kwan, I do not know anything about this 'fish dissection,'" Terese protested. Hannah was confused too but relieved that they did not appear to be in trouble. Mr. Kwan continued, "You will be dissecting a fish for bonus points. It is the only way to save your grade. No need to thank me."

Terese shook her head in her hands, "Oh, but, Mr. Kwan. You must know, I do not even *like* fish!"

"And yet, you drew such beautiful ones during my class time," Mr. Kwan replied, clearly not amused. Hannah watched Terese's objections, struggling to maintain a straight face.

"Hannah, you will get bonus points for this. Can you come in on Saturday?"

"Sure, Mr. Kwan. Thanks," Hannah replied.

"Great. See you both then. 9:00 A.M., my classroom. And Terese, I will deduct five points from your work for every minute you are late." Terese threw her head back in distress and ran out of the classroom. Hannah gave a short wave to Mr. Kwan and headed out close behind.

Hannah pulled her P.E. clothes from her bag and hurried to get dressed. Though Mr. van der Merwe had turned out to be nice, Hannah still found his 6'4" gigantism, huge neck and booming voice intimidating. She vowed to never be a member of the late-comers club, who had to do extra pushups at the front of the gym while everyone else stretched.

Hannah dreaded 4th period P.E. class. She didn't hate sports, but her lankiness made her uncoordinated, and she struggled to make any sort of skilled contact with a ball.

To make matters worse, her class was co-ed. In Texas, since Middle School, P.E. had been a single-sex event. In spite of her lack of athletic ability, Hannah had always rested in the comfort of knowing that if she did indeed completely miss the ball and fall flat onto the soccer pitch during that shot on goal, she would do so in the presence of only a few sympathetic females.

Hannah was mortified that boys were now allowed to scrutinize her athletic failures.

She stashed her bag in the locker room and hurried out to take her place on the gym floor. Coach van der Merwe blew his whistle.

“Grab your places, *boets*. Save your dribbling skills for the soccer field. Quit showing off,” he barked, in a thick, Afrikaans accent.

Hannah looked over to see Chad, Noah, and some of their teammates juggling a soccer ball in the air with their feet. Hannah thought she saw Noah’s face grow red. Chad, on the other hand, rolled his eyes and went to put the ball away, but not before first smacking his teammate in the back of the head when the coach wasn’t looking.

The bell rang for class to start, and the students hurried to find their spots on the floor. Coach van der Merwe began yelling commands for stretches.

“Now, left knee bent, right leg out and grab your heel. *Your* heel, Chad, not Elizabeth’s. Cut that out. Concentrate, Min-ki, deep breaths. You’re sitting down for Pete’s sake, boy, how can you be losing your balance?”

When they finished stretching, Coach van der Merwe announced that they would play volleyball today. Hannah groaned. She and Volleyball had a long and bitter history, tracing back to an unfortunate collision between her and the net in 4th grade. It was recess finals, and her misjudged jump for the ball had resulted in the game point for the other team. That fatal mistake initiated years of dissension between Hannah Jones and the entire sport.

“Boys and girls will play separately. Men, line up on court 1 and ladies on court 2. I will divide you into teams alphabetically,” the coach shouted.

The boys jumped up and ran over to the other end of the gym. Hannah meandered over to court 2, where the rest of the girls congregated. Hannah noticed that Terese had on kneepads already. She looked prepared for serious volleyball action. Maybe she was on the BIS team. Hannah wouldn’t have pegged her as the athletic type.

“Jayaputri!” another knee-pad wearing girl called out as she pelted the ball in Terese’s direction. Terese turned quickly and popped the ball up in the air as the first girl ran and spiked it into the ground. Terese’s friend gave her a high five and pat on the back, with a “Nice one, Jaya. Bring that to practice.”

Terese skipped over to join the rest of the group. She spotted Hannah and winked. Hannah smiled. She hoped they would be on the same team. Maybe that would compensate for her personal lack of skills.

“Ok, ladies, last names from A to J on the far side of the court, K through Z on the nearest,” the coach called out. Hannah trudged to the other side of the court. She was relieved to see Terese skipping to her side as well.

Just then Hannah spotted Mi-Young Kim on the opposite side. Her stomach flipped. Mi-Young noticed her at the same time. She scrunched her eyebrows and glowered in Hannah’s direction. Turning to her sidekick, Mi-Young whispered something and pointed toward her. Hannah’s stomach flipped again. *Curse the blasted alphabet*, thought Hannah.

Mi-Young had it out for her. That was for sure. Hannah took comfort in the fact that, surely, Mi-Young couldn’t do much in front of the coach. *Maybe Mi-Young will suck at volleyball even more than I do*, Hannah thought, trying to reassure herself.

As Coach Van der Merwe blew the whistle, Hannah’s team served the ball. Mi-Young dove for it, popping it up for her awaiting teammate, who lofted it over the net. Hannah’s heart sunk.

Mi-Young was legit.

As the game continued, Hannah tried to stay out of it as much as possible, always allowing another girl to hit the ball if she could and never attempting to score. She counted down the rotation spots until it was her turn to evacuate the court.

Hannah watched in amazement as Terese spiked it again and again over the net. The game was close, though, with Mi-Young and her sidekicks returning many difficult serves and saving several of Terese's tricky shots.

The time came for Hannah to rotate back in. It was her serve. She inched with the enthusiasm of a slug over to the corner and picked up the ball. She took a deep breath, closing her eyes, as she raised the ball above her head and hoped for the best. To her amazement, her serve glided over the net and into the opposite corner of the other's team's court! It stayed in bounds and barely eluded the fist of a diving Mi-Young.

Hannah had scored for her team!

Mi-Young pulled herself to her feet and brushed off her arm, which she had landed on. She glared at Hannah and stomped back to her spot. Hannah raised the ball to serve again. This time, the other team managed to keep it in play.

A short blonde girl on the other team set the ball right by the net. Hannah watched as Mi-Young pushed through two of her teammates and ran to the front row. She leaped into the air and punched the ball with serious force. For a split second, Hannah watched, horrified, as the ball sped through the air in her direction. And then, SMACK! Everything went black.

When Hannah opened her eyes, she found Mr. van der Merwe, Terese, and a petite Singaporean girl named Alice, who held a bag of ice, all standing over her. Coach van der Merwe pulled Hannah to her feet. "Are you all right, mah dear?" the coach asked. "You took a serious klopping to the head there."

"Yeah, I think I'm fine, thanks," Hannah said, trying to regain her composure. She rubbed the haze out of her eyes. "You can sit out for a while, lady," Mr. Van der Merwe reassured her.

Hannah headed over to the sideline. She stole a quick glance at Mi-Young, who beamed. Mi-Young's sidekick nudged her and smiled. She winked. Mi-Young caught Hannah's eye and smirked. Hannah was too embarrassed to care. As she walked off the court, Terese called after her,

"Nice one, Hannah. I wish I could set like that. Did you see Hannah's header, Alice? Beautiful form." Hannah looked over at Terese, confused. Terese smiled.

"Seriously, Hannah, teach me your ways. Here, Alice, set me up on the next one. I want to try."

Alice lobbed the ball in Terese's direction. Terese head-butted it to the teammate on her right who spiked it onto the other team's court. The rest of the team laughed. Even Mi-Young's sidekick couldn't resist a chuckle. Terese looked over at Hannah and winked. Hannah caught on and let out a grateful laugh.

"All right, all right," Mr. van der Merwe barked. "Back to the game."

The girls assumed their positions on the court. Hannah found a spot on the bleachers to plop down. She looked over at Mi Young, who had not found Terese's joke funny. Mi-Young stomped back to her spot and refused to look at Hannah. Hannah wondered what would come of this incidence in the future.

Hannah's team won by a mere two points. As the girls hi-fived and headed for the locker room, Hannah spotted Terese bouncing over toward her.

"Hannah! How are you feeling? How is your head?"

"It's ok, thanks. Just a little sore."

"That Mi-Young, ooo--ooh" Terese shook her head and clicked disapprovingly. Hannah nodded and sighed.

“Hey, do you have plans now? How about we go to get ice cream and talk about that stupid fish?” Terese suggested.

Hannah hesitated, “Uh...ok! Sounds good!”

“Great!” Terese said, already heading toward the locker room. “Meet you back here in five minutes.” As Terese bounced away, Hannah smiled. Maybe she liked this crazy Indonesian girl after all.

9

Hannah made her way to Mr. Kwan's classroom and found Terese already sitting by the door.

"Good Morning, Terese," she said.

"No, not good morning," Terese said, rubbing her eyes. "Good morning is being in your covers, not hanging out with dead fish." Terese sipped tea from a mug and looked mad at the world.

"What time did you get here?" Hannah asked.

"Eight o' clock. Sharp. Mr. Kwan called my mother and told her I could not be late. My mother says, 'Terese, you will be early to your fish dissection. You will not lose points. You will make up for every minute you were not punctual. And you will be happy,'" Terese recounted, rolling her eyes.

"I say, 'but Moooooommm, this is not fair. Cutting up fish on a Saturday morning? Cruel and Unusual Punishment. Child abuse.' Then, my mom tells me about how my grandfather had to wake up every morning before the sun to chop fish to support his family...blah blah blah. I hit the bus before she could harass me anymore."

Hannah laughed. She wondered what a fish dissection with Terese as her partner would look like.

Terese and Hannah turned at the sound of Mr. Kwan clicking down the hall. "Good morning, ladies. Glad to see you are both on time," he said, shooting a look at Terese. She grinned.

Mr. Kwan led them into the classroom where a tray with tools and gloves waited for them on their lab table. He went to the closet and pulled out a jar. Opening it, he removed a floating fish from the formaldehyde.

The smell was overwhelming. Terese gasped for air, and Hannah covered her nose. They looked at each other, grimacing. Mr. Kwan laid the fish down on their tray. "You will dissect this fish. Remove and sketch a detailed drawing of each organ. Identify the organs and write down observations about each. You may use this diagram as a guide," Mr. Kwan said, handing them a colorful, laminated chart with the words *Perca schrenkii* printed at the top in bold letters.

"I will pop in periodically to check on your progress. You should finish just in time for lunch."

"Yeah, like we'll be hungry," Terese mumbled, still gagging on the smell. Mr. Kwan ignored her and headed out the door.

"Ok, where should we start?" Hannah said, studying the chart.

"This fish is looking at me," Terese said. She patted the fish's head, "I am sorry, little unfortunate one. You were so young. Such a tragedy."

"How about, I dissect, and you draw?" Hannah said. "Let's get this over as quickly as possible." Terese nodded. As Hannah picked up the scalpel, Terese covered her eyes. "Be quick!" She said.

Hannah opened up the fish and looked inside. She spotted what she thought was the stomach. She double checked the chart and then eased it onto the tray with her tool.

"Ok, Terese. Stomach? Check. You can go ahead and sketch this one." Terese still had her eyes covered. Hannah nudged her.

"Oh! Such a small stomach! She must not have gotten enough to eat."

Hannah looked at the chart's depiction of the average size of a perch stomach. Sure enough, this fish's stomach was tiny. Terese drew an abstract sketch of the stomach, complete with swirls in the background.

“Observations: undersized stomach,” Hannah said. Terese thought aloud as she jotted down notes on the paper: “Stomach small due to overcrowded school. Fish cannot scavenge enough food to feed her baby fish. Sacrifices her own nutrition for the sake of her young.”

Hannah started to protest Terese’s creative addition to their observations, but Terese was already busy sketching an elaborate scene of hungry baby fish. The babies cried as their mother swam to them with minimal food in her fins.

Next, Hannah detached the muscle from the fish’s skin. Terese observed, “Muscles deteriorate from malnourishment.” She jotted down more observations, “Fish cannot hold her own in fight as other mothers battle for sustenance for their guppies.”

More doodling. This time, Terese sketched a showdown between the mothers and the perch.

“Look, she’s missing a fin!” Terese said, pointing at their perch’s right pectoral.

“How do you know it’s a she, Terese?” Hannah asked.

Terese scribbled some more, “Perch in question loses fin in brutal battle between one strong mother fish. Perch’s wimp husband refuses to protect her in fight. Instead, he stays home and gorges what little food she manages to collect for the children.”

Hannah eased the heart out of the perch. They were almost done. She laid the heart down onto the tray with a bit too much enthusiasm, puncturing it with her scalpel. Hannah gasped.

“Oh no! I put a hole in her heart.”

Terese peered over at the tray and returned to her observations: “Fish’s babies starve. She can do nothing. Her sorrows overwhelm her. Dies from hole in heart. Recovered by fisherman who donate her body to science. RIP.”

Hannah laughed. Terese had a way of making bad things funny. She watched as Terese finished her elaborate depiction of their perch’s life story. Terese worked each organ sketch into the biography.

Just then, Mr. Kwan walked in. Hannah looked at what they had to show for themselves: one dissected fish, one punctured fish heart, several not-so-scientific observations, and a drawing that looked more like the work of Picasso than Darwin.

She sighed. At least *her* grade was safe. But what about poor Terese? Hannah tried to look like a naturalist. She tried to look engrossed by the perch's kidneys.

Mr. Kwan scrutinized their progress. He snatched Terese's drawing out from under her other papers and frowned. Terese caught Hannah's eye, eyebrows raised.

Then, all of a sudden, a smile stretched across Mr. Kwan's face. And low and behold, he started laughing!

Terese giggled. Hannah giggled. Mr. Kwan giggled.

Their fish dissection seemed to be a success! Hannah was shocked.

Mr. Kwan interrupted the giggling, "Well, ladies, it's certainly not what I had in mind. And definitely unorthodox. But I am pleased with your results. You will enter your work into the school science fair on January 15th."

The giggling ceased.

"Oh noooo, Mr. Kwan. I do not think this is school science fair material," Terese said, shaking her head.

Hannah joined in, "Yes sir. I think this is more...um...artistic than scientific."

"The matter is settled," Mr. Kwan said. "No need for discussion. I will turn your proposal into Headmaster Qián tomorrow with my signature of approval. I will give you further instructions as the time comes." Mr. Kwan turned to leave, but Terese and Hannah didn't move. They stared at each other, flabbergasted.

"That is all today," Mr. Kwan announced. "I have no more need of you. You may go." Hannah and Terese hurried to gather their things. They bolted into the hall, free from the wafting aromas of preservatives.

As soon as they were out of earshot of Mr. Kwan, Terese and Hannah's laughter erupted. "Can you believe it? The *Science Fair*?" Terese said. "I cannot wait to see the look on Mi-Young's face when she hears the 'great news.'"

Hannah stopped laughing.

“Will Mi-Young be entering?”

“Oh yeeecaaaahhh,” Terese said. “She gets first place every year. The way she struts with her ribbon, you would think she won the Nobel Prize.”

Hannah gulped. Would she never escape the warpath of Mi-Young Kim?

Monday morning Mr. Kwan announced to the whole Biology class that Terese and Hannah would enter the January science fair. Terese beamed. Hannah shot a glance at Mi-Young. Mi-Young gripped the corners of her copy of The Living World until her knuckles went white. Mi-Young glared in Terese and Hannah’s direction. Terese smiled and waved, pretending not to notice the laser-beam look of death Mi-Young shot them. Hannah nudged her.

“Don’t antagonize her, Terese,” she whispered under her breath.

“It is not like we will win, anyway, Hannah. Relax,” Terese whispered back, still smiling.

At supper that night, Nancy Jones announced that she would NOT be attending anymore PTA meetings for Beijing International School. “Why, Nance? Did something happen?” Robert Jones asked. “Well,” Hannah’s mom started, getting that look on her face that said “You will not interrupt my story until I am finished. And you will sympathize with the cruelties I have endured.”

“Here’s the thing,” Nancy started, “I wanted to make a good impression, so naturally, I took some cheese and crackers—which, I might add, are not easy to find here. When I showed up, the ladies were already meeting! *And* they were only speaking *Korean*! When I tried to join the circle they stopped and just stared at me. Then one lady, the leader, who I later learned is named Mrs. Kim, glared at me and asked, ‘You are Mrs. Jones. You are Hannah Jones’s mother, yes? To which, of course, I said ‘yes’ and tried to say that I was also the mother of Madelyn and Noah Jones, but she interrupted me and said ‘that is what I thought,’—rather rudely if I may say so. Then they carried on in Korean as if I was not there.”

“Maybe they didn’t know you couldn’t speak Korean, Nancy,” Robert said.

Nancy rolled her eyes, "Right. That's probably what they thought. Thankfully, one of the other moms—I think her son is your friend, Min-ki, Hannah—translated for me. But, afterwards, no one would talk to me. But they still ate my crackers. What nerve!"

"Surely they didn't mean anything by it," Robert said. "The first week at work, my Chinese coworkers were hesitant to befriend me. In time, though, we pushed through it, and now they love me! Maybe you should give them another chance."

Nancy put her fork and knife on the table with extra force. "Fine, Robert, if it's so easy, next time *you* go befriend the other moms. It should be easy for you with your fluent Korean skills."

Robert Jones looked baffled.

The rest of the Jones family continued eating in silence. The only sounds were the slurping of the wonton soup Nancy had ordered from the Cantonese restaurant across the street.

A thought suddenly struck Hannah. *Mrs. Kim. Mi-Young Kim.* She gasped.

"Mom! I know why Mrs. Kim hates you! Her daughter has it out for me!" Hannah relayed the entire saga of her and Mi-Young's relationship, beginning with the volleyball-to-the-head incident and continuing into the drama of the school science fair.

"*You* have a nemesis, Hannah? You've never had an enemy in your life! Do you even know what to do in a catfight? I am such a bad mother. I've taught you nothing," Hannah's mom said, shaking her head.

Hannah stared at her. As if the gentle Nancy Jones could teach her how to put someone in a head lock. The most conflict her mom had ever seen was with an obstinate turkey on Thanksgiving. And the turkey had won.

"Don't worry about it, mom. It's no big deal."

"No big *deal*?? No one knocks *my* daughter out with a volleyball and gets away with it. Mrs. Kim better watch her back." A far-off look came into Nancy's eye. Hannah was worried. What was her mom scheming?

Hannah didn't know what had gotten into Nancy Jones. Hannah had always known her mom to be a compassionate, forgiving woman. And here she was fanaticizing about taking out some poor Korean lady. (Even if Mrs. Kim did have it coming.)

Hannah knew one thing for sure, though. She was beginning to dread January 15th.

Lín Nà carried her bag of groceries out of the market. She beamed, thinking of how well she had haggled with the litchi-seller. Her husband always teased her about her shrewdness. "You could talk a fishmonger into paying you to take the fish off his hands!" He would say. She would remind him that if he were a rich man and didn't drive rich foreigners for a living, she wouldn't have to be so shameless in her bargaining.

But secretly, Lín Nà was proud. Both of her haggling abilities and of her husband. She relished arguing over one kuài at the market. Other women, like her neighbor, Mǎ Pó, had to slave away scrubbing rich ladies' toilets or babysitting whiney, foreign babies all day long. She, on the other hand, could fret instead over what her mother-in-law's favorite dish was or which of her husband's coworkers they would invite over for dinner next.

She liked it this way.

As Lín Nà stepped upon the dusty road leading to their house, she stopped. Something furry stuck out from the top of the trash bin outside their porch.

Not Mǎ Pó's stinky cat again!

Lín Nà had warned her neighbor again and again, that if she ever caught that thing in her yard, she was going to tie it up in a sack and throw it into the river.

As she grew closer to their house, she stopped. Why was her mother-in-law frozen in the doorway? And holding a broom poised above her head? She had that look in her eye, that look that said, "If you try to mess with me, you will get a fine kick in the seat." Lín Nà had seen that look many times. It was usually directed at either her or her father-in-law.

Just then, she realized what had inspired it. Crawling out of the trash bin was a giant monkey. She froze. That thing was almost as big as she was! And twice the size of her mother-in-law! It turned and stared at her. She stared back. She shot a look at her mother-in-law. Was that a sigh of relief she saw? Was she going to leave her to fend for herself here?

The baboon eyed her groceries. Oh no he didn't! She had paid good money for these groceries! She was not about to sacrifice them to some lazy ape!

The broom flew through the air. Her mother-in-law had not abandoned her after all! In a single motion, she dropped her bag of groceries and snatched the broom. She rushed the monkey, waving the broom and sounding a war cry! The baboon looked startled. He dropped the trash he had held in his hand and scurried off in the other direction!

Into her house, Lín Nà strutted with her saved groceries in tow. She smirked at her mother-in-law as she put water on the stove for dinner...

10

Hannah sat in the BIS soccer field bleachers. This was a big day for the Jones family. Noah had practiced with the team for two months now but had never dressed out. But today, he was a starter against DSB, the Dutch School of Beijing.

Hannah watched Coach van der Merwe give a pep talk to the huddled team. He jabbed at his clipboard, reviewing some last minute strategies. Hannah surveyed the opposition. They looked big. Too big. And mean. Where did they get these guys? The Netherlands National Team? She looked back at the BIS boys. Noah, Chad and Chad's two sidekicks towered over most of their teammates.

Hannah worried this might turn into a massacre.

"Here you go, Han," Robert Jones said, returning to his seat. He handed her a bottle of sweet tea and a bag of Lays. Hannah scrutinized the bag. Prawn flavor. Yum.

"They had Lipton!" Robert Jones exclaimed, "What luck!" Hannah opened up her bag of chips and caught a fishy whiff. "Thanks, dad," she said, forcing a smile.

"PTA moms are running the concession stand," her dad said. "I dunno what your mother's issue was. They seemed nice. Maybe they don't smile much, but that's just the Asian way," he concluded. "Refreshing, actually. It's so genuine," Robert mused.

Two months with Chinese coworkers, and suddenly Robert Jones considered himself an expert on Asian culture. *Terese and Min-ki smile*, Hannah thought to herself. But she didn't say anything.

Hannah scanned the crowd. A lot of families had come to the game today. Hannah spotted Mi-Young. She stood on the stairs, searching for someone. Hannah pulled the bill of her cap down and slouched low in her seat. Mi-Young didn't see her. Instead, she went to sit down by a middle-aged man and a white-haired lady who Hannah assumed must be her family.

The whistle blew and the teams ran onto the field. "That-a boy, Noah!" Robert yelled. Noah looked up at the bleachers where they sat. He spotted the family and gave a nod. He looked nervous. Chad, who was running beside Noah, turned too. He caught Hannah's eye and winked. She looked away. The boy was persistent. But Hannah would not be wooed. She would eat live squid every day for the rest of her life before she would go on a date with Chad Rogers.

DSB took the first kick of the game and pushed the ball onto BIS's end within thirty seconds. A large right forward took a shot on goal, but the BIS goalie was ready. He caught the ball and booted it to his midfielders. The BIS defenders, on the other hand, looked stunned. They had just begun to react by the time the ball was in their keeper's hands. Coach van der Merwe shouted from the sidelines:

"Yho! What do you think you're playing here, okes? Croquet? Stop standing around!" His face was red.

"Ok, luv. Calm it down. Don't want you having an aneurism before half-time," a petite blonde called from the front row. Mrs. van der Merwe. *Bless her heart*, Hannah thought, *what a woman*. Coach van der Merwe tensed but quieted. "All right, boys, it's all right," he said, clapping his hands.

Noah had the ball now. Robert Jones was out of his seat, yelling. "In the net, Noah. Yeah, way to own that left D. Nice dribbling!" Hannah sunk lower in her seat. She looked around.

None of the other parents were yelling. They were very stoic, staring straight ahead as the ball moved down the field.

Noah passed the ball to a fellow teammate, but it was intercepted by a DSB defender. The defender cleared it to his left forward who crossed it to a right mid-fielder sprinting up the side. This time, though, the BIS defenders were ready. Alex Zhu knocked it away and out of bounds with a beautiful slide-tackle. Maybe BIS wouldn't get killed after all.

Noah intercepted the throw in and dropped it to Chad. The Dutch players, who had all pushed forward for the throw, could not regroup in time. They struggled to catch up as Chad bolted down the field. Hannah sighed. Why did Noah have to keep passing it to Chad? Other players were just as good. No need to give him an even bigger head.

Chad sprinted in closer to the goal. The Dutch defense could not catch him. He had an open shot. He reared his right leg back. But as his foot was about to connect with the ball, a giant DSB player slid into the back of his calves, stealing the ball, and taking Chad down.

The ref blew his whistle. Coach van der Merwe let out a few choice words in Afrikaans. (The ref, who was a teacher from DSB, heard and understood van der Merwe, and gave him a look that shut him up. Mrs. van der Merwe shook her head in her hands).

A man on the front row shot to his feet. "Red card! He can't do that to my son!" the man yelled. *Chad's dad?* Hannah thought.

"Oh hey, that's Stanley Rogers! We work together. Great guy," Robert said.

Oh no! Worked together? Great guy? Surely no one of blood relation to Chad could be a great guy. Maybe Chad was adopted.

Stanley Rogers continued yelling, "Red card! Red card! C'mon, Ref!" But Stanley needn't stand up for Chad. Chad was up in seconds and headed straight for the player that took him down, looking mad as Hades.

Noah caught him just as he reared back for a punch. Hannah sighed. Noah should have let him go through with it. She would have loved to see Chad Rogers ushered off the field, bearing the shame of a red card. Though, knowing Chad, he probably would have worn it as a badge of macho-ness. Noah gave Chad a pat on the rear, and the ref resumed play. Gross. Hannah didn't know why boys did that.

BIS received a penalty kick, which Chad took. Apparently, the take down hadn't caused him too much harm because he lofted the ball straight into the goal's upper right corner. It glided past the goalie's fingertips.

BIS was up by one as the ref blew the whistle for half time.

As the players exited the field, Hannah's dad beckoned Stanley Rogers over. Hannah searched for something to busy herself with.

"Stan, I want you to meet my oldest daughter, Hannah." Hannah looked up against her will.

"Hi, Hannah. I'm Stanley Rogers, Chad's dad. You guys are friends, right?"

Hannah sized up Stanley Rogers. He wore a red visor, button-down shirt and khaki shorts. Hannah thought it was a bit cold for the shorts. She searched for something to say,

"Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Well, Chad would be stupid not to befriend a pretty girl like you. Good thing he's got an in with the older brother," Stanley said, winking at Hannah. So *that's* where Chad got the winking.

Stanley nudged Robert, "You better keep a lock and key on this one," he said. Robert looked a bit uncomfortable at this statement but shrugged it off. Stanley guffawed.

“Chad seems like a terrific kid, Stan. Any girl would be lucky to catch his eye.”

“He really is. His mother and I are quite proud.”

Hannah tasted her prawn chips again.

However, the sound of the referee’s whistle saved her from any arranged marriages. Everyone returned to their seats for the second half.

The second half progressed with a lot less excitement than the first. No one scored in the first forty minutes. However, just as BIS started to rejoice over their win, DSB caught a break. A BIS midfielder misjudged the DSB forward’s dribble direction, letting the forward through. Unluckily, this happened at exactly the same time that Alex Zhu bent down to fix his untied shoelace, allowing the forward to whoosh past him before Zhu even realized they had lost control of the ball.

The BIS sweeper ran to cover the far side of the net as the forward took a shot. The shot was a bit low, though, so when the sweeper went up for the header, it hit his hand instead. It would have been a great block if it had worked. But instead, DSB received a penalty kick for a handball.

The goalie took a chance and dove for the left as the forward aimed his shot at the right, sending the ball rolling in, untouched.

The game was now tied.

Two minutes to the end.

“No shame in a tie,” Robert said. Hannah nodded. But in the remaining thirty seconds, just as they started packing up to leave, Noah stole the ball from a DSB defender.

The goalie, seeing that he was unguarded, rushed to meet Noah head on. But Noah was too quick. He swiped the ball with his outer foot to the opposite direction. He dribbled right around the goalie and into the net.

The ref blew the whistle, signaling the goal and the end of the game.

BIS had won! And it was all thanks to Noah Jones! Well, Chad Rogers too. But everyone had long forgotten his measly penalty kick in light of Noah's Pelé skills!

The Jones family leaped out of their seats, whooping and hollering. They ignored the civil clapping of the surrounding fans. This was not a time for stifling one's excitement. This was a time for celebration, Longhorns style.

Nancy bolted to the field to hug a very sweaty Noah.

"Han, wanna go congratulate your brother?" Robert said.

Hannah looked at the field. Noah and Chad stood arm in arm, celebrating with the team.

"Nah, I think I'll wait until the crowd dies down," Hannah said.

"Suit yourself! How about taking our meal tickets to the concession stand? The PTA's providing lunch for the families." Hannah took four tickets with the name JONES stamped across the top from his hand.

She walked up to the table where several Korean ladies handed out rolled up rice balls with egg, ham, carrots and cucumber in the middle. *Mmm, Gimbap.* Hannah had learned to love this dish at Min-ki's house. Min-ki's mom often made it for them as a snack during tutoring. It was wrapped in seaweed and very refreshing. Hannah's stomach growled.

She handed the first hair-netted lady her tickets. The woman frowned at them. She looked at a list of names.

"No. Sorry. No 'Jones' on the list," she said.

“What?” Hannah said. “Oh, I thought lunch was for all the team’s families.” Hannah blushed.

“Not on list? You don’t get food.” The lady said, crossing her arms.

Hannah stole a peek at the list. There, written three from the bottom, were clearly the names of her and her family.

“Do you mind checking again?” Hannah asked.

“Do you think I cannot read? Not on list.”

A hair-netted lady down the row said something to the list lady. She yelled something back down the row. Hannah distinctly heard the word “Jones” mixed in between other Korean words.

This incited more chattering, but now with volume and emotion. “Aiyaaaa,” one lady said.

Another slammed her serving spoon down on the table. All six ladies stared at Hannah with crossed arms.

“It does not say Jones. You must be mistaken.” The list lady glared at her.

Hannah was confused. She still held her tickets in an outstretched hand. These must be the same ladies her mom had rendezvoused with at the PTA meeting.

Just then, Mi-Young strutted over to the table. The list lady smiled at Mi-Young and handed her several gimbap rolls. “Thanks, Mom,” she said. Mi-Young ignored Hannah, letting her hair whip in Hannah’s face as she turned to get a drink.

Hannah left without saying anything. She fumed as she stormed back to where her family was. And her stomach still growled.

She was just about to open her mouth to vent about the mistreatment at the PTA table when she noticed a new member to their section.

Chad Rogers.

Chad and Robert Jones chatted away like old buddies. Robert laughed at something Chad said.

"Oh, Hannah! You're back. Great!" Robert said. "Chad was just telling me about the time you took a volleyball to the head in P.E. class. Hilarious. I can't believe you never told me that."

Hannah was flabbergasted. Oh, the injustice! She tried to force a chuckle for her dad's sake. "Well, it wasn't that funny at the time," she said, avoiding Chad's eyes.

Stan Rogers joined the group. "It's nice that our kids know each other, Rob," he said. "Makes things easier on them at all these business dinners." Robert nodded.

"So true. But my kids have been safe so far. No dinners yet."

"Lucky you," Chad said, winking at Hannah.

Enough with the winking already, she thought. Hannah searched for her mom. She needed an out from this conversation. She spotted her, engaged in a serious talk with Mrs. van der Merwe.

"Yeah, but they'll be at the company ball next weekend right?" Stan Rogers continued.

Ball? Hannah had not heard anything about any ball.

"Oh, that's right!" Robert said. "Nancy and I hadn't told the kids yet. Wanted to surprise 'em." Stan looked at Hannah, flashing a very white grin. Hannah felt a growing sense of dread. But she fought it, trying to stay positive. Maybe it would be a family thing. Maybe there would be no Jones-Rogers mingling.

"I guess the kids are old enough to bring dates now," Stan said, nudging Chad. Chad smirked.

"No use leaving them at the table when the parents are on the dance floor," Stan said.

"Actually I thought *Hannah* and I could go together." Chad said.

Hannah's jaw fell open.

“Um, actually I think I’ll probably be working on my science fair project that weekend,” she said, searching for any excuse.

“Nonsense, Hannah,” Robert said. “It’s the weekend. And how often do you get to go to a *ball*? Besides, we didn’t put you through three years of Cotillion for nothing,” Robert said.

Hannah searched for any way to save herself. Was her dad blind? Could he not see through Chad’s act? And could he not see the disdain for Chad she did not even *try* to keep hidden?

“I don’t know, Dad. It’s a pretty big deal,” Hannah said. She tried to send a message to her dad with a look. Something along the lines of “if you make me go to some stupid dance with stupid Chad Rogers, I will never forgive you, and you can fed-ex me back to America for all I care, because I will no longer be able to go to school or live in Beijing, or live at all, for that matter.”

“That’s funny, Hannah. I thought you didn’t care about the science fair. You didn’t even want to be in it,” Robert said. Hannah huffed. Her dad could be so oblivious sometimes.

“Well that’s just fantastic.” Stan said, interrupting their discussion. He patted Chad on the back.

“Now if we can just find a pretty girl for Noah,” Robert said. Hannah walked off. She couldn’t stand it anymore. She headed for the car, where Mr. Han sat behind the driver’s seat, waiting for them.

Hannah didn’t think Noah would have any trouble finding a date for the company ball. She, on the other hand, would be hard-pressed to get rid of hers.

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Hannah was dismayed to discover that the company ball came as fast as a dentist appointment. At first she tried not to think about it, hoping that it would simply go away. But, as the days grew closer, she realized she needed a plan.

Hannah started small at first. She approached her objective with reason and maturity. Hannah sat her parents down for a presentation on all the reasons they should let her stay home. She listed all of her other engagements that the ball would impede. She needed to work on her science fair project, for instance. Plus, she had to celebrate Terese's birthday. (Okay maybe Terese didn't have a birthday this weekend, but she would eventually, and why not celebrate now?) And of course, the ever-present duty to save stray puppies could not be ignored!

Her parents' unwillingness to move amazed Hannah. How could they still be so cold? She had even included a pie chart!

After the failure of plan A, Hannah moved on to her second plan: Channel Her Inner Seven-Year-Old. She had watched how effective Madelyn's temper-tantrums were. Sure, they might sometimes land Maddy in timeout, but they certainly got her point across. Surely the parents would not be able to stand the sight of a fifteen-year-old flailing about on the ground.

So, Hannah flailed. She cried. She mustered up her best whine. She ended her grand show of resentment in three whole days of the silent treatment.

And still, Nancy and Robert Jones were adamant. Hannah *would* be going to the company ball whether she liked it or not.

So by Thursday, two days before the big event, Hannah was desperate. This was no longer a time for elementary methods of protest. She had to pull out the big guns.

Personal Injury.

Hannah found it convenient that on the exact same day she resorted to this plan, Coach van der Merwe decided to start rugby in P.E class.

By fourth period, Hannah had mustered up her nerve and resolved to be the most aggressive player on the Rugby pitch. In all sports, Hannah always chose the stay-out-of-the-way approach. She never called for the pass, even if she were wide open. She always handed off the ball as soon as she received it. She perfected the skill of running up and down the playing field without being noticed, avoiding all involvement in the action. This method of evasion had kept her happy and uninjured until now.

But now was not a time to be a defensive player. Now was the time to make the other players angry.

Hannah did everything she could during that one hour and fifteen minutes of P.E. play to ensure being taken down and taken down hard. She raced across the field and stripped the ball from its possessor several times. She grimaced at the burliest players, and even talked some smack.

But much to her disappointment, Hannah discovered that every time she got the ball, no one could catch her! She was too scrawny and spry. She slipped through the tackles of the opposing team with ease! This was no good! Why did she have to discover the one sport she was decent at on *this* day, the day when she needed a couple of good broken ribs?

Though Hannah's miraculous rugby abilities did not land her a trip to the emergency room, they did merit her an invite to play on the BIS girls' team.

Blast, Hannah thought. Plan C could not have gone any worse!

On Friday, Nancy dragged Hannah and Madelyn to the market to pick out dresses for the ball. This was a fancy event, so they needed new gowns, Nancy assured them. Hannah's mom and little sister reveled in all of the beautiful silk fabrics the market offered.

For a moment, the rows and rows of beautiful reds, yellows, greens, blues, and purples distracted Hannah, and she forgot the horrible reason why they were shopping for new clothes. She reveled in the floor-length turquoise dress she chose. Hannah couldn't believe how fast the shop owner penned and altered it!

Nancy Jones also chose a floor-length dress that was an emerald green and had flowing, long sleeves. Madelyn picked a traditional Chinese silk dress that was pink. The ladies in the market fawned over Maddy's red hair. They clapped and "awed" when she tried on her dress. Madelyn ate it all up. All three Jones ladies felt like princesses as they glided out of the market and into the car with their dresses in tow.

But soon Hannah remembered that she didn't want to be a princess at the Meyer Company Ball. She wanted to stay home. And "save stray puppies."

When Saturday night came at last, Hannah tried one last escape attempt. She coughed up and down the stairs. She held her face over boiling dumplings for a clammy look. She moaned on the couch and held her stomach. She tried the ole hold-the-thermometer-up-to-the-light-bulb trick.

But, alas, she could not fool Nancy "Stonewall" Jones. Nancy knew every trick in the book. She had seen it all before, thanks to Noah Jones, the king of sickness-faking.

Much to her dismay, the family had decided, without consulting her, that she would be Chad's date. Apparently, the conversation at the soccer game was the equivalent of a binding contract. Hannah could not believe how they ignored her feelings! She had tried to explain how much she despised the idea of going on a date with Chad. But they dismissed it as modesty. Robert Jones had even used the words "cold feet," at which Hannah thought she might spontaneously combust.

Even Nancy was against her on this one. She did not understand what Hannah's problem was. "But he's so cute, Hannah! Plus, he's been a good friend to Noah," Nancy told Hannah one day while washing the dishes.

Hannah sat at the table protesting: "Mom, he's not 'a good friend.' He's been nothing but a bad influence. Have you seen the way Noah's been strutting around lately? There is only one person he could have learned that from."

However, all was not lost. Saturday did greet Hannah with some positive news.

Around lunch time, the Joneses received a phone call from Chad. Noah handed Hannah the phone with a smirk.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

"Your boyfriend," Noah mouthed. Hannah shook her head and made the international sign for "no way am I talking to that creep."

Noah laughed and pushed the phone into her chest. Hannah was saved, however, as Pappaw Lee meandered into the kitchen at exactly the right time. He took the phone from Noah.

"Wéi?" Pappaw said. (Lately he had taken to impersonating seventy-year-old Chinese men).

"Ah, Chad Rogers. We've heard of you," he continued.

Hannah banged her head on the table as her grandfather paused for Chad's response.

"Ha!" Pappaw Lee cried out, all of a sudden.

Hannah jerked her head up. "No, son, you will not take my granddaughter to the ball on the back of your moped. Not unless you want to spend a little quality time with my twenty-two." (Hannah hoped the Chinese government did not listen into Pappaw's comments about his twenty-two. The family all knew very well that Pappaw Lee's entire gun collection had remained in storage in Texas, back where it was both legal and reputable to own guns. However, any screeners of their phone calls would have no idea that Pappaw Lee's words were nothing but empty threats. Hannah expected the authorities to bust in and do a complete search of the house any day now.)

Pappaw started to give Chad what was to be a long spiel on the appropriate way to treat a lady. But Chad must have interrupted, because Pappaw ended the conversation with a, "Why yes, yes that sounds like a much better plan, son," before hanging up the phone.

"Mr. Rogers and his parents will be here to pick up the Jones family at 5:45 this evening," Pappaw Lee announced. "And you tell that boy of yours, Han, that I will receive a full report on everything that goes on tonight, so he best not try anything that he wouldn't also do to his grandmother," Pappaw Lee said, scooting back into the living room.

Hannah sighed. "For the love! He is not any boy of *mine!*" she shouted.

Hannah did as little as possible to get ready for 5:45. She didn't touch her hair. She slapped on the bare minimum of makeup. And she made sure to eat potent foods all day long. She hoped her garlic breath would remind Chad that she was not on a date with him. She would attend the ball for one reason and one reason only: she had no choice.

The mood amongst the rest of the Jones family, however, was entirely different as 5:45 grew near. All day long they fluttered around the house, chattering about whom they would see at the

ball, what they would eat, and what would be on the program. Madelyn had attempted to sleep in her Chinese dress the night before, but Nancy wrestled her out of it.

Robert purchased bouquets for all the ladies and donned his suit an entire two hours before departure, much to the dismay of Nancy, who followed behind him with a detergent wipe and a ready hand for any substance that might attempt to spill on his white tuxedo shirt.

As 5:45 brought the sounds of the doorbell and the knocks of all three Rogers, a thought struck Hannah: Where was *Noah's* date? Hadn't her dad and Mr. Rogers emphasized the necessity of them *both* bringing dates to the ball? How come *she* had to spend so much time cursing that blasted soccer game when, meanwhile, back at the farm, Noah was living dateless and fancy-free?

Oh, the injustice of it all!

Hannah dragged herself down the stairs and joined the rest of the family in the Roger's minivan. Chad greeted her with a corsage. Hannah managed to mutter a "thank you" as he helped her into the backseat. He beamed at her, but she kept her eyes on the corsage and tried to keep Madelyn chattering so she wouldn't have to endure any small talk. As soon as they all made themselves comfortable, Robert ushered them back out of the van for a group picture.

"Oh, Hannah, what a lovely corsage!" Nancy said, noticing the pink mums on Hannah's wrist. Hannah grunted.

She didn't even like pink.

"I almost forgot," Nancy trailed off, running back into the house and returning with a boutonniere for Chad. She handed it to Hannah. Hannah stared at her and handed it back.

"You better do it, mom. I wouldn't want to accidentally poke him," Hannah said.

"Yeah. 'accidentally,'" Noah muttered under his breath. Hannah nudged him hard in the side.

Pappaw Lee came out to snap a picture of the group. Hannah wished Pappaw would go with them, but he had opted for an alternative way to spend his Saturday night.

Lately, Pappaw Lee had taken an interest in the games of the neighborhood's taxi drivers. The drivers would often sit outside the gate and huddle around a little table while they waited for customers.

One day, after returning from a trip to the store, Randall Lee had stopped by their table and watched them play Mahjong. At first they ignored him, but after several days of his watching, Randall Lee started picking up on the rules and occasionally even commenting on moves the taxi drivers would make.

Since the drivers did not speak English and Pappaw Lee's comments were certainly not in Mandarin, all the strategic wisdom he had gained in his few, short days of passive observation were lost on the men. What was not lost on them, however, was the hilarity of a seventy-five-year-old American man from Arkansas joining in their Mahjong circle.

Soon, he was invited to play. And now, every weekend, Pappaw headed down to the Hutong village close by for dumplings, Mahjong, and a cold pint of Tsingtao.

Pappaw Lee, a long-time condemner of the immoral practice of gambling, reassured the Jones family that Mahjong was much more respectable than Poker.

"Besides," he said, "it's not as if we're using real money!" pointing to a wad of one-Yuán bills he now kept on him at all times. Pappaw Lee need not be concerned of the judgments of his family members, however. They were all glad he had made friends, even if those friends *couldn't* understand a word he said.

On the way to the ball, Mr. Rogers began a long story about the incredible golf game he had played that morning. Chad, who had also played all eighteen holes, tried to offer his own observations about the weather, the course, and the shots they had made:

“Dad, do you remember that great putt I had on hole seven?” Chad said. Hannah winced. *Here he goes again, she thought, forcing us to listen to how awesome he is, how no one can match his level of athleticism.*

“Huh? Hole Seven?” Stan Rogers grunted, irritated at the interruption. “No, I don’t remember that. As I was saying, there I was, squinting at the green. I thought I would never make it over the bunker...”

Hannah looked at Chad. He frowned and stared out the window. She had never seen him frown before. Even in times when she shot down his advances, he always wore a smirk and turned it into a joke. Hannah let her thought pass and chatted with her sister about an intense game of “Pretty Pretty Princess” they had played earlier that day.

They pulled into the Legendale Hotel Beijing. A door attendant greeted them and directed them to the parking area. Hannah was impressed at the fluency of Mr. Rogers conversation with the attendant. She started to ask Chad how long they had lived in Beijing but stopped herself. Any personal questions would risk him thinking this was a date. And this was not a date. This was two families, squished into a minivan, going together to the Meyer Company Ball, as any self-respecting Chinese, American, or Chinese-American family would do on a Saturday night.

A lady in a pink, traditional silk dress led them into the banquet room. Madelyn beamed as soon as she realized that she and the hostess matched. She pointed out this fact to their hostess, who smiled at her with a blank expression. When the hostess didn’t say anything, Madelyn tried

again in Chinese, to which the hostess replied with delight, chattering with Madelyn at a speed more preferable to the energetic seven-year-old.

Hannah did not think it was fair how easily Chinese came to Madelyn. Here she was, pouring her life into studying, when Madelyn could spend an hour on the playground with her Chinese friends and come out speaking like a native.

Hannah did not try to fight her bad mood as they found their table in the banquet hall. She looked around the room. It was spacious, with chandeliers lining the high ceiling, and red velvet curtains hanging on all of the windows. The lights of Wángfǔjīng showed through, illuminating the busy street, which was already filling up with both Chinese and foreigners in search of Saturday night entertainment.

The guests were clad in a mixture of traditional and modern formal attire. Hannah noticed that the ratio of Chinese families to Western families at each table was proportional. She wondered if this arrangement was intentional.

After all the guests had taken their seats, Meyer's CEO, Mr. Zhōu Bào Lǐ, gave a toast to begin the meal.

"Tonight, we are gathered to celebrate another year of great success for the Inchworm Corporation. We have seen profits rise and the total number of companies to which we outsource our services dramatically increase. We have watched as our sphere of influence has begun reaching beyond the borders of China, stretching throughout Asia, across the Middle East, and finally, clear to the other side of the world. We are pleased tonight, to celebrate our company's growing sense of internationalism with the hiring of ten new American employees. We welcome their families here tonight."

The dinner guests applauded as Mr. Zhang continued:

“We have chosen *East meets West* as the theme for tonight’s banquet. We hope you will enjoy the menu, as we have sought to blend the culinary traditions of both of these hemispheres in our selections. We also hope that you will enjoy the program later on in the evening, as we celebrate the talents of all of our new employees and their children.”

More applause.

Hannah was taken aback by Mr. Zhōu’s last sentence. *Talents of our new employees and their families?* What on earth could that mean?

To Hannah’s relief, Noah and Chad conversed about soccer plays for the entirety of the first two courses. She was able to pout over both the appetizers of cold meats, vegetables and fruits, and the following cheesy potato soup. The menu for the night alternated between Eastern and Western courses.

While struggling with an extra-cheesy spoonful of potatoes, Hannah noticed that Chad had stopped talking. She followed his eyes across the room to a table where his dad laughed with several of his coworkers.

They had all been served wine at the start of their meal (which Nancy had snatched away from Hannah and Noah before they could even look at it). Mr. Rogers, however, now gulped down his third glass and motioned for the waiter to pour him another. His coworkers seemed to follow his lead. They laughed and laughed as Mr. Rogers shared something with the group. Hannah noticed that some of the wives at the table did not find whatever it was he said very funny.

Hannah looked around for Mrs. Rogers. She spotted her fluttering around with some of the other expat women near the front. Hillary Rogers wore a floor-length, gold dress which was tight at the waist. The sparkling stones lining her plunging neckline drew all the attention to her bosom. Mrs. Rogers laughed and glided about with the other ladies. She seemed to enjoy the

evening and was either ignorant or apathetic about Stan Rogers's tipsiness, which increased by the minute.

Hannah looked at Chad. He had stopped listening to Noah and frowned in the direction of his dad. He caught Hannah looking at him as he turned back to face the table. She darted her eyes away but not quickly enough, for she caught a glimpse of his face turning red.

Hillary Rogers fluttered back to their table and began commenting on the entire evening to Nancy. She motioned for Nancy to lean closer as she pulled her chair up to the table. Hannah overheard the conversation.

"Beautiful evening don't you think, Nancy?" Hillary said.

"Oh, yes!" Nancy replied. "Everyone looks so nice. It's so great of the company to have this."

Hillary nodded. "Yes, they always do go all out for these things. It's a shame, though, about the, well, guest situation."

"Oh?" Nancy said.

"Oh you know what I mean," Hillary continued, rolling her eyes. "It would be nice if we could have a real banquet, full out, like home. This whole assigned seating thing is a bit much, don't you think? Wouldn't it be more comfortable we got to sit where we wanted, with people like us? I'm so tired of making a fool of myself, babbling in broken Chinese and charading about the courses like a four-year-old."

"Oh, I thought you and Stan spoke Chinese. Do you mean you wish it was a foreigners-only thing?" Nancy said, her brow furrowed.

"Well don't you? I mean, it's only natural. We're so different. It would just be so much more natural for everyone if the Chinese families had their own banquet their way and the rest of us

had our own parties. Everything would be much less forced," she said, taking a long swig of her wine.

"I thought that was the point," Nancy said. Hannah noticed her mom's voice starting to shake. "East meets West. Internationalism."

"Well that's all fine and good for the men," Hillary said, rolling her eyes. "But it's all a façade really, anyway. All in the name of business. Maybe the men will stay for a few drinks together after work. But at the end of the day, the Chinese will go their way, and the Americans will go theirs. And the women stay happy through endless pedicures and massages. I do have to hand it to the Chinese, there. No one does nails like they do."

Nancy was struggling to keep her grimace in check. She looked over at Robert. He tried to comment to a Chinese businessman beside him about a particular dish on the table. He waved his arm about, indicating a river, and attempted to describe a particular fish using only charades. The man's young son and wife laughed.

Before Nancy could protest that Robert really enjoyed his Chinese coworkers, the next course was served: Peking Duck.

As the waiter carved off slices of the duck breast, Hannah tried to distract Madelyn by challenging her to a chopsticks-peanut race. No one could hide the truth from Madelyn, though, when the duck's whole roasted head pointed right at her.

Chad and Noah stopped talking and started experimenting with the different options for their duck pancakes. They rolled watermelon, cucumber, and carrot sticks into their round flour wrappers with a piece of duck skin and a generous helping of plum sauce.

Hannah started to fill her own pancake with vegetables, but Chad took it out of her hands, replacing her zucchini with the same contents as his own wrapper.

“There you go, Hannah.” he said. “That’s how it’s done. This is called, well, let me put it in your language: ‘El Taco de Ducko.’” Hannah didn’t return his smile, but instead forced a “thanks,” before shoving it all in her mouth in one bite.

“Very ladylike,” he said, with a wink.

Hannah ignored him.

“Hey, Noah,” Chad said. “Why don’t you ask your sister why she hates me so much?”

Hannah stared at Chad. Noah shrugged and smirked at her.

Before Hannah could think of a response, Mr. Rogers strutted back to their table and gave Chad’s shoulders a shake. Hannah noticed that his stride was a bit shaky.

“I think it’s almost time for the show!” Mr. Rogers said, pulling up a seat by his wife.

“Remember what we did last year, Chaddy? With your mother’s singing and my ukulele and you...well actually I don’t remember what you did...hmm.”

“I wasn’t there, dad, remember? My appendix ruptured. You left me at the hospital. Ring any bells?”

Mr. Rogers scratched his chin. “Your appendix? Huh. No, I guess I don’t remem...oh yeah, ok. Yeah that was a bad time for you, eh? A bad time, indeed. Ah, Nǐ hǎo, Liù,” Stan said, switching his attention to the man next to Robert. The man nodded.

Chad shook his head and stared at his pancake.

“Chad, what does he mean by ‘the show’? Are they performing something?” Noah asked. Chad chuckled.

“Well *they* won’t be performing,” he said. “*You* on the other hand...” but before he could finish, Mr. Zhōu took the stage again.

“Ladies and gentleman, tonight we will celebrate our new business partners by watching them and their families perform something special on stage.”

Hannah dropped her duck roll, letting plum sauce splatter onto the front of Chad’s shirt.

“Whoa, easy there!” Chad said, laughing.

“Great!” Hillary Rogers said, sneering at Hannah. “There’s no dry cleaner in Shunyi, Chad. Lǐ Ayi is going to love trying to wash--”

“--I’m, sorry but did I hear him right?” Nancy interrupted. “Does he think we are going to perform something on stage? Ha!” she whispered.

Mr. Zhōu introduced the family who would be performing first for the evening. “To begin, we will hear from Mr. Svensson, his wife Ingrid, and their son, Emil.”

Nancy shot Robert a panicked look as the Svensson’s took the stage. Mrs. Svensson walked to a chair in the middle with a cello. Their son, a blonde boy of around ten carried in a violin. Robert, Nancy, Noah, and Hannah watched in horror as two waiters wheeled in a piano and Mr. Svensson settled himself behind the keys. With a nod from Ingrid, all three Svenssons broke into a feverish arrangement of a Paganini piece.

Nancy grabbed Robert’s arm and squeezed through all three movements the ensemble played. When they finished, the audience erupted into applause.

The Joneses gawked at each other. Was this really happening? Were they expected to get on stage and perform like the Beijing symphony? Who did Inchworm think they were? The von Trapp family?

Nancy Jones raised her voice over the dying applause, “Um, Robert, I think you forgot to tell your boss that none of your children are named Yo-Yo Ma. You will have to sedate me if you want to get me onto that stage.”

Robert Jones retained a blank look on his face. He looked at the family and shrugged.

“Well, hon’, I guess we’ll just have to roll with the punches! We Joneses are always ready for a new challenge, right kids?”

All three Jones children shook their heads. Even Madelyn’s spunk was no match for a situation like this. She was unprepared! She had left her tutu and ballet shoes at home.

“Eek! No one told us about this!” she said, looking down at her dress.

Noah shook his head. “No way, dad!” he said.

The second family, the O’Keeffes, took the stage with a three-part Irish folktune. Their youngest daughter accompanied the family on guitar.

“Where are they getting these instruments?” Hannah mouthed at her mom. She thought she would have noticed people wheeling in cellos and pianos.

Robert bounced to the beat of the O’Keeffes’s tune, slapping his leg to keep time. Did he not care that at any minute their family would be called upon to humiliate themselves in front of the entire Inchworm Corporation?

Chad whispered over Mr. O’Keeffe as he stepped forward for a solo:

“I have an idea. Hannah, what songs do you know?”

Hannah, not eager to be positive or encourage Chad in his heroic efforts, shot back,

“We don’t sing! I don’t know! I’m a little teapot? Mary had a little lamb? The Itsy Bitsy Spider?” She sighed. She, like her mom, would not go onstage without a fight.

“Hmmm, I’m a little teapot. I think we can work with that,” Chad said, beaming.

Hannah thought he was kidding. But he wasn’t. He leaned over to whisper something to Noah. Noah laughed and nodded.

“Yeah, ok I’m in. Mom will just die!” Noah said. Hannah stared at him in awe.

"What!? Whatever you're planning, don't do it, Noah Jones," she whispered.

"C'mon Han. Get your panties out of a wad. You know you used to love playing the teapot."

Hannah thought it over. Nope. No way.

The O'Keeffe's ended their final note, and the crowd applauded with vigor once again. Mr. Zhōu took the stage to announce the performers.

"You think they would have at least given us a program or something!" Hannah's mom yelled across the table.

"Up next we will hear from one of our new American families. Please welcome Mr. Robert Jones and his family as they sing, or dance...well, I am not sure what they will do. We will just have to wait and find out!" Mr. Zhōu said.

Hannah also wondered what they would do. Whatever it was, she was not participating. She felt Chad's hand jerk her arm. She tried to protest, but he had a strong grip. To make matters worse, the eyes of the entire banquet room were on them.

She forced a smile and followed Chad, Noah, Madelyn, and her dad toward the stairs up the stage. Nancy remained in her seat. As they passed, Hannah grabbed her mom's hand and pulled her out of her chair. If they were going down, she was going down with them.

"You are so grounded for this, young lady," Nancy whispered through gritted teeth that also passed for a smile to their Chinese table members. The Jones family plus Chad headed backstage and huddled together.

"Just follow my lead," Chad said. "Mr. and Mrs. Jones, you guys and Hannah will sing the first verse of 'I'm a Little Teapot'...to the best of your ability."

"Is there more than one verse!?" Nancy cried. Chad ignored her question.

"Maddy, you be the teapot. You can do that, right?"

“Yessssss!” Maddy said, jumping up and down.

“Noah and I will come in for the grand finale.

Nancy Jones protested, “We will look ridiculous!”

“No, trust me. They’ll love it!” Chad reassured them. Mr. Zhōu nodded for them to come on stage. Chad and Noah remained backstage as the rest of the family meandered to the center.

Maddy pranced to the front.

“Mee mee mee mee,” Robert hummed, giving the family their first pitch. Hannah could not believe they were doing this. She grinned at the audience, her lips trembling. She was relieved to see that the stage lights made it impossible to see any faces.

“*I’m a little teapot short and stout...*” the three of them began. Madelyn stuck out her arms at the appropriate times, forming both a handle and a spout. They finished with a “*tip me over and pour me out,*” holding out the last note and waiting for some kind of signal as to what to do next.

Just then, Noah and Chad rushed to center stage and threw up the most gangster poses that could be expected from two middle-class white boys.

“*REMIX!*” Chad shouted.

The four Joneses proceeded to watch as Noah and Chad rapped “I’m a Little Teapot” in its entirety.

*Uh-uh-uh I’m a lil teapot short and stout [What!?!]
[wikee-wikee]
Here is my handle and h-h-here is my spout, Wuh-*

Wuh-wuh- when I’m gettin’ steamed up

You know you’ll hear me shout,

“T-t-t-tip me over and pour me out!” [What!?!]

The non-rapping members of the ensemble did not know what else to do but stand behind them and smile. Nancy squeezed Hannah's hand. Hannah wanted to bail. Surely this was not happening. It was like one of those dreams she'd had where she was the president of the United States, and she had to give the State of the Union Address. Except, no one told her that she had to give the speech or even that she had been elected president. And there she was, standing behind the podium in front of the entire nation. Except, of course, she had forgotten to wear any pants.

Hannah expected "booing" to commence at any moment. But much to her amazement, she heard laughter instead. And not only did the audience laugh, but they cheered, too! When Noah and Chad ended their rap, the rest of the Joneses hurried to strike a pose.

The audience erupted once again into applause. Hannah could not believe it. They got more applause than the Svenssons and O'Keeffe's combined! As the lights went down, Hannah scanned the crowd. She noticed the Liù family sitting back at their table. Mr. Liù cried with laughter and slapped the leg of his wife, next to him.

Chad was right. They *had* loved it. And not only that, Chad had saved the Jones family from total loss of face. *Maybe he wasn't so bad after all*, Hannah thought to herself. Could she have been wrong?

They made it back to their seats just in time for dessert. Her waiter set a plate of graham crackers, chocolate and marshmallows in front of her. Another waiter put a tiny flaming plate between her and Chad.

S'mores! Hannah had been craving S'mores for forever! They had always been a staple back home during the fall. Who would have thought that her craving would be satisfied tonight at a Chinese banquet?

Mr. Rogers moved around the room again, mingling with his fellow business men. He wobbled back to their table. He steadied himself with Chad's chair.

"Dad, what did you think of our...um...performance?" Chad asked.

"What, son? Performance? At the game last weekend?"

"No, just now," Chad muttered. "On stage?"

Mr. Rogers scratched his chin. "Oh, I heard something, but it must have been when Daniel and the guys started taking shots of bǎijiū. You should have seen Mr. Scott. I thought we would have to wheel him out of here. Ha! Totally blacked out for a second."

"Great, Dad. That's awesome," Chad said, staring down at his plate. Mr. Rogers made it to his seat and threw his arm around his wife, barely missing her cup of tea in the process.

Hannah fumbled with her s'more. With parents like that, no wonder Chad could be a jerk. In fact, next to his dad, he was a prince!

Hannah sandwiched a roasted marshmallow between two graham crackers and a chunk of chocolate. She started to bring it up to her mouth but changed her mind, mid-way. She handed her s'more to Chad.

"Here you go. This is how it's done," she said, throwing in a wink as he took the s'more from her. Chad laughed. She smiled at him. Except, this time, she didn't have to force it.

Yīng-Yīng leaned her head against the bus window and sighed. It was 8:00p.m., and she headed once again, like she did everyday at this time, to tutoring. Her exams were fast approaching. And as if her high school finals were not enough to worry about, her university entrance exam would be here in no time. Her parents longed for her to get into a good Beijing school like Peking University or Tsinghua. But it was so competitive. Only the best could go there. She would be lucky to get in anywhere at all.

Yīng-Yīng rubbed her eyes and yawned. How was one supposed to concentrate on things like Calculus with so little sleep? She had been up since 4:00a.m., going over her math notes and getting ready for her early morning tennis lesson. She didn't really like tennis all that much, but at least it was a break from her homework.

She watched as an electric bike weaved in and out of traffic, darting in a gap between their bus and a nearby taxi. The bus pulled to a stop, and a lady holding a giant bag of clothes boarded. She must be bringing home merchandise from her shop, Yīng-Yīng thought.

The bus pulled back into traffic and Yīng-Yīng pulled out her English vocabulary review sheet. She liked learning English, but today her brain was so tired. Her tutor was a tall, red-headed boy from one of the local American schools. His Chinese was not very good, but Yīng-Yīng thought it was cute when he braved speaking Mandarin with her. She tried not to laugh at him too much.

The bus pulled off for the final stop before hers. The bus attendant yelled something at the bus driver. Yīng-Yīng noticed some commotion near the front. Two of the three workers who had just boarded seemed skittish. The other laughed and pointed. Yīng-Yīng wondered what could possibly be the matter. Then she spotted it. A full-grown baboon wandered onto the bus and climbed onto the front seat.

Not only did he not seem to care that his right foot squashed the clothes-lady's merchandise, he was definitely not in possession of a bus card...

12

"You're getting good Hannah," Min-ki said, closing his copy of The Practical Chinese Reader.

"Thanks," Hannah said, smiling. It seemed the many hours of writing characters and having Mandarin conversations with herself in the bathroom mirror were paying off.

"I'm glad to be done for today, though. My brain feels like mush."

Min-ki laughed. "Yeah, I know what you are talking about," he said, "I felt this way the first time I started learning Chinese. It is the same with English sometimes. Like reading Charles Dickens."

Hannah laughed, "Even my *English* brain feels like mush when reading Charles Dickens."

Min-ki shrugged. "Are you hungry?" Min-ki asked. "Want to stop by the Nanhu market for some sweet pancakes?"

Hannah didn't know what sweet pancakes or the Nanhu Market were, but she agreed anyway. She could not remember how to get out of Min-ki's neighborhood. Lately, Hannah and Min-ki had spent their tutoring sessions at Min-ki's house. It was a short walk from BIS. But even after several trips there, Hannah could never remember her way around. And all the signs were in Korean.

The Nanhu market sat across the street from Min-ki's neighborhood. Hannah followed him across several lanes of traffic. A tuk-tuk narrowly missed her. The driver honked without slowing down as Hannah scurried to catch up with Min-ki.

"Don't you ever wait for the walking sign to turn green?" Hannah said, once they had reached the other side of the intersection.

"No use," Min-ki said. "Red means 'not safe to cross.' Green means 'still not so safe to cross.' Might as well just run for your life anytime and hope for the best."

Hannah didn't like this strategy at all.

They found the Nanhu Market. Several men sat outside the entrance behind tables covered in trinkets. "Ha-llo," one man shouted at Hannah. "Kàn kàn!" He motioned for her to come look at the items on his blanket. Hannah wondered if the furs he sold were real. He held a skeleton of a bear paw, complete with claws. He grinned, revealing several missing teeth. Hannah shook her head and kept walking.

"Here are the pancakes," Min-ki said, motioning toward a cart. One lady rolled what looked like sesame seed tortillas into cylinders, while the other poured batter into a waffle maker.

"They put chocolate, strawberry or pineapple sauce on it. You pick." Hannah could only remember the word for strawberry. She held up one finger and formed the Chinese sentence in her head: "Wǒ yào yì ge. Cǎoméi," she said slowly. The lady nodded. "Sān kuàir." Hannah thought for a second, counting in her head. *Yī, èr, sān*. She pulled out three one-yuán bills from her wallet.

Min-ki ordered his pancake. His sentence sounded a lot more complicated than hers. A two-year-old could say more than she could. She was always surprised when she managed to make

herself understood in Chinese at all. But the Chinese people were forgiving. All she had to say was “nǐ hǎo,” and they complimented her on how well she spoke. She didn’t deserve it.

Mrs. Pancake spread red sauce and whip cream on a waffle, folding it and handing it to Hannah. She did the same for Min-ki’s, but with chocolate syrup. Hannah started to take a bite, but the whiff of a strange fishy smell stalled her. She looked at the cart next to Mrs. Pancake’s. A man with a white chef’s hat fried skewers of squid over a grill.

“Mmm...those are so good. I love squid!” Min-ki said. “We will have to get one as a snack to go when we leave.”

Hannah tried not to think about it as she ate her pancake.

Behind them was a pet shop. A lady in a mustard knit beret motioned toward a bucket with turtles while bargaining with a couple and their son. Beside the turtles, goldfish swam in another pail. Hannah noticed that one of the goldfish must have hopped into the turtle bucket.

“That’s cute,” Hannah said, pointing. “He’s trying to make friends.”

Just then, a turtle swam up to the goldfish and took a large bite out of his left fin.

Hannah gasped.

“Awww, so sad,” Min-ki said, shaking his head.

The pet store also sold guinea pigs and trinkets for decorating fish tanks. They had several plastic figurines of a baby Buddha hugging a red carp as well as one of a little boy urinating. Hannah wondered who on earth would want *that* keeping their fish company.

Hannah and Min-ki passed stalls selling fake flowers, boots and scarves, silk fabrics and journals, and jewelry and construction signs. As they walked deeper and deeper, Hannah started to notice a peculiar smell.

The smell kept getting stronger and stronger until finally Hannah spotted where it was coming from. They had entered the fish section. Colorful fish lined the stalls, lying on deathbeds of ice. Hannah stared at the fish. They stared back. Hannah's stomach felt a little squirmy. She wasn't used to fish that was so... *fresh*.

She watched as a stall owner picked up a meat cleaver and whacked a big silver head in a single swipe. He put it—eyeballs, bones, and all—in a plastic bag and handed it to a white-haired man.

Hannah listened to the stall owners and shoppers around her as they yelled back and forth, bargaining over one yuán or two yuán like their lives depended on it. "I just need to pick up some vegetables and chicken for my mom," Mìn-ki said. Hannah was relieved to be leaving the fish section. As they walked farther, the smell changed from fish guts to raw meat.

Hannah expected to find counters with meat cutlets like the one at the grocery store, but instead, cow legs, chickens, and whole pigs hung from hooks in the ceiling. If they hadn't already been skinned, Hannah would have thought they had hopped up there themselves.

As Mìn-ki bargained with the Chicken shīfu, Hannah looked up at a skinned Doberman pincher. She watched as the stall owner whacked off a large chunk of Doberman for an elderly lady. Hannah wanted to look away, but couldn't. *That will never be on the end of my chopstick*, she thought.

"Ooooh, dog meat," Mìn-ki said, tossing his bagged chicken in his backpack. "Great winter snack."

Hannah thought about Cheetoh, her golden retriever, safe and sound back in America, out of the reach of hungry Chinese chopsticks.

Hannah no longer wanted the rest of her pancake.

When they left the market, Min-ki asked Hannah how she would get home. Hannah hadn't thought about it. Usually, Mr. Bái fetched her. Hannah had forgotten that her dad had a meeting today and needed to stay late.

"Do you want me to call a taxi for you, Hannah?" Min-ki said. Hannah thought about it. No. She could do this on her own. She had lived here long enough to at least summon a taxi all by herself. Plus, it would be good Chinese practice.

"No thanks, Min-ki. I can do it," she said.

"Ok, good luck!" Min-ki said.

"See ya later, Min-ki. Thanks!" Hannah said, waving as he hurried back across the intersection. She started searching for a taxi. The sun was already starting to go down. Hannah zipped up her jacket as a chilly breeze caught her. It seemed winter came earlier here in Beijing. Even though it was November, it felt more like Christmastime for Texas.

Hannah scanned the lanes for a metered taxi, watching as a couple of the small green and orange cars zipped by before she could raise her hand to call them. One drove by in her lane, and she waved her hand. The driver stared straight ahead as he drove past. Perhaps he didn't see her. She spotted another taxi. She was determined to make herself known this time, waving her arm back and forth wildly. Again, the driver refused to look at her, whooshing past.

Hannah started to get irritated. Why were the taxi drivers ignoring her? Was it because she was a foreigner? Two more taxis zipped by. Hannah started to panic. It was getting dark, and she didn't know any other way to get home. She wasn't even sure what part of the city she was in. Perhaps she could call her dad and get a ride. But no, Mr. Han always went straight home after dropping her dad off at work. Hannah looked at her watch. It was almost five.

She waited a little longer, motioning to every taxi that drove by. Then, a white car with a red light in the windshield pulled up to the curb. He opened the door. "Nǐ Hǎo," the driver said. "Nǐ qù nǎr?" Hannah hesitated. She had heard about "hēi chē," *black taxis* before. She knew some of her friends at school used them without any problems. However, her mom and dad had always warned her only to trust cabs with meters.

She climbed in and shut the door. As the driver sped back into traffic, Hannah pulled out her card with her address in Chinese and showed it to him. He nodded and grunted, "Hǎo de." *That's odd*, Hannah thought. He didn't ask for directions. Taxi drivers often weren't familiar with the suburb where the Joneses lived. This was especially true for drivers deep in the city.

The car reeked of cigarette smoke. Hannah looked around. The driver didn't have his name card on the dash board like she was used to. No meter, either. Red fuzzy dice hung from his rearview mirror. A container of half-finished dumplings spilled in the back seat. Hannah wondered how much business this guy could possibly get.

"Um, sorry. How much will it cost to get there?" Hannah asked. The man looked at her. He had on a dark green army jacket hanging open. Underneath, he wore a white undershirt that was too short, revealing a large pot belly. Hannah tried again, this time in Chinese. "Duō shǎo qián?" "Aaa," he said, "Méi shì, méi shì," waving his hand and shaking his head. *No worries?! Was this some trick to rip her off?* If he thought he was going to get her there and then charge 300 kuài, he could think again. But, then, what could she do really? She couldn't take on a full grown man.

One thing was for sure. Hannah *was* getting worried. She looked around. They *seemed* to be going in the right direction, but she couldn't be sure. She still didn't have her bearings. Beijing was too big and too confusing. It didn't help that all signs were in characters.

The taxi driver was really booking it. Without signaling, he suddenly took the exit onto the expressway. Hannah had never been this way before. Maybe it was faster. She looked at the highway signs. They were headed southwest. That was *definitely* not the right direction. Maybe he was lost or confused.

“Um, nǐ hǎo,” she said. “Ni qù Shūnyì ma?” The man shook his head. “Qù, qù,” he emphasized. He seemed very irritated.

Hannah’s heart beat fast. What she would give to be back at the Market right now, safe and sound amidst hanging chickens and Dobermans. The driver’s cellphone rang. He shouted quickly into the phone. While he was talking, he glanced over at Hannah and looked her up and down. Hannah felt queasy. The man grinned and hung up. Things were not right.

They had been driving a long time. Hannah wondered if they were still in the city. She had to do something. When the taxi exited and pulled back into traffic, Hannah was relieved to see that they were still in Beijing.

“Wōmen dàoqù Shūnyì. Shì bu shì?” she said. The man ignored her, staring straight ahead. He sped up.

Hannah couldn’t wait any longer. “Qǐng tīng chē,” she said. Please stop. No response. “Tīng chē, tīng chē!” she repeated, louder this time. The man kept speeding. Finally they pulled to a stop at a traffic light. Her driver honked, trying to run the redlight, but he was blocked by other cars.

Hannah fumbled for her bag, unlocked her door, and bolted from the car. She ran through lanes of honking cars and into a nearby restaurant. She stopped to look back. Hannah spotted his car still sitting at the light, which had now turned green. He didn’t move. Perhaps he had

abandoned his car to chase her. But the sound of angry car horns ushered the driver onward.

Hannah watched with relief as the white car sped through the intersection and out of sight.

Hannah pulled out her phone and steadied her shaking fingers. She punched in the telephone number to her house.

13

Even weeks after the hēi chē encounter, Hannah still shuddered at the thought of riding in a taxi. Christmas break had come as a welcome distraction. At times, like when they opened presents around the tree or drank hot chocolate while watching *It's a Wonderful Life*, Hannah almost forgot where she was. The familiarity almost convinced her she was back at home in Texas. But then again, was that home now?

Hannah's adventure in the hēi chē had shocked the family as well. Her mom had kept her barricaded in the house for days afterwards, and her dad had begun triple checking that she had a ride home anytime she ventured out. Though, she wasn't up for much venturing these days. Even without the almost-kidnapping, the subzero temperatures Beijing had reached as of late discouraged any treks outdoors.

When Christmas break ended, the Jones children bemoaned the recommencement of school. To make matters worse, Hannah had completely forgotten what waited for her upon her return.

The science fair.

Hannah and Terese hadn't done much on their project since that fateful Saturday morning dissection. On Wednesday, Mr. Kwan hinted that they needed to get a move on things.

"Hannah, Terese, how is your science fair project coming? You know the competition is next Saturday."

"What? Next Saturday?" Terese mouthed, shooting her a look of panic.

"It's coming along, Mr. Kwan," Hannah said. "Thanks." Mr. Kwan didn't look convinced. He raised his eyebrows.

"Ok," he said. "You will come tomorrow to my classroom after school. Bring what you have. Some of the other students will also use that time to work on their projects. We will compare your progress to theirs."

Hannah nodded. Terese grabbed her throat and made a choking sign, shaking her head behind Mr. Kwan's back. When he walked off, she started,

"Hannah, what will we show him? We have nothing but our dissection sketches." Hannah and Terese agreed to stay after school and do some serious brainstorming and painting.

At 3:00 the next day, they headed to Mr. Kwan's classroom with their work. They had painted all evening the night before, transferring Terese's sketches into paintings. They had completed at least one fourth of the fish's life.

Hannah spotted Mi-Young across the room as they headed inside. She had claimed the entire West corner and had tiny balls, paint, and a partially completed double helix spread across the floor. Hannah and Terese looked at each other and chose the farthest corner away from Mi-Young to set up.

Hannah noticed Min-ki working on a chart close to Mi-Young. He looked up, and Hannah waved. He smiled, but not for long before returning to his chart, his glasses inches away from the poster-board. Mi-Young looked at Min-ki's chart and ordered something to him in Korean. *Were they working together!?* Min-ki had failed to mention that to Hannah during their Chinese

lessons. Hannah hadn't realized that they were friends. Or, at least comrades. She wasn't sure if anyone could really be Mi-Young's friend.

Hannah and Terese set up their paint and canvases. Terese began working on the scene in which the Perch's husband snatches away the guppies' food. Hannah worked on a timeline of their Perch's hypothetical life. She planned to transfer it later to poster board, complete with pop-up words and fold-out pictures.

As Hannah contemplated what they should name their fish, a pair of soccer cleats approached her paper. She looked up to see Noah staring down at her, Chad at his side.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Hannah," Noah grumbled.

"Well, I've been here, like I told you I would be until you were done with soccer." Hannah mumbled. Noah was getting on her last nerve lately. His attitude was a little more understandable a couple of months ago when he was still struggling to make friends and adjust to China.

But it was January now. He had friends. And he still had off-season practice to keep him busy. The way Hannah saw it, Noah had been given more than enough time to get over himself. But he seemed not to care about anyone else in the Jones family. It was so unlike him. Hannah had never seen him like this before they moved. She wondered when he would snap out of it. Maybe it was too late. Maybe this change was irreversible. She hoped that wasn't true.

"Why aren't you at soccer anyways?" Hannah asked.

Noah ignored the question. "Chad and I are going to Sānlitúnr to see a movie."

Chad interjected, addressing Hannah's question, "Coach van der Merwe is in South Africa visiting his family. So, we're off until next week!"

"Thanks, Chad," Hannah said, frowning at Noah.

"No prob," Chad said. "You guys are welcome to come with," Chad said, smiling at Hannah and Terese.

"Yes, please!" Terese said. "Enough science fair for one day." She reached for her backpack, but Hannah stopped her with a look of exasperation.

"Are you kidding me, Terese?" Hannah said. "We've only been here ten minutes."

"I knooooow!" Terese said, pulling at her face. "Too long!"

"How am I supposed to get home, Noah?" Hannah asked. "We were supposed to catch a taxi together."

Noah shrugged. "You're a big girl. Catch one by yourself."

Hannah glowered at him. Had he forgotten about the last time she caught a taxi by herself? That wasn't that long ago. Noah didn't seem to care. He didn't return her gaze but instead, headed for the door. Chad hung behind.

"I can have my driver swing back by to get you, Hannah, if you need," Chad said.

"Thanks," Hannah said, "but like Noah said, I'm a big girl. I can get home by myself." Chad shrugged and followed Noah out the door.

Hannah's face was red. Terese interrupted her thoughts before her anger could rise anymore.

"Your brother is soooo cute!" Terese said, picking up her paintbrush.

"No way, Terese." Hannah said. "You would not think he was cute if you had to be around him as much as I do."

Terese thought for a moment. "Maybe he needs some time still. New school. New friends. That must be hard," she said. Then, staring off into space, "Maybe he needs someone to comfort him. Maybe a nice Indonesian girl..." Terese's voice trailed off. Hannah rolled her eyes and returned to her timeline.

Mr. Kwan walked around the room, scrutinizing everyone's work. He stopped where Mi-Young and Min-ki worked.

"Mi-Young," he said. "Adenine pairs with Thymine, not Guanine."

Mi-Young gasped. She looked down at her partially completed double helix and started pulling each pair apart. She shook her head and let out some words in Korean which made Mr. Kwan turn back around and shoot her a harsh look. She quieted and returned to her work, glaring at the floor.

Mr. Kwan walked over to where Terese and Hannah sat. He stared at Terese's painting.

"Very nice, Terese," he said, without smiling. "You are really capturing the colors of the dorsal fin." Mr. Kwan continued on his tour of the room. Terese and Hannah exchanged an inconspicuous low five. As Hannah returned to her work, however, an evil eye from Mi-Young stifled her enthusiasm. Mi-Young glared at the two of them. Terese seemed not to notice. Hannah pretended not to notice too.

Mi-Young got up from her station and headed to their corner, walking by them to the sink, where she rinsed off one of her paintbrushes. Hannah wondered what Mi-Young was up to. She soon found out as Mi-Young started to return to her prospective corner. On her way back, she caught her foot on the desk right next to Terese and Hannah. Pretending to trip, she kicked over an open can of yellow paint, spilling it all across one of their completed paintings. Terese gasped as a splash of yellow paint hit her glasses lens. She blinked several times before scolding Mi-Young.

"Ah, Mi-Young! Why don't you control those clumsy feet of yours?"

“What!” Mi-Young said, feigning both shock and offense. “It is not my fault this stupid desk is right where any normal person would walk!” she said, brushing off her shoes. “Look! Your fish paint got all over my boots!”

Hannah could not believe it. The entire painting was ruined! “You did that on purpose!” she said, her voice shaking. Mr. Kwan looked over at their corner. “What happened, ladies?” he asked, frowning. Hannah could not help but speak up.

“Mr. Kwan,” Hannah said, “Mi-Young is sabotaging our project!”

Mi-Young gasped. “Sabotage! Mr. Kwan, you cannot believe such lies! Ayaa, I am just clumsy. My mom always tells me this. Not my fault!”

Mr. Kwan looked from the painting to the girls.

“Ok, ok.” he said. “Everyone calm down. Girls, return to your respective stations and keep away from each other’s projects or I will deduct points from your final scores.” Hannah couldn’t believe the injustice! Mi-Young all but strutted back to her corner of the room, punishment free.

Min-ki came over to their side of the room with paper towels.

“Aw, so sad,” Min-ki said, taking in their ruined painting. “Sorry about Mi-Young,” he said. Terese shook her head.

“How can you be partners with her, Min-ki?” Hannah asked.

Min-ki shrugged. “What am I supposed to do? Her father is my mother’s brother. No choice.”

Hannah sighed and scrubbed at a smudge of yellow paint on the floor. She didn’t care if Mi-Young were Min-ki’s cousin or not. She was determined to stomp Mi-Young’s project at the science fair.

Hannah's mom woke her up early Saturday morning.

"Hannah, you can't sleep in this morning. You have a dentist appointment."

"Huh?" Hannah moaned, rolling over and pulling the covers up over her face.

"I made pancakes and sausage," Nancy said.

Hannah sat up. That changed things. She could get up early--even on a Saturday--for her mom's cooking. Thank goodness her mom had finally mastered the art of Chinese grocery shopping!

Hannah moseyed down the stairs to find her siblings already at the table.

Noah grunted as she sat down. Maddy worked off an arm of her pancake snowman with her fork. "Good morning, Han!" Madelyn said. Hannah doubted there had been any coercion involved in getting Maddy up this morning. She had probably been up with Pappaw Lee.

"What time for the dentist?" Hannah asked, spreading butter on her pancake.

Noah sighed. "It's not like I didn't have other plans today. Thanks a lot, Mom."

Nancy ignored Noah's comment. "Your appointments are at 10:00," she said, "but, y'all are taking the bus, so you need to leave at least an hour early."

"Wait, what do you mean, 'we're taking the bus'?" Hannah asked. "Aren't you coming with us, Mom?"

"Not today," Nancy said. "Mrs. Cho invited me for tea this morning."

"Min-ki's mom? Why?" Hannah asked.

"She thinks I should be a part of the PTA's science fair committee. Of course I told her, 'no, I'm not in the PTA. They don't want me there.' But she really pushed it. I think she feels bad about how the Korean Mom Mafia has been treating us."

Hannah nearly spit out her milk. "Mafia, mom? Ha! That's a bit harsh."

"Just calling it how I see it. Anyways, I figured I should at least go have tea. Maybe it's smart to have an advocate in the group," Nancy trailed off, mumbling something under her breath about being saved from a bloody horse head in her sheets.

Noah groaned, "I hate the bus. And the dentist. Why can't Mr. Bái take us? Isn't that what we pay him for?"

"He doesn't work on Saturday. And we don't pay him. Our company does. Unnecessary luxury. What are we, diplomats?" Nancy mumbled some more as she flipped another pancake. "Besides, you guys need to start learning how to get around on your own."

"Why can't we just take a stupid taxi?" Noah lamented.

"Taxis are expensive. And I don't trust them," she said, shooting Hannah a look. "The bus is cheap. Plus, it's good for you guys to do things with real Beijingers. I don't want you to become spoiled expats. I won't have you turning out like those Johansson kids."

Hannah's mom recently heard a story about Franklin Johansson, an American high-schooler who had broken into a computer store in the city with a gang of embassy kids. All of the perpetrators had gotten off with no punishment, thanks to their diplomatic immunity. Since learning of this incident, Nancy had grown wary of whom the Jones children hung out with. She always rejoiced when they brought home Asian friends. Thankfully, her run-ins with the Korean "Mafia" hadn't turned her off to *all* of the continent's people.

Hannah looked at a bus map of Beijing. She searched for the best route to the dentist's office in the Cháoyáng district.

"Noah, do you want to look too, just in case I get confused?" Hannah asked.

“Nah, you’ve got it.” Noah said, heading up the stairs and disappearing into his room until it was time to leave.

Hannah, Maddy, and Noah caught Bus 916 and headed into town. Bus riders filled every seat and almost spilled into the street when the door opened to let the Joneses on. Maddy squeezed between legs with no problem, but Hannah and Noah had to shove their way inside to find a place to hold on. The colorful, puffy marshmallow coats of their fellow travelers made their intimate proximity more comfortable, though.

Hannah tried to pull out the map, elbowing an old lady next to her. She apologized, and the lady stared at her. Hannah looked around. Most of the bus’s occupants also stared at the three of them.

“I hate it when they stare.” Noah said. “What? Have they never seen a white person before?”

“Why do you hate it? It makes me feel like a celebrity,” Hannah said. “No one ever stared at me in Dallas. I felt like I was invisible.”

“Speak for yourself,” Noah said, combing his fingers through his shaggy, blond hair. Hannah rolled her eyes. Noah’s friends had definitely rubbed off on him.

“Scoot over, Noah. There’s not enough room for me and your giant head.”

Noah squinted at her and scooted over, pushing the teenage boy beside him in the process. The boy lost his footing and almost tripped as he struggled to find a new place to hold on. Noah ignored the boy. Hannah gaped. *What a jerk*, she thought.

The bus turned and their entire group leaned to the right. Hannah’s face pressed into a fuchsia, marshmallow coat beside her. They took another turn, and the group leaned to the left. An old man close to Noah threw up. Noah sighed and looked at the ceiling. Hannah tried not to look as the man’s breakfast rolled down the floor on the next turn. Before long, a second passenger had

also caught the bus sickness and began sharing his breakfast with the bus floor. Noah didn't try to hide his irritation any longer. He covered his mouth and glared at the nauseated traveler.

A third passenger got sick, except this time, it was the teenage boy next to Noah. A portion of his breakfast made a pit stop at Noah's shoes before reaching the floor. As disgusting as it was, Hannah couldn't help laughing. Noah gaped at her.

Their stop came, and the three Joneses squeezed their way through the wall of puffy coats and out the door. Noah helped part the crowd this time, though, as his vomit-filled shoes squeaked and slid around the floor.

The second bus they caught was a lot less crowded. Hannah spotted an open seat near the back. She motioned to Maddy to sit. Noah rushed ahead and grabbed it before she could sit down.

"Seriously, Noah?" Hannah said. "Very chivalrous." Noah ignored her and stared out the window, pouting over his vomit filled shoes. An older woman with a fluffy, purple toboggan squeezed against the window and motioned for Maddy to sit between her and her husband. Maddy hopped into the seat without a pause and snuggled in between the couple's puffy coats. Hannah chuckled.

Hannah grabbed hold of the rail near the couple. She checked the map. The bus stop names were all in characters. She had forgotten to bring her Chinese dictionary along. She recognized the first two characters for their stop but not the rest. She pulled off her mittens. Her hands were getting sweaty. What if they missed their stop and ended up lost in the city?

Hannah eased her way to the back of the moving bus where Noah sat.

"Noah, can you read what this says?" She pointed to their stop.

"It's in Chinese," Noah said, gawking at her.

“I know it’s in Chinese” Hannah said. “I know the first part, but I can’t read the last characters.”

Noah shrugged and continued staring out the window.

“Thanks for your help,” Hannah said, working her way back to the front of the bus.

After a few more stops, Hannah heard the bus attendant call out what sounded like their stop. They would have to take a risk. Hannah grabbed Maddy’s hand and motioned to Noah to get off. At first Noah didn’t respond but as the bus squealed to a stop, he meandered his way to where they stood. They each swiped their bus cards as they exited.

Hannah pulled out the directions her mom had given her.

“It says we’re supposed to take a left on Liǎngmǎjiē, but I don’t see a sign for that anywhere. Hannah pulled out her map again.

“We’re looking for Beijing Dental Hygiene Clinic.”

“Ooh, look! A puppy!” Maddy said, pointing to a Pekinese on a leash by the stop light. Its owner had stopped for a newspaper and drink at a kiosk. Hannah squeezed Maddy’s hand to keep her from running to the puppy.

“Noah, can you please look at this map and help me figure out where we’re supposed to be going.”

“You can figure it out, Hannah.” Noah said, scraping vomit off of his shoes on the sidewalk.

“Sick, it’s starting to freeze,” he said. “I hate this weather.”

“Get over it, Noah. We need to find Liǎngmǎjiē or we’re going to miss our appointments.”

“Oh, now that will be a national emergency, missing our dentist appointments,” Noah said.

“Mom will be ticked,” Hannah said.

“Good I’m glad,” Noah retorted. “Then she will know how I feel. I had important things to do today.”

“Important things? Bumming around with your lame teammates is not that important, Noah. I hate to break it to you.” Hannah’s voice was almost a shout now. In the midst of their argument, Maddy slipped out of Hannah’s grip and ran to pet the Pekinese, which now sniffed half a sausage stick on the curb.

“At least I have friends,” Noah shouted back. “Who do you hang out with, Hannah? Pappaw Lee? Maddy? Mom?”

Hannah felt a ball form in her throat. “I have friends! Min-ki and Terese are my friends!” Hannah said, a bit softer. *Were they her friends or only her classmates?*

Noah smirked. “Right, your Chinese tutor and your lab partner. Some friends.” Hannah didn’t know what else to say. She glared at Noah. But Noah didn’t glare back. His face went white as he stared at something behind Hannah. Hannah turned to see what it was. Her mouth fell open as she spotted Maddy in the middle of the street, chasing the Pekinese, who had managed to wriggle out of his leash. Maddy was calling out after it: “Here, puppy! Look out for the cars!”

Forget about the stupid puppy, Hannah thought. She couldn’t seem to make her legs move. She watched with horror as two taxis swerved to miss Maddy. Maddy squatted down to summon the puppy, who had turned back to her, oblivious to the cars whizzing by it.

Hannah tried to call after Maddy, but her voice was lost in the sounds of the honking traffic. Hannah looked down the road at a bus careening straight for Madelyn. The driver couldn’t see Maddy’s tiny body from his seat high above the road.

Just then, Hannah saw Noah flash by. He ran straight into the road with his left arm out, motioning for cars to stop. A black Audi swerved into the bike lane to miss him as he scooped up

Madelyn and ran back across the road. He whisked her away just in time to avoid the honking bus which had been mere inches from them. The Pekinese trotted behind to the safety of the curb, unfazed by his flirtation with death moments before.

Madelyn started to cry as Noah set her down where Hannah stood. His hands shook, and his face was still white. Maddy hadn't realized the danger she was in until Noah grabbed her. But now, the reality sunk in, and she buried her face into Noah's side. He picked her up and stroked her back. Noah and Hannah stared at each other, speechless.

"Maybe we can reschedule our dentist appointments," Hannah said. Noah nodded.

"Enough busses for one day," he said, carrying Madelyn to the corner where he waved a taxi with his free arm.

All three Joneses huddled into the back seat. They rode home without saying anything. Maddy whimpered into Noah's jacket for most of the drive. Hannah stared out the window at the zipping Beijing traffic. She was so thankful Noah had made a quick decision. She had been no help whatsoever in the moment of need. As they turned onto the expressway for the final leg, Hannah leaned onto her brother's shoulder and closed her eyes.

Fèi Fèi had stumbled upon a baboon's paradise. Three days ago he had been wandering around for nearly a week with only one rotted piece of durian to his name. His stomach had stopped growling and now only whined at him, every now and then, reminding him that he was still alive. (Though, with the pain the durian had wreaked upon his insides, he sometimes wished he wasn't).

News of his escape had become widespread, and the result was a confidence boost for his spotters. No longer could he wander through the alleys besides restaurants with little notice. And no longer could he pilfer through the trash bins on the street without protests. No, not only had shop-owners and grocery stores taken to posting guard dogs outside their doors, but people had toughened too. Just the other day he had been minding his own business, attempting to acquire a piece of leftover chicken from an unclaimed feeding whole, when he almost got taken out by a broom!

That piece of chicken was not worth the bristled decapitation he nearly received. It didn't even smell that great, anyway. From that day on, Fèi decided to become choosier about where he scavenged. The risks were high when humans were present.

However, finally, he had found the perfect place. By some great stroke of luck, he had staggered upon the gathering place of miniature humans. Sure, there were some bigger ones too, but he had been watching them and had learned at what times the smaller ones came out to play. He was twice their size, so they posed little risk to him. However, he decided to take precautions, waiting to hunt and gather until after they had been called back inside.

Without fail, they always left their playground scattered with a cornucopia of treats. He found fruit, rice, cakes, chocolate, and other snacks he had never dreamed of. Thank goodness he had gotten out of that stupid Primate House, where his meals were monotonous and mediocre.

Today, however, Fèi Fèi was confused. Where were his little human suppliers? He had polished off all of his findings already. They were long overdue for playtime. He waited all morning, perched in his hiding spot until at last, a few larger humans went inside. They carried many items and traveled in groups and brought...wait, was that fish that he smelled!? He would have to creep closer and find out. But what if he was seen? His stomach growled. He decided it was worth the risk...

14

Hannah and Noah had a heart to heart. It came in the form of a date to a local Chinese dumpling restaurant. Noah initiated the event.

"The greatest dumplings in the entire Shùnyì area," Pappaw Lee reassured them upon giving them the recommendation. Pappaw Lee considered himself an expert on the subject after many dumpling escapades with his Mahjong friends.

"I'm sorry for being such a jerk lately, Han. Really not just to you, but to the whole family," Noah said, struggling to secure a slippery mutton jiǎozi with his chopsticks.

"Well, I haven't been the nicest sister either," Hannah said. "Criticizing your friends, yelling at you. What happened? We were always close in the States."

"Two words: Beijing," Noah said. "That's what happened."

"That's one word," Hannah shot back. Noah gave her a look.

"Oh, sorry," she said, chuckling.

"I know it must have been hard for you to move your senior year and start over," Hannah said. Noah looked down, dipping his dumpling.

"I guess I should have given you a break. And your friends aren't really *that* bad," Hannah added. Noah raised his eyebrows.

"Chad, huh, huh?" Noah said, winking.

“Hey now! Let’s not get carried away here. I said they’re not so bad. I didn’t say I want to marry them.” Noah laughed.

“Well, Chad would be on board if you change your mind.” Noah put a dumpling on her plate. She changed the subject, asking Noah about his classes and soccer and pressing him to admit the things about Beijing he actually did like. It seemed that things were on the up and up for Noah. He didn’t hate it as much as he let on. He had kept up the act for consistency’s sake.

“I can’t let mom and dad think I *like* to be kidnapped and whisked away to foreign countries!” Noah confided to Hannah, smiling.

Hannah and Terese worked the week away finishing up their science fair project. They entitled their panorama of paintings and pop-up timeline *A Big Fish Story*. Terese was especially smug about that particular touch.

To finish in time, Terese and Hannah had to relocate their work from Mr. Kwan’s classroom to the Jones’s kitchen. Terese had spent every night of the week painting at the Jones’s kitchen table. The entire family loved her, especially Nancy, who gave Terese extra attention, always asking her if she were hungry or thirsty. Terese could hardly paint with Nancy’s constant questions about her family, how long she had been in Beijing, and what her favorite foods were.

Hannah thought her mom could tone it down a notch. Terese wasn’t going anywhere. Hannah didn’t need her mom to talk Terese into being her friend. She could keep friends quite well on her own, thank you very much. Nancy need not worry about Hannah becoming an expat

hoodlum of the Johansson variety. In fact, Hannah had noticed that all of her friends were Asian. Perhaps Nancy should be more worried about her lack of American friends.

Terese nearly lost her life in transit to the Jones house two nights in a row. After that, the Joneses took to bringing Terese home from school with them. Monday night, Terese had shown up an hour late with a tale about a near kidnapping on the subway. Tuesday, Terese showed up missing a shoe, which she blamed on a close-encounter with a motor scooter.

Unfortunately, Hannah could not stick to the keep-all-Terese's-limbs-intact plan Friday afternoon due to tutoring at Min-ki's house. As a result, Terese came busting through the Jones's door after supper with a tale to rival all of her previous ones.

"You Joneses will not believe what happened to me!" Terese said, flailing her arms about as she slammed the front door behind her. Hannah didn't doubt the truth of that statement. Upon hearing Terese's dramatic entrance, the family meandered into the living room for another exciting story time with Terese. Pappaw Lee got comfortable on the couch and folded his copy of the *Beijing Daily* away.

"What is it, Terese?" Hannah said, trying to look concerned.

"Oh my goodness," Terese started, catching her breath and flinging the back of her hand to her forehead.

"There I was, walking through your neighborhood, looking at all the pretty houses and eating the sandwich my mom packed me. All of a sudden, this brown creature leaped down from the tree and landed on my shoulders, taking me down!"

Maddy gasped. "What was it? Was it friendly?"

Terese shook her head. "Friendly! Do you call something that nearly rips out your hair friendly?"

Maddy giggled. Hannah noticed that Terese's bun did look disheveled. But it was hard to know for sure. She always sported the barely-survived-a-hurricane look.

"And then!" Terese continued. "It stole my sandwich and ran away." Terese pantomimed the stealing of the sandwich. "I chased him around the whole neighborhood!" She acted out the chase. "But he disappeared..." Terese squatted and finished in a hushed tone, "...into the night."

Pappaw Lee and Noah clapped at the story's dramatic finish.

"Encore!" Noah shouted. Terese put her hands on her hips. Hannah stole a glance at Noah. Where had *he* come from? And what was that look he gave Terese. Did she spot some dreaminess in his eyes? Surely not.

"What, you think this is a joke?" Terese huffed. "I could have lost my life! And my hair! And I am now without any supper!"

Nancy jumped in, "Tell me what you're hungry for, T. I'll make you whatever you want!"

'T?' Hannah thought. *Was her mom on a nickname basis with Terese now?*

Hannah interrupted, "Terese, you didn't tell us what the animal was. Dog? Cat?"

"Nooo!" Terese protested. "It was..." she paused for the effect, "...A monkey!"

"Monkey!?" Hannah said. "No way. Monkeys don't live in Beijing."

"You think you can argue with an Indonesian about monkeys? We know monkeys. We live with them. And they steal food." Terese shook her head. Hannah dropped the issue. If Terese wanted to believe she had been attacked by a monkey, she could believe it. Hannah was glad she had gotten there already, monkey or no monkey. They still had lots to do before the next morning.

It was almost 11:00p.m.by the time Hannah and Terese put the finishing touches on their project. Noah came wandering into the kitchen and opened the fridge. He pulled out three glasses, filling each one with milk. He then brought a package of chocolate chip cookies to the table.

“Snack break!” Hannah gave Noah a look of confusion. This was the third snack break of the evening he had initiated. What had gotten into him?

“Noah, didn’t you have somewhere else to be tonight? Where are your friends?”

“What, do you not appreciate the snacks I have been so graciously providing this evening for you ladies?”

“Don’t listen to her, Noah,” Terese said, shoving a cookie into her mouth. “She doesn’t appreciate the importance of snacks. Look at her. So skinny.” Terese ‘tsk’-ed at Hannah and took another cookie.

“*I’m* skinny?” Hannah gawked. Terese was at least half her size. Noah nodded his head in agreement, shoving two cookies into his mouth.

“So, Terese, show me what you’ve got so far,” Noah said, smiling. She showed him their finished paintings.

“Wow, Terese! You are so talented!”

“Thanks!” Terese said. Did Hannah spot a blush!? “Hannah helped too.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Thanks,” Hannah mumbled under her breath. Noah didn’t look at Hannah but leaned in closer to Terese to see the rest of her paintings. Terese smiled up at him. Hannah could not believe the two of them. She reached in between them and picked up the paintings.

“Okay! No more snack breaks,” she said, clapping her hands together. Noah and Terese snapped out of their temporary moment. Noah headed back up the stairs. He turned near the top.

“You ladies let me know if you need anything,” he said. And with a wink, he disappeared into his room. Hannah rolled her eyes.

Hannah and Terese finished around midnight and headed to bed. The science fair was scheduled for the afternoon the next day.

That night Hannah barely slept. She dreamed that Mi-Young kidnapped her and used her for “scientific research.” She woke up still trembling at the thought of Mi-Young standing over her with a rusty scalpel and a crisp, white lab coat.

At the breakfast table the next morning, Hannah had a thought.

“I think our project is missing something,” she said.

“Like what?” Noah said, strutting into the kitchen, dressed and ready for the day.

“Wow! You’re up early, Noah,” Hannah said, scrutinizing his dress shirt and khakis. Noah gave her a look. Terese didn’t notice.

“What do you think it’s missing?” Terese said.

“Food,” Nancy Jones chimed in from the sink. “It’s missing food.”

“Mom, you can’t have food in your science fair project. Not unless it’s growing mold or something!”

Nancy Jones wagged her finger. “Everything is better with food,” she said.

Noah agreed, “Duh! Plus, it will win the judges over.”

“Mmm, bribery,” Terese said, smiling at Noah. Hannah wasn’t convinced.

“What kind of food could possibly fit with the life of a fish?”

“Plankton!” Noah said.

“Yeah, I’m sure the Lion Mart carries plankton,” Hannah said, shaking her head.

“Ok, how about fish sticks?” Nancy said. Terese gasped.

“So cruel!” she cried, laughing.

“Goldfish crackers?” Noah said. “No fish were harmed in the making of them.”

Hannah shook her head. “Try finding those here.”

“I’ve got it,” Nancy said. “Tuna salad. It’s like a taste of home.”

“Controversial!” Noah said. “It will stick in their memories.”

“...And their stomachs,” Hannah mumbled. But in the end, she conceded. Mi-Young definitely wouldn’t have tuna salad in her DNA presentation, and that fact was enough to convince her.

Terese ran home before the Science Fair with promises to meet them there. Hannah wondered if splitting it up had been the best plan, given Terese’s tendency for lateness and near-death experiences.

In the effort to finish the tuna salad in time, Hannah forgot to ask what one wears to a science fair at BIS. Hannah’s mom suggested her turquoise pants suit. Hannah tried to avoid that outfit as much as possible, but this day seemed like a fitting circumstance to look professional. The entire family dressed up too. Maddy wore her silk dress from the ball. However, no one got a chance to awe over it this time, for it was hidden under a bright blue marshmallow coat, which she didn’t remove for the entirety of the day.

Every building besides their house was glacial. Hannah had never before experienced the temperatures of a Beijing January.

At noon, the entire Jones family, ten painted scenes of a Perch’s life, tuna salad with corresponding crackers, and a giant plastic pitcher of sweet tea boarded the subway to BIS. Pappaw Lee had to cradle the sweet tea. Pappaw was not the subways’ biggest fan to begin with, so multi-tasking the safety of both himself and the sweet tea required much encouragement.

“Nance, why are you bringing this dadgum pitcher anyway? Will anyone even want cold tea? Don’t they like it hot?”

“Some like it hot, Pappaw,” Noah added, chuckling to himself. *He* was in a better mood these days.

“Oh, Dad, I know that. I just thought it would be a bit of a novelty. Thought we could represent our home. Plus, I wasn’t expecting to be involved in this thing, but Mrs. Cho was so convincing. I couldn’t say no to her. I didn’t know what else to bring. It was all so last minute.”

The Joneses squeezed their way into the crowded subway. They almost lost the tea at every stop. After four stops of near disaster, Pappaw Lee exerted his right to sit in the seats designated for the *old, weak, sick, disabled and pregnant only*. The young man he took the seat from hopped up without question as Pappaw Lee hovered over him and cleared his throat.

They underestimated the time it would take to make it to BIS by subway. Around 12:45, still far from their destination, Hannah started to sweat in her puffy yellow coat. She looked at her watch. They should have already been there by now.

By the time they made it to the school, it was far past the time to begin. The whole family walked in feeling conspicuous. To make matters worse, Hannah realized that everyone else had worn their school uniforms.

“Ooh, nice suit, Hannah!” Terese said, hurrying over to help carry their project. Terese wore her uniform but had added a fuchsia fur vest to her ensemble. Hannah looked around the room, trying to avoid eye contact with the room’s constituents, who had all turned at the sound of their entrance.

“We’re so late!” Hannah whispered to Terese, ducking to the back of the room to find their spot.

“It’s not a problem!” Terese said. “They haven’t started yet. Though you have missed so much! So much drama today already!” Terese’s eyes lit up as she spoke.

“What?” Hannah said.

“You know Mi-Young’s two sidekicks, Soo Jin and Hana. Apparently they showed up today with another project about DNA!”

Hannah gasped. “I’d like to have seen the look on Mi-Young’s face when she saw them!”

“It was wonderful. She was soooo mad! She forced them to set up in the corner.”

Hannah looked across the room. In the far corner, Hana and Soo Jin stood frowning with their arms across their chests. Both a column and a table obstructed part of the room’s view of their work. Hannah felt sorry for them. Though, they should learn to pick a better friend.

At the entrance, Pappaw Lee struggled with the giant pitcher of tea and tuna fish platter, which Nancy had handed off to him. Nancy stood at the food table chatting to Mrs. Cho. Mrs. Cho laughed and talked to Nancy like they were best friends, ignoring the raised eyebrows of the other PTA ladies standing nearby. Hannah liked Mrs. Cho. She wondered how it was possible for her to be related to Mrs. Kim.

Hannah relieved her grandpa of his tuna and crackers duty.

“Thanks! It sure is cold today. Whoo-ee. I think my undershirt has gone and froze to my armpits,” Randall Lee announced.

Hannah grimaced at that mental picture. She took their “fish food” from his hands.

“Can you close the door, Pappaw? It’s letting in cold air,” Hannah said.

Pappaw Lee tried to unstop it but it wouldn’t budge. He shrugged, “Guess they’re goin’ for the natural air effect.” Hannah shivered. At least their tuna fish wouldn’t spoil.

Pappaw Lee dropped off the sweet tea at the refreshment table. Mrs. Cho set the pitcher next to the kettle and teabag section. She poured a glass of sweet tea and took a sip.

“Mmm...she said. Naomi, you must try some.” Naomi Kim turned up her nose.

“Of course not!” Mrs. Kim exclaimed. “Everyone knows you must not drink cold drinks in the winter. You will get sick.” Mrs. Cho put her cup down and changed the subject as Nancy’s face grew red.

Hannah put the finishing details on their display. They propped up their paintings chronologically from the beginning of the fish’s life to its bitter end. Next to their paintings, an easel stood holding up their popup timeline. They placed the tuna and crackers at the beginning of their presentation.

Hannah spotted Min-ki running back and forth around the room with drinks and a giant poster board. Hannah waved. He nodded before running over to where Mi-Young stood. Mi-Young yelled something at him, taking the drinks. He hurried back across the room with the poster.

Soon everyone moved to their places around the room, and those who came for support took their seats.

Headmaster Qián walked up to the lectern at the front of the room. As he started making announcements about the event, Hannah felt something pull on the edge of her coat. She looked down to find an excited Madelyn gazing up at her.

“Hannah, Hannah!” she whispered.

“What is it, Maddy?” Hannah mouthed. “It’s starting.”

Madelyn glanced at Terese. “It’s the monkey!” she said, struggling to contain her voice to a whisper.

“Not that again,” Hannah said. “There’s no monkey.”

"But I *saw* him with my own eyes!" Maddy said, waving her arms about. Hannah shook her head and shoed Maddy over to her mom.

Mr. Qián opened with a personal thank you to the PTA moms for helping facilitate the event. "Let's show our gratitude to Mrs. Kim, Mrs. Cho, Mrs. Park, Mrs. Go, Mrs. Moon, Mrs. Jeong, and of course, Mrs. Jones."

He announced over the microphone that the judges would move about the room and discuss each project with the participants. The judges consisted of several teachers from BIS as well as some visiting Science teachers from Beijing Academy. Apparently Min-ki was responsible for taking care of them, because as soon as the panel stood up, he rushed over and began leading them around the room. After stopping at the first station, Min-ki ran over to the food table and hurried back with several mugs of tea. The judges' eyes grew.

"Um, thank you, young man," one short, balding judge said. "Don't we get wine and cheese as well?" he asked, chuckling. Min-ki's face went white. "Oh, sorry. I'll see what I can do," he said. The judge caught him before he could run off again. "Just a joke, my boy," he said.

"Oh," Min-ki let out a nervous laugh.

The judges stopped first at Kunjaba's booth, who presented about the benefits of Mendhi for skin health. She grabbed the arm of a tall, skinny judge whose grey hair was pulled into a low bun. The lady blinked a lot as Kunjaba traced delicate flowers up to her elbow and added some surrounding, intricate black swirls.

"Ooooh, that's cool," Terese said. Hannah noted the disappointment in her voice. She looked at their presentation. "But does she have tuna crackers?" Hannah asked. Terese giggled.

The judges stopped next at the station of Charles, the boy from Hannah's Chinese class and his lab partner, Sun. Their project discussed Pluto and Charon. Gigantic models of both celestial

bodies constructed out of painted rice balls hung from a coat hanger. “Creative use of food!” one judge said. “Now if only it were made of cheese.”

Hannah and Terese fidgeted as the judges approached their station. Mr. Gallagher was the first judge to arrive, with Mrs. Skinny Grey-Bun following close behind. Hannah blushed as Mr. Gallagher commented on their tuna and crackers.

“Does that contain fish? How heartless, ladies. Where is your sense of dignity?” he asked, winking at them. Hannah tried to think of something clever to say, but words failed her. She handed him a tuna cracker instead. She held her breath as he took a bite. Terese nudged her and cleared her throat. Hannah stopped staring and remembered to give the other judge a cracker as well.

Mrs. Skinny Grey-Bun took a nibble. “Very...um...tangy,” she began, in a high, tight voice. “I detect a hint of pickles, don’t I? Interesting culinary decision.” Hannah and Terese exchanged a nervous glance.

As the rest of the judges made their way to Hannah and Terese’s station, Hannah thought she saw a flash of brown out of the corner of her eyes. She heard a gasp nearby. She looked around but didn’t see anything. She caught sight of her mom, who was frozen in place, her face white. Hannah followed her mom’s eyes to the location of the brown flash.

There, on top of the concession table, sat a giant, brown baboon.

The judges hadn’t noticed him. They continued commenting on the color palette, the accuracy of the Perch’s anatomy and so on. Hannah tried to raise her hand to interrupt them.

“Um, I think maybe you should...somebody should--”she started.

“Save your comments until the end, Hannah. We will ask you questions.” Mr. Kwan cut her off.

Hannah started to try again, but Mr. Kwan gave her a look that quieted her. Hannah nudged for Terese to look. "That's him!" Terese whispered! "That baboon owes me a whole lot of hair back!" she said, starting to make her way in his direction.

But before Terese could make the first move, the baboon jumped off of the concession table and into Kunjaba's presentation, splashing Henna all over Kunjaba and her mother. Kunjaba's mother starting yelling something as the judges spun around to see what was going on.

Around the room, people broke off in mid sentence and began to notice that something was amuck.

The threat of Mrs. Kunjaba's mom's waving, sari-ed arm sent the baboon hopping back onto the concession stand. He knocked over the sweet tea in the process. The tea exploded, hitting everything within a ten-foot radius. Charles and Sun ducked beneath their easel as the tea soaked Rice Charon and Rice Pluto. The sticky balls morphed into porridge and slid off the string suspending them from the coat hanger. Sun and Charles could not jump fast enough to avoid the ricey glops falling from above.

Mrs. Kim was the first to respond to the chaos. She picked up a serving spoon, running at the baboon and clanging cutlery against a tray above her head. The monkey darted off the table, grabbing a handful of gimbap in his escape. The other PTA ladies yelled at him in furious Korean. But the monkey was not to be intimidated by the Mom Mafia. He strutted across the room, out of their reach.

Hannah realized he was headed straight for their project. She didn't know what to do. He was big. And he looked mean. Could she take on a full-grown, alpha baboon? This was not Rafiki. He was not their friend. He was wild. And hungry.

Hannah met the baboon's eyes. Was that a glare she detected? He sniffed the air and stomped his foot against the ground. Suddenly, he was the bull, and she was waving the red blanket.

Except that red blanket was a plate full of tuna-fish salad and Lion Mart crackers.

The baboon eyed the presentation. *Is it worth fighting for?* Hannah asked herself, thinking of the hours and hours they had spent painting Perch scales.

Just then, Hannah noticed Terese edging up behind the baboon. Terese had a table cloth she had commandeered from another exhibit. She raised it above the baboon's head. Terese's slim frame looked pathetic next to the baboon.

Hannah shook her head at Terese. *Don't do it!* Hannah thought. Luckily, Terese missed the baboon when she swatted, for he had already begun his charge toward Hannah. Before Hannah could decide what to do, the baboon had reached her. She closed her eyes, bracing herself for his taloned attack. But she felt nothing. He ignored her, jumping onto the table. She would not deter his tuna fish destination.

The baboon climbed up their easel and reached for a handful of tuna. But the easel could not take his weight, and it began to tip over.

Down came the baboon. Down came the easel. Down crashed ten paintings and a pop-up timeline. Crackers and tuna salad flew through the air. Bits of mayonnaised pickles landed in the hair of Mrs. Skinny Grey-Bun. She scowled.

"Timber!" Mr. Gallagher cried as the baboon hopped onto the edge of their presentation table and flipped it over. It hit the neighboring exhibit, starting a chain reaction of subsequent easels, which began dominoing down the room.

Soo Jin burst into tears as chromosomes from their double helix popped apart and scattered across the floor. The baboon plopped down, munching tuna, apathetic to the destruction he had caused.

The domino-effect continued. Hannah watched as three more displays saw their ends. She looked at the judges. They stood unmoved, not knowing what to do. No one told them the science fair would be so interactive. They had simply been given a score sheet, not training on the ways of restraining a primate. The baboon was on the move again. Mrs. Skinny Grey-Bun's knees knocked together, and Mr. Gallagher smirked, watching the entire affair with detached amusement.

Hannah wondered where the baboon was headed next. Then she saw her. Mi-Young snuck across the room, carrying a plate of gimbap away from her exhibit. She tiptoed, hoping the baboon would not notice her. But this baboon had a nose for fish. And his nose could not fail to pick up the subtle whiff of spicy tuna emanating from the plate she held. He charged once again. Mi-Young caught sight of him out of the corner of her eye. She began to run. The baboon quickened his pace.

For a moment, a wave of sick joy caught Hannah. The feeling was immediately followed by guilt. She was in turmoil. What should she do? Help her arch nemesis? Mi-Young had done everything in her power to bring Hannah down. Shouldn't she let the baboon attack her? Wouldn't that be like making room for Karma?

But in the last moment, as the baboon reached out his scary, furry hand and opposable thumb toward Mi-Young's platter, Hannah made a break for it.

She rushed the baboon and Mi-Young. She knocked the plate of gimbap out of her hands and pushed Mi-Young out of the baboon's reach. Gimbap flew through the air. Mi-Young belly-

flopped onto the floor. The baboon scurried out of the way, and Hannah's momentum took her straight into Mi-Young's exhibit. Her yellow marshmallow coat cushioned her fall, as she landed atop Mi-Young's model of semi-conservative replication. Hannah maneuvered the rescue without a scratch.

But she could not say the same for Mi-Young's double helix. Its pieces lay crushed and strewn about the floor, her poster in a crumple, and her table of bribes for the judges (apparently Nancy Jones hadn't been the only one with this strategy) ruined.

In the midst of the commotion, Terese managed to corner the baboon with the help of Noah and three participants' fathers. Someone must have called the zoo because within minutes, three men rushed in with a cage and detained the monkey. They loaded him into a white van and disappeared.

Hannah brushed the remnants of a lagging strand of DNA off of her turquoise slacks. She gathered her thoughts and took a deep breath. However, she could not relax. The science fair drama was not yet finished.

"Look what you have done!" Mi-Young said, rushing over to Hannah and pointing a finger into her chest.

"What? I practically saved your life!" Hannah said, a bit louder than she intended. Mi-Young's face was inches away from her own.

"Sabotage! Mr. Kwan! Look what this girl has done to my project! It is ruined!" Mr. Kwan was busy trying to calm Soo Jin and Hana, who were still whimpering over the destruction of their exhibit.

Nancy Jones rushed to the scene of the dispute, stepping in between her daughter and Mi-Young.

“Now wait just a second, missy! It’s not like Hannah tried to make that baboon attack you. There’s no telling what shape you’d be in now if she hadn’t risked herself for you!”

From out of nowhere, Mrs. Kim appeared in the ring, grabbing Mi-Young’s shoulders and pulling her close.

“Who are you calling ‘missy,’ *Mrs. Jones?*” she spat. “It is obvious your daughter had it out for Mi-Young. She has been jealous of her from the beginning. I know. I hear what goes on in the BIS halls. I come to PTA meetings!”

Nancy Jones’ mouth dropped open, and she took a step closer to Naomi Kim.

Mr. Kwan approached the group before Nancy could formulate a retort.

“Ladies, ladies. It is alright. The baboon is no one’s fault. Who could have even schemed of such a thing? Not in my wildest dreams could I have anticipated this! A baboon at the science fair! Can you imagine? Never in all my years of teaching...” Mr. Kwan trailed off.

Hannah looked at her mom. Then at Mrs. Kim. Then at Mi-Young. Mi-Young’s lip quivered as she gazed at her ruined project.

“I’m sorry about your project, Mi-Young,” Hannah said, the twinge of sympathy welling up within her for the first time. Mi-Young stared at the floor.

“It’s ok,” she said. “I guess you didn’t mean it.”

Mean it? Of course she didn’t mean it. But Hannah kept her thoughts to herself and instead walked with Mi-Young to help pick up the shambles of her exhibit.

“Thanks,” Mi-Young said. “You really don’t have to. There is no hope.”

“Nonsense!” Hannah replied, snapping together two remnant strands. Mi-Young and Hannah plopped down on the floor and piece by piece, reassembled Mi-Young’s entire model.

Mi-Young broke the silence when they had finished. “I really do not hate your guts, you know.”

Hannah looked up, raising her eyebrows.

“Really?”

“Well, not all your guts.”

“That’s funny, because I actually thought you wanted to be best friends,” Hannah smarted back.

“Huh?” Mi-Young said, confused.

“Oh, you know, the volleyball to the head, the spilling of the paint, the death looks in English class. All signs pointed to friendship.”

“I am sorry about that.” Mi-Young said, growing silent again. “It’s just that, you see. I am always first in everything. You scared me when you came. You were so smart.”

“Me? Smart?” Hannah said, flabbergasted.

“Well, maybe not as smart as me but still. I couldn’t take any risks. I must be the best. Must get into a good America university. Must keep Mrs. Kim proud.”

Hannah could not believe she was having this conversation.

“Well, you really had nothing to worry about. I am always in the middle. Never the best, never the worst. I’m like Canada.” Mi-Young giggled.

“Don’t tell my grandma that. She lives in Canada.”

Hannah joined in the giggling. “Truce?” she asked.

“Ok, Hannah Jones,” Mi-Young. “Truce. Just don’t try to beat my science fair project ever again. I want first place.”

“I don’t think you have anything to worry about,” Hannah said, looking over at their exhibit, which was a fiasco, tuna salad smeared across the canvases.

The two girls headed back to join their mothers. The stare down had continued until Hannah's dad joined the circle. Ignoring the tension, he walked over carrying a plate of gimbap. He shoved one in his mouth. "You have got to try these, Nance! They go great with your sweet tea." Nancy laughed at her husband and loosened her fists. Mrs. Kim had nothing to say. She blinked several times as Robert stuck out his hand and grinned. She shook it.

"Quite a morning we've had here, don't you say? We'll be forcing our kids to participate every year from now. Who knew a science fair could be so invigorating?"

Mr. Kwan announced over the microphone that the judges would take a short break. He encouraged everyone to salvage what they could of their projects.

An hour later, after the judges had scrutinized the remnants, Mr. Qián took the stage once again to begin handing out awards. Everyone took their seats. Hannah looked around for Terese. She walked in the door, giggling with Noah. Noah grinned.

Hannah waved them over, and they took their seats.

"I can confidently say that we have never had a science fair like this in all my time at Beijing International School," Mr. Qián began. The audience chuckled.

"Many times we have had people study wildlife, but never before has said wildlife made a living appearance at the competition. For future reference, we will ban the bringing of food. It seems an unnecessary complication, one that lends to chaos of primateon proportions, if you'll pardon my saying so."

The audience chuckled once again.

"But without further ado, I would like to begin announcing the awards for today."

Mr. Kwan stood up from his seat and approached the podium, carrying several trophies.

“With honorable mention, we have Kunjaba Patel with her project *Your Epidermis is Showing*, Michael Jeong with his project entitled, *That's the Shui, Uh-Huh-Uh-Huh* about the quality of Beijing reservoir water, and last but not least, Terese Jayaputri and Hannah Jones with their *Big Fish Story*.

The audience clapped as the participants approached the stage and took their purple ribbons. Hannah and Terese laughed all the way back to their seat.

“I do not believe that we actually won something!” Terese exclaimed, under her breath.

“Thank you for your excellent work, students,” Mr. Qián said. “And now for third place, I would like to congratulate Soo Jin Go and Hana Park. Thank you for your excellent project about complimentary base pairing, ladies.”

Soo Jin and Hana avoided Mi-Young's eyes as they rushed to the stage, beaming.

Mi-Young gripped the edge of her chair.

“In second place, we have Min-ki Cho and Mi-Young Kim, whose presentation about DNA's semi-conservative replication amazed us all.” The crowd applauded. Mi-Young, however, frowned as she took the stage to receive her prize. She sulked back to her seat as Min-ki ran by, receiving his prize, bowing several times, and shaking Mr. Kwan's hand with extreme vigor.

Hannah felt a pang of pity for Mi-Young. She looked at Mrs. Kim. Mrs. Kim did not smile at her daughter as Mi-Young returned to her seat with her red ribbon.

“I would now like to announce first place!” Mr. Qián said. The crowd hushed its murmurings. He paused, building the suspense.

“The winner is...or, I should say, the winners are: Charles O' Leary and Sun Jung Moon, with their project about the relationship between Pluto and Charon.” The crowd applauded. A red-

headed family of seven shot up from their seats. Charles and Sun meandered their way to the stage, leaving a trail of sticky globs of rice behind them.

Everyone continued applauding as Mr. Kwan put gold medals around both of their necks and handed them trophies. Their expressions were marked by pleasant surprise as they posed for pictures next to Mr. Kwan and Headmaster Qián.

“Hannah! I am so proud! Honorable mention in a science fair. You don’t even like science!” Hannah’s dad said after the event had ended.

Pappaw Lee joined in. “Well done, sugar. Well done indeed. I reckon you will want to celebrate, now.” Hannah grinned and nodded. She was glad it was finally over. It had been far less painful that she had anticipated, even with the baboon.

“Yes! We must celebrate our victory!” Terese chimed in.

“Ok, where to?” Hannah said.

“How do you feel about fish and chips?” Noah said.

Everyone laughed, and the entire family, Terese, ten ruined canvases, a mangled pop-up timeline, a smeared platter of tuna fish salad and crumbled crackers, and an empty pitcher of sweet tea made their way to the subway and into the city.

15

The end of January marked the beginning of Chinese New Year. Noah, Hannah and Maddy were all delighted to discover that they would receive two full weeks off of school.

“It’s not even Christmas!” Maddy exclaimed.

The sound of never-ending fireworks shook the Jones house day and night. On the fifth day, Pappaw Lee informed them all that some of his mahjong friends and their families would be coming over to make dumplings. Hannah wondered how her grandpa could possibly have made such plans using only charades. But apparently, he had his ways.

At 10:00a.m.that morning, the doorbell rang and in flocked Randall Lee’s friend, Mr. Yūn, as well as Mr. Yūn’s wife, his son, his daughter-in law and his eight-year-old granddaughter. The granddaughter and Madelyn took off to Maddy’s room. The family saw them dart in every now and then, waving Barbie dolls and chattering in rapid Mandarin. Soon after the arrival of the Yūn’s, the doorbell rang again, and in walked the Liú family, complete with a grandfather, grandmother, a daughter, son-in-law, and a crying, bald baby.

Nancy Jones did not know what to do. Both families stood staring at one another in the living room. She searched her dictionary for the expression “please sit.” But there was no need for Hannah’s mom to direct the group, for the ladies went straight to the kitchen and began pulling flour, oil, meat, and vegetables from their bags and setting the ingredients on the kitchen table.

In no time, the dough appeared, as did bowls filled with raw pork, onions and cabbage. Nancy followed the ladies' charades as they taught her to roll out tiny circles of dough. Soon, the table was covered in tiny, beige circles. The ladies began dropping the meaty filling into the middle of the pancakes.

Soon Terese came over, and she, Hannah and Noah began filling pancakes with the group. When Noah first sat down at the table, the ladies gave him looks of disapproval. But he flashed a grin and tried to construct the retort, "men can make dumplings too," in Chinese. Whether it was his poor pronunciation or his pearly whites that won them over, Hannah didn't know. But soon, the ladies began reveling in correcting his dumpling-making methods. He played along, holding his dumpling close to his face and feigning intense concentration.

Hannah could not get her dumplings to match the perfect baby bonnets of their expert teachers. However, it was no matter. The dumplings were plentiful enough to engulf the entire table, and the ladies began dropping them into big pots boiling on the stove.

Hannah and Terese chatted about Chinese New Year traditions as they waited for the dumplings to boil.

"What animal are you, Hannah?" Terese asked, referring to the Chinese Zodiac.

"I didn't know I was an animal." Hannah said.

"When is your birthday?" Terese asked. Hannah told her.

"Oh, then I think. Yes, you must be a sheep," Terese said. Hannah pondered this revelation. *Sheep?* That's not very romantic. She didn't want to be a sheep. Sheep were dumb, and they all looked the same. They blended in with the sheep next to them. No one ever said, "Now that! That is a very fine sheep." The only time Hannah noticed sheep was when they crossed River Road near their house and held up traffic.

Hannah frowned as Terese continued talking. "I am a monkey," she said laughing. "I think it fits." Hannah laughed too. She never thought monkeys would play such a huge role in her life.

"This is the year of the Dragon, though. My mom is so excited. She is a dragon. She says we must give her special attention all year," Terese said, rolling her eyes.

"Dragons are supposed to have lots of energy. They're leaders and are always at the center of attention. I think they must be bossy too, because my mom is always telling me what to do."

Hannah had stopped listening by the time Terese finished telling about all the chores her mom put her up to this week. Hannah was still stuck on the sheep thing. Was she destined to always be a sheep? Could she change that? Pretend to be a dragon? Wear lots of red and hope people believed her act?

Madelyn and her new friend came into the room to announce that dinner was ready. Hannah and Terese headed to the kitchen table, where all three families crowded, poised and ready with chopsticks in their hands. A negligible amount of table was left uncovered as the mounds of dumplings spilled over their plates. In between the plates sat small bowls of soy sauce, vinegar, and sesame seed oil.

Dinner was quiet. Occasionally, members of the group would break it with a comment to a family member. However, everyone mostly stared and smiled. Sometimes, Hannah's dad would attempt a charade, but Nancy would shoot him a look and smile again at the group after he returned to his dumplings.

Hannah struggled to grip onto the slippery jiǎozi after drowning it in sauce. She lost one in transit, and it dropped into Grandpa Yūn's cup, splashing chrysanthemum tea onto the table. Hannah gasped.

“Duibuqǐ!” she cried, wiping up the tea and reaching for the teapot in the center of the table. But the old man laughed and grabbed her reaching arm.

“Měishí,” he said, shaking his head. He smiled at her and popped the insurgent dumpling into his mouth, chuckling.

This event seemed to break the ice because afterwards, everyone felt at ease. They commented on the beauty of the dumplings and guessed at which ones they had made. No one seemed to care that their commentary was lost in translation.

After supper, Hannah decided to brave the cold and take a solitary walk around the neighborhood. She grabbed a moonpie from the pile her mom had made on the coffee table. “It’s like the American version of a mooncake!” Nancy had exclaimed after finding them at the Lion Mart. Hannah had received a moonpie in her sack lunch every day since then. She stuffed it in her pocket, just in case.

The sun had begun to set and streaked purple behind the thick clouds covering the city. Hannah circled the block in her yellow marshmallow coat. She headed to the park where she often saw her elderly neighbors do tai chi.

She was not alone when she reached the park. A little old lady stood with a chow-chow at the end of a leash. His brown coat looked a lot more suited for the temperature than hers. The lady stared at the cars and bikes on the other side of the fence as they zoomed by.

Hannah took a seat on the bench. She watched the chow-chow with its owner, who soon noticed her presence. The old lady stared at Hannah. She and the chow-chow strolled over to fill the empty space on the bench. For a while both Hannah and the lady sat there, saying nothing.

After several minutes, Hannah turned to the woman. “Chūn jié Kuài lè!” Hannah said. The lady turned, surprised. She smiled. “Chūn jié kuài lè.” The lady began to speak in Chinese at a

speed too rapid for Hannah to follow. However, she nodded anyway, smiling at the lady and throwing in a “dùì” or “àa” every now and then. She caught enough to understand that the old woman’s family was coming to town for the Spring Festival.

Eventually the lady stopped talking. She looked at Hannah, waiting for her response. Hannah could not think of a single relevant Chinese phrase in that moment. So instead, she offered the lady the moonpie in her jacket pocket. The petite, white-haired lady scrutinized the package before deciding to open it. She pulled out the chocolaty cake and took a bite. The marshmallow center made a sticky string as the lady pulled it away from her mouth. She laughed and made a face. Hannah chuckled too.

Mrs. Chow-Chow didn’t finish her moonpie, but instead passed it to her Chow-Chow, looking at Hannah with a playful expression. She pulled a small package out of her pocket and handed it to Hannah. Hannah opened it, scrutinizing the calligraphy on the snack’s tan surface. Hannah hadn’t liked any of the mooncakes she had experienced in the past. However, she feared rudeness if she didn’t try this one now. She split it open, studying the filling. Thank goodness it was chocolate.

She took a large bite and regretted it. The center was not chocolate at all, but instead red-bean paste. Some things she would never get used to.

She smiled at Mrs. Chow-Chow and nodded, giving the lady a thumbs up. The lady smiled without saying anything.

As Hannah took another bite, she listened to the fireworks erupting around her. They were in full force now that the moon was their color display’s only hindrance.

She pulled her marshmallow coat shut, bracing herself for the cold wind that had started to pick up. She noticed the weeping willow hovering over their bench. Its bare branches threatened to bud any day now.

Maybe being a sheep wasn't so bad, after all, she thought. People needed sheep for things like stuffing puffy marshmallow coats and filling mutton dumplings. And surely each sheep was not the same as the next. It only looked vanilla in the midst of its fellow sheep. But if that sheep were to roam on its own or frolic in a flock of baa-baa black sheep, people would notice. It would be a special sheep.

Hannah could never have conceived of this moment last year. But now she pondered how normal it was, sitting in a Beijing park, sharing snacks and a sunset with Mrs. Chow Chow and her dog. Normal old woman walking her dog. Normal sunset. Normal Hannah.

She smiled as she polished off the last bite of her mooncake.