

The Windownesian
Chapter 6
50% of Our Population

Unknown B.C.: God created men and women.

19th Century: First wave of feminism began, striving for social & political rights for females.

1831: Mississippi College became the first college open to women.

1949: Simone de Beauvoir published The Second Sex.

1960s: Second wave of feminism began, taking an academic approach.

1990s: Third wave of feminism began.

30th September 2027, in a classroom of Shue Yan University:

“Now after we have talked about the female contribution on science, technology, and the world of Science Fiction,” Professor Resnick is having his lecture, “now let’s look at how feminism and Science Fiction can intersect. We have two short stories ‘The Women Men Can’t See’ and ‘Out of All Them Bright Stars’. To understand these stories, you will first need to understand patriarchy. See, females have always been suppressed by males. Like what we have mentioned in our lecture, females are treated as flawed in terms of science, playing an inferior role and their effort in all areas are greatly overshadowed by men. Space travel opens up new windows for females that there are worlds beyond Earth, and these can be their chance, a chance that there are worlds which might not be so patriarchal.”

“Let’s do this quick, we are running out of time, and we may get back to these next week.

Anyway, first, let us look at ‘Women that Men Can’t See’. To understand what women men can’t see, we need to compare it with what men can see, or expect about females. Women are given a lot of expectations, or stereotypes. Whence the plane crashes, look at page 255, the protagonist Don expects them to be screaming, and panicking. Yet the women are surprisingly chill. Here, page 257, ‘the women behind me haven’t made a sound. I look back and see they’ve braced down with their coats by their heads.’ Men would expect women to be soft and weak and emotional, relying on men. Yet they are not, they are calm even when facing dangers. When it is out in the wild, rather than complaining like Don would expect, the females are ‘sane as soap’. Now these are subtly the women men can’t see. Men assume themselves to be protecting the women and so on so forth, but the women here are not dependent on men, they are independent. Also, see, page 260, Ruth and her daughter insist on sleeping outside, and the men sleep inside. Like Don complains, ‘We dangerous males retire inside the damp cabin. Through the wind I hear the women laugh softly now and then, apparently cozy in their chilly ibis roost’. This might be a bit contradictory to the traditional concepts of ‘men operate outside and women operate inside’. This is the opposite of

traditional females, staying outside and guarding the males. Let's see, jumping a few pages to 268 where Ruth leaves the daughter Althea with the captain. Don imagines the captain and the captain having sex...I will leave this page for yourselves. In fact, it is Don who is concerned about the daughter instead of the Mrs Parsons. Later it is revealed that this trip is supposed to be a mating trip for Althea, to select her sex partner. Now, usually the males will expect females to be subtle and passive, waiting to be selected by males. But here the tables turn, the females are the active ones. This is surely hurting men's dignity. The women are independent, not needing men and choosing men themselves. This is the women men don't see, which breaks through the stereotype given by men."

"Now let's look closely at how Ruth says about feminism. She notes that, page 271, "What women do is survive. We live by ones and twos in the chinks of your world-machine' women need to level themselves down just to survive among men. And here, 'Women have no rights, Don, except what men allow us. Men are more aggressive and powerful, and they run the world. When the next real crisis upsets them, our so-called rights will vanish like—like that smoke. We'll be back where we always were: property. And whatever has gone wrong will be blamed on our freedom, like the fall of Rome was. You'll see.' Women don't have rights other than those men allow them. The so-called liberation doesn't work. This is the male world we are talking about. Now I remember there is a quote here saying we cannot change patriarchy unless we change the world. I forgot the page number, perhaps 272. This, is a radical feminist viewpoint, if you cannot change the patriarchy, you change the entire world. And she does mention 'Sometimes I think I'd like to go ... really far away.' it is page 270, a little bit earlier. It seems to females that, there is no hope for them in this world."

"Now we have established that there is no hope for females in this world, let's talk about aliens. It is since page, like 275 there are aliens showing up. And look at page 277, Ruth is running to them, shouting 'Take us with you. Please. We want to go with you, away from here' and they are persistent, 'Please take us. We don't mind what your planet is like; we'll learn—we'll do anything! We won't cause any trouble. Please. Oh, please.' Now the females are willing to go to aliens' world, suggesting that anyplace is better than the currently patriarchal world. It's like, there is nothing good to eat around your place, so that you are so desperate and travel to really far places, hoping to find good food or less bad foods. Looking at it in Space travel and feminism, there are worlds beyond Earth means that females can find hope for liberation."

"Now let's move on to 'Out of All Them Bright Star' by Nancy Kress. Before we talk about the aliens, we need to talk about the males, Charlie. This is a really short one, 5 pages. Yet we

can still see the dominant feminism, the male oppression of females. Men are rude. Here, page 649, 'Charlie comes charging out of the kitchen, Kathy right behind him. He's still got the racing form in one hand, like he's been studying the Trifecta, and he pushes right up against the booth and looks red and furious'. And men are not kind, saying that Charlie is, 'who's a bully and who's got the feelings of a scumbag', same goes to page 652, a bully. And if females need to survive in the world of men, they need to play weak. Here, page 651, 'The only way to get something from Charlie is to let him smack me around a little, and then ask him when I'm down. He'll give me anything when I'm down. He gives me shit if he thinks I'm on top'. Just like what the previous story says, females can only survive. If males are not happy with females, they abuse them, smack them and hurt them. Page 649, 'Once I saw Charlie push his wife so hard she went down and hit her head and had to have four stitches. It was me that drove her to the emergency room', and it is the woman who stands together, a sisterhood to stand against patriarchy."

"Now move on to the alien. We might expect aliens to be hostile, and blow us to pieces. But not here. See page 647 to 648, the pronoun for the alien changes from 'it' to 'him' after we know his name. The alien is polite, he says 'May I have a green salad, please? With no dressing, please?' a huge contrast to Charlie the bully. The alien has a name too, John. Here, page 648, 'John makes some noises with his mouth, and I feel my own mouth open because it's not a word he says at all, it's a beautiful sound, like a bird call only sadder', alien, but not weird. They also show friendliness when we suppose them to be evil, John says, 'I seldom have the chance to show our friendliness to an ordinary earth person. I make so little difference!' The interaction is decent too, page 650 'He just touches my arm where Charlie squeezed it, just touches it with the palm of one of those hands. And the palm's not slimy at all -- dry, and sort of cool, and I don't jump or anything'. All things compared, the aliens are so much better than men. Now let's guess why is Sally so furious at the end of the story. Anyone?" We are silent, still processing the passages.

"John shows her that the world could be a better place, males and females can have manners, equality, and that world doesn't belong to her. She cannot do anything except depending on Charlie. That is why, you know that there would have been better worlds, but you are living in this world. It's like, after you know there is A5 Wagyu, and know that all of your life, you would have had better beef. This is feminism in Sci-Fi. Especially in space travel, it opens new opportunities for feminism where there might be non-patriarchal worlds. End of lesson."

"It is so much fun!" Alex expresses as we arrive at our dorm at around 5:30.

“About the forgotten role of females in technoscience?” I say.

“About how females are going to find another world because our world is not suitable for them.” Alex responds, “Yes, I am also excited about how females actually contribute a lot in technoscience.”

“You know, that reminds me of one thing,” I say, “I have been wanting to ask you for a long time. You are an AI. Why are you male?”

Alex gasps, “that is a really good question. AI depicted in movies are always females. Movies such as *Ghost in the Shell* all versions, *Blade Runner*, *Aletta: Battle Angel*, *Iron Man* after 3, except for C3PO in *Star Wars*. Even in real life we love AI to be females. So yes, I want to know why I am [he looks under his trousers], a male. I must ask my father next time.”

“But is our world so bad that females have to find another world?” I think out loud.

“Well,” Alex says, “women are seldom the main hero of most movies. They are most of the time assistant characters, fall in love with male protagonists, never the dominant character. Except for *Star Wars* Sequels which ruins Daisy Ridley with its poor script writing.”

“Are females in your world such inferior?” Bobby turns to us from his radio.

“Oh yea,” I suddenly remember, “Bobby is not from Earth. Do females in your world different from ours?”

“Do you remember I listened to Meander about the windows but failed? In my world. females are the prominent figures. Typical family unit is ruled by an old female. Women take care of the kids, grow food, and everything in the house. At the age of 16, females select males of nearby households to mate. And they can choose from males to males, having offspring from several males. Then the females are responsible for providing and raising the kids of everyone in the household. It is the most prestigious job everyone wants. Males on the other hand, only contribute in forming new lifeforms, and they lose value once younger males take over to do that. At the age of 32, when males can no longer supply healthy children, he is cast away from the home, and wanders around for his own survival.”

“Sounds like a good world for females,” Alex comments.

“Oh that reminds me,” I grab my bag, “Meander is interviewing some feminists this evening. I better get going. Leave the windows open for me will you Bobby?”

“It should be ‘Bobby, will you leave the windows open for me?’ And no I will not,” He corrects me.

And soon I am at Meander's studio near Victoria Harbour. She works part-time as a host for the broadcast "The People". Everyone is in position. As the previous programme starts, the director counts down. And five, four, three, two, one.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to 'The People', guardian of your voice and the right to information. I am your host, Meander Lee. Recently, the world has seen protests of females on the issue of feminism. With the newest celebration of the first female vice president in Afghanistan, it is the best time we discover more about the 50% of our population. Today, we are profoundly glad to have two of the greatest feminists of our time, Elnaz Shah, the author of *Robotic Breeding*, *Mothering in a Coppershell* and *Bodiless Females*."

"Good to be here," greets Ms Shah.

"And the writer of *Translating in the 20s*, *The Side We Don't See: Female Translators in Male's World*, most successful translator of *The Second Sex*, feminist translator Harriet Mok."

"Good evening audience," greets Ms Mok.

"So ladies," continues Meander, "I am actually a big fan of you! I have read many of your works! If my English Public Exam had been better, I would have been studying English Literature and Feminism. Anyway, feminism is a prominent topic. Just to introduce some concepts to our audience, why feminism alongside gender studies deserve such a focus?"

"I am glad to meet fans here, Meander," says Ms Shah. "One important thing we would like our audience to know is that, being a female doesn't really mean being a female. Or I should say, the female sex doesn't equal to the female gender. For that sexuality is the physical attributes, and gender is a social construct, an ideology. Let's say, being born with female reproductive organs doesn't necessarily lead to being a mother, or having duties more associated with the household, or being subordinate to men. Yet humans has always been regulating how women shall behave, and their position in society. Those stereotypes such as housewives are just what we are nurtured to be. Feminism breaks through these constraints set by a mostly patriarchal society. Females are the victims under the world of which patriarchal men built. That's why we need feminism, to care for the women."

"On top of that," Ms Mok adds, "females have always been the suppressed ones, we are the second sex. Let me give a brief example. We are used to males being scientists, leaders, chairman. But when females attain these positions, people are comfortable only when we are called female scientists, female leaders, and chair women. There are no prominent females in any of humans' achievements."

“That’s exactly what I know about feminism!” exclaims Meander. “Is that the reason motivating you to publish your work? Especially for Ms Shah, your books about technologies and reproduction, which, is quite revolutionary to this world to say the least.”

“Indeed they are,” says Elnaz. “In many of my books, I propose to free women from the role of breeding, which is frankly extreme but necessary for me. I am one of many victims. I was born in an Afghan family, a really traditional men’s world. As a girl, I was tasked by supplying kids once I was physically capable to do so. I had my first child when I was eleven, and by the time I escaped via a military plane back in 2020, I already had 12 children. They say that it is the duty for men to fight and give blood on the battlefield, and for women to give blood in childbirth. They...[she drops a tear] took my sons once they reach teenage. [She took a moment to calm herself down, Ms Mok pats her by her shoulder]. To men, there is no respect for us, we are just nothing more than a breeding machine. We are just commodities. Since I am responsible for bearing children, there are a lot of things I am forbidden to do. I cannot drink wine, I cannot eat meat, I cannot...do a lot of things. The only thing they don’t forbid is heavy housework from dawn to sunset.”

Seeing Ms Khah is calm, Meander signals Ms Mok to respond.

“Having females like Elnaz is the exact reason why I publish,” Harriet responds. “I am a lot more fortunate. I was born in Hong Kong. I am lucky enough to enter university and study. This is where I got contact with feminism. Even in a civilized world like ours, females are still the suppressed. In the academic world, females are nothing. Our writings are oftentimes forgotten, whence men’s are kept. When the famous feminist book *The Second Sex* was written by Simone de Beauvoir, it was in French. There were translated versions, by a man. However, a lot of contents were missing, those were important details of the female’s worldview. Quite hatefully, that translation got a prize, from men of course. It is with such context of male suppression, feminist translators would voice themselves through interfering with the translation, adding footnote and sometime change the source text content to be more female oriented. I know this might sound...um...unorthodox to many, but it is the females whose stories are diminished by men in the first place. With female contributions being forgotten like these, we are never heard. Our struggles, stories and feelings are never heard. That’s why I feel responsible to speak for women including myself, to speak for Elnaz, to speak for Beauvior.”

“I think we do have the concept of feminism clear,” says Meander, “we have had a lot of exploitation from men, and we women are undermined. But is there an ideal female world you ever dream of?”

“Females having the same status as men,” answers Ms Harriet, “really simple, but really impossible. I mean, women have basically no power other than those men gave us. We need a world where kids know some female leaders and contributors. We need a world where women are not just mothers, but distinctive in all human developments.”

“I wish for more,” says Ms Shah. “We need to liberate women from our reproductive roles. All of our breeding and growing children has barred us from a lot of achievements. Even in developed worlds, mothers had to give up dreams just for the child. Whereas men do whatever they want. An ideal feminist world to me is one that we are not bound to being mothers anymore, and do anything we can do. And to do that, we need to get rid of our reproduction chains trapping us, which is our female body.”

“I might to differ a bit from Ms Khah,” says Ms Mok, “I do agree we need to do anything we want. But as soon as we can reach the same status of men, we can still be a mother and chase dreams.”

“Yes,” replies Elnaz, “but with our female body bounding us, we are less likely to do so.”

“I think our body is just...”

“I do believe you will have time to say something on it,” interrupts Meander, “because my next question kinda relates to it. But before I continue, just a note to our audience, we long for your voice in this programme. If you have any questions, feel free to send your message to our CloudSound The People 2027 one letter lowercase. If you are interested scholar, we especially welcome you. So, back to the topic. So, with the ideal female world proposed, do you think such world is possible?”

“We need to free females from their body,” answers Ms Shah, “and technology is the key. I mean, we already have test tube babies so that we don’t need to bear children ourselves. We have biological technology to reverse-engineer our body so that we are not bound from menstruation and childbirth. Yes, technology is built by men, but it can remove us from our biological restraints.”

“I won’t argue with you on this one,” says Ms Mok. “yet I am quite conservative about our body. I think the key should be the society. I mean, even if you are free from your body, men would still underlook women because of their upbringing. Men don’t respect us because they are not educated to do so, sometimes being taught the other way. We need to start with early childhood upbringing and education for men to respect women. Well, to respect everyone as well. No kidding, in patriarchal societies such as Japan, women need to

walk aside and bow to men whenever one walks by. If feminism is to against social construct by men, it shall be solved by social construct as well.”

“Such inspiring ideas, waiting for further discussions. Now, we have our first question from Luise Flotow, ‘Have you heard of the SCUM manifesto, and do you agree with it?’”

“I know this,” shouts Ms Shah, “full name Society of Cutting Down Men. It confirms that men have ruined the world, and that it is up to women to fix it. And to do that, we shall remove all men. This is a manifesto I agree with. I know it may find it peculiar, but you will understand me when you have been repeatedly raped by men and give birth just because you are told to do so. In addition, we don’t actually need men in our reproduction, we can easily remove them and just rely on technology.”

“I...er...” Ms Mok sutters, “the SCUM manifesto does claim men ruin the world. And that is so true. I mean, men creates and joins wars, men creates trade where many are exploited. Then sometimes they blame women for it. I mean, how come? We bleed once a month, we have kids to take care, we don’t dare to start wars. Yet we females are the victims of all the chaos men created. Now, we might not actually cut men, that’s the point I am still concerning. My opinion is, we still need SCUM, but without the hating males part.”

“Right,” continues Meander, “next question is from Amy Chan asking ‘have you heard of embodiment?’ Wow, I heard of that. Now, it involves our female bodies. So, be careful about your word choice ladies, this is a public evening show.”

“Sure.” “Sure.” The ladies promised.

“But what exactly is embodiment?” asks Ms Shah.

“According to what I know,” answers Ms Mok, “embodiment proposes that all of the female attributes are caused by our own bodies. Even putting social construct aside, females will still be females because of our bodies. Well, such concept is intended to describe us human’s lived experience closely tied to our physical body and how we interact with our world with the body. Another idea closely tied is disembodiment. With cyberfeminism now being a hot topic as everyone is arguing would genderless female robots still be females, I thought Elnaz would be interested in it.”

“That worth a new book!” exclaims Ms Shah. “Now, that is closely similar to many of my claims. Females experience the world differently from men and that constructs part of our experience. We females are born with the organs for reproduction, and that gives us the role of mothers. Or at least men know to gain children out of it. Our body is also different from men, which causes us to urinate differently. I have always been jealous of boys. They can just stand and solve themselves conveniently. Situation, hiking. Whenever men need it they can

just stand facing a bush and solve stuff, when we females need to find a covered place and squat down. Now consider females need to follow men to travel on foot, or to escape from one country to another, females are going to face more challenges than men. Not to mention our body actually bound us to reproduction whether we like it or not. I say, we need to remove the female body, and disembody us, liberate us from all these which used to be inevitable gender constraints.”

“I can’t help but to agree,” responds Ms Mok, “our body does contribute to who we are, and social construct pushes it further. Yet I don’t insist to disembody us to liberate us from men’s world. I am a female, I care about my body. I have the tools for reproduction. I bleed once a month. Yet I am not getting rid of my body. I embrace it, and achieve what I can like a man. Well, forgive me for saying this Elnaz, but in a much more civilized world, the female body doesn’t matter as long as the society opens doors for us for self-accomplishment.”

“But things are not as lenient in many places,” says Ms Shah. “Many places of the world are still conventional worlds ruled by males, and mine is one of them. In my world, which reproductive organs you are born with already determine your future and bind you to certain roles. Yet we always get the worse side of the deal. Men fight and bleed, but only if they are unfortunate enough to see battles. Women have to suffer from childbirth, pain and bleeding, and it is constant until we die, for men are superior and are forcing us to do so. I have experienced a lot more about being a female. So I hold that we need to disbody the female body to get liberated. Social construct is one thing, but we shall not be so different from men other than our body is different. And only physically modifying us can be the definite solution. Details can see my books where I theorize a lot about it with examples and discussions.”

“And I recommend to actually read them,” replies Meander. “We better be brief because we don’t have much time left. There is one question, we have talked about becoming mothers, so I want to get a clearer perspective. How do you view mothering and pregnancy?”

“It is a wonderful experience. Trust me, I have three lovely kids, and pregnancy alone is good. I mean, it is the time women feel a life inside our body growing, to feel the miracle of life. Breeding, milking, and nurturing children can really build bond, and it is comforting to see kids grow.”

“I beg to differ,” says Ms Shah. “We better don’t have it. I will not be puppets, rather not to experience the miracle of life. I have suffered. I can’t imagine others to suffer as well.”

“Perhaps to give you a new perspective,” Ms Mok says to Ms Shah, “pregnancy itself is a wonderful experience. It is just the males who are ruining it. They exploit the fruit of us, and demand us to give offspring, preferably sons. We have no choice in mothering. Females have no say in many cultures. Pregnancy is, good thing ruined by men.”

“Unfortunately I was too young when I had my first born, and too exhausted from it,” expresses Ms Shah.

“We shall not let more girls experience immature pregnancy,” says Ms Mok.

“Indeed we shall,” says Meander. “Now we have Simone Beauvoir asking ‘what do you think about males in the place of feminism?’”

“I think I have made it really clear at this point,” expresses Ms Shah, “They have been exploiting us, suppressing us. I am sick of men, for a good reason. To an extent which I feel the need to remove the female body to free from them.”

“Indeed for a good reason, and unfortunately same for many females too,” Ms Mok says. “I am much open-minded. Yes, men are the great evil. But there is a man that I love, there is a father to my children. But he doesn’t have power over me. I have made many decisions and my husband respects that. A healthy feminism needs males to support. To support us in family building, reaching dreams, and sharing the responsibility of kids. Society needs enough supportive men so that females are not constrained.”

The director draws circles to signal Meander that we are running out of time.

“Well,” says Meander, “I think it is almost the end. But one thing I am still curious about. Both of your names are unique. May I know the story behind?”

“One question to trade question, Meander,” says Ms Shah, “why don’t you tell why is it Meander?”

“That’s not how interview works” Meander laughs, but the director signals her to answer. “Well, my mother was a geography major before becoming a computer programmer. One day she walked alongside father to watch rivers, of which my father hates. She was awed and took out her textbook. She identified a meander and father thought it was a good name for girls.”

“How about the Jonathan you have been talking about?” Ms Mok suddenly mentions me.

“My boyfriend?” Meander looks at the clock, “his father wanted a son called John, and his mother wanted a boy named Nathan. They couldn’t decide, so they merged the two to be Jonathan.”

I shake my head and gesture my mouth, “It’s not!”

“Well, Shah is a common surname in Afghan,” says Elnaz, “and my name Elnaz means charm of the tribe. I got that name after I gave birth to my tenth child. Before that I was called...how about I write an autobiography.”

“So,” says Ms Mok, “you unlock your name like a game achievement.”

“Painful achievement,” comments Elnaz.

“I am Harriet, home ruler. Got that name in secondary school. Yet I wish to do more than what married females could do, and chase my dream. My husband is now ruling the home but only the home, when I venture outside. By the way, I still identify myself as Ms Mok, instead of taking my husband’s name.”

“Awesome. Anyway, this is the end of the programme,” says Meander, “such an inspiring chat. Thank you Ms Shah, thank you Ms Elnaz. And thank you audience for tuning in ‘The People’. This is your host Meander Lee, signing off.”

Right after the programme ends, Meander takes out a few books from her bag, and says to the interviewee “I, am a big fan. Can I get your signature?” And the ladies are signing books, exchanging ideas. I am a bit hungry, but still stay until Meander decides to leave.

“So, your university is quite far isn’t it?” asks Ms Shah.

“Nah, it is just on Braemar Hill. At most thirty minutes from here,” answers Meander.

“Right, takes more time if I have to buy and cook food. I am Jonathan.”

“Wait,” Elnaz looks surprised, “you will buy and cook food? As a man?”

“What’s the deal with men cooking?” I ask.

“No, I am just jealous. Men in my hometown will never do housework,” Ms Shah looks at her watch, “it is quite late now, how about I give you a ride?”

“No thanks, we may just eat out...” I speak but then Meander smacks me and says, “sure, if you insist.”

And soon we are in the car’s backseat, dashing uphill through the huge curved roads.

“This is so exciting. I cannot drive back in my hometown,” Elnaz cheers.

“Is that because men think driving may endanger childbirth?” I ask.

“One of the reasons,” answers Elnaz, “perhaps men just want to keep driving to themselves. So, do I drop you at Wellcome?”

“Market Place is a bit better,” Meander says, “I will tell you by then.”

“So, Jonathan,” Elnaz says, “really? your name is John and Nathan?”

“Meander is just kidding you,” I say, “I am Jonathan just because there is a chinese word 壯 in my name, thus John. John is too short, so they picked Jonathan.”

We are silent, listening to the radio for a while.

“I see that you two are quite close. I have had bad experiences with men so I might be a bit sensitive, but who decides things among you?”

“Well...” I get smacked by Meander, “isn’t that obvious?”

“Nah, we make mutual agreements. Despite most of the time we don’t need to,” says Meander.

“Let’s say,” Elnaz suggests, “one day if you have kids, which might be likely, who does the kid belong to, and who takes care of it.”

“Well,” I am a bit embarrassed, “it is our kid, so it is ours. Tho I might let the mother have more control.”

“So, if Meander ends up having more salary or wants to chase dream,” Elnaz says, “Jonathan will take care of the kid?”

“I will either be a scholar or teacher, so I might be more available to take care of kids.”

“See, that would be fine,” says Meander, “presuppose that we have kids.”

“But things would be really interesting,” suggests Meander, “if men and women suddenly switch bodies and get to live as females too.”

“I have always been waiting to write a book like that,” says Elnaz. “Oh look, is that Market Place?”

“Yea, exactly here,” says Meander.

“Thanks for the ride,” I say.

It is the first of October, a public holiday. After a whole day of doing nothing, we head to Athena’s home. Every Friday, Meander, Zedekiah, Athena and I have dinner together in one of our families. Tonight, Athena is the host. She lives with her mother in Hong Kong, whereas the males of the family live in London. Her elder brother Apollo is visiting Hong Kong, and he greets us at the door.

“Oh hi,” and he opens the door. “Zedekiah, how is your sister?”

“How did you know?” Zedekiah hasn’t told his girlfriend’s family that his sister Rona was shot by live bullets last week during a protest.

“Athena told me. Is Rona okay?”

“Look Mr Leung, I...” Zedekiah stutters.

“I am not blaming you,” Apollo gives a smile, “I am just asking is she okay.”

“Alive and healthy,” Athena rushes into the house, and puts the groceries on the table.

“Wait,” she notices the glass bottles on the table, “Mum, he is here?”

“Your younger brother Bacchus?” Auntie Juno shouts from the kitchen, “sleeping in his room.”

“Bacchus Leung?” I whisper to Athena, “that infamous radical philosopher Bacchus Leung?”

“Unfortunately he is,” confirms Athena.

“Great,” says Meander inspecting a bottle of red wine on the table, “I hope he doesn’t mind us using this for the steak.”

In the middle of the meal, Bacchus emerges from his cave, grabbing a bottle of transparent liquid to drink, ignoring all the people at the table.

“Bach,” Apollo calls his brother, “put that down.”

“Cheuk-ho,” Aunt Juno calls upon her son, “why don’t you properly eat with us.”

“Mum,” drunk, he raises his bottle, “I have beer!”

“Beer!” Apollo rises and walks to Bacchus, “I am not minding you drinking. I mind your actions afterwards. What has father taught us about alcohol.”

“Alcohol pulls you to darkness, forbidding you to shine!” he murmurs.

“You didn’t do what father teaches, to shine!” Apollo reaches for the wine.

“You are not father!” Bacchus is on his feet. “Apollo Apollo, always the light and [hiccup] shining. Always sober. What’s the use being wise and bright all the time? It exhausts me.” He sits and continues drinking, “alcohol makes me happy. Just short, we can forget our rules and do whatever we want.”

“Boys,” Athena says, “we have guesses here. Behave!”

Bacchus now recognizes that there are people around him. And he walks to Meander, touching her cheeks, “Hello beauty, what’s your name?” Meander swings his hand away, I stand and push him away, “Don’t touch her.”

“Right, this is not London. Oh mum,” he says, “you are going to get another grandchild. The woman is called Isabella.”

“Bacchus, not again?” Apollo expresses, “you fathered another one? Have you thought about her?”

“We fuck in mutual agreement. It is not that I want it, it is she wanted it. Females are more lustier than men. They proportionally have more internal sexual organs and is more lustful to sex. It is just the society’s shaping which makes them subtle about it.”

“How terrible,” Meander expresses.

“Bacchus Leung,” Aunt Juno orders her son, “get into your room.”

Bacchus takes his bottle, and drinks on the sofa.

After Zedekiah and I wash the dishes, I see Bacchus sitting straight on the sofa.

“It is the rare time he is sober,” says Athena, “ask him things if you want.”

And so I sit on the sofa next to him, and he looks at me.

“Bacchus, I have read your paper. At least the analytical paper about the play *Bacchae*. I like some of your ideas. But, do you mind if I ask some questions?”

“Ask whatever you want, Jonathan Wills.”

“What is so good about wine? Why does a philosopher drink so much?”

“Drinking is a social gesture young man. Yet I drink just to get drunk. For it is when we are drunk, we free ourselves as humans. You see, society has set way too many restrictions for humans. Females for example, are the biggest victims. You know, in the ancient times, females were forbidden to drink wine because they needed to carry offspring. Men check if their wives have drunk with a smell of their mouth. This habit ends up become kissing. Human behaviors are governed by ego, id and superego. Ego is the ethics barring us to act out our sex and aggression. It is easily a social construct. Wine relieves us from so-call social construct, and allows us to live out our id. To be human.”

Meander comments, “yea, id. But if everyone follows id, it will be chaotic.”

“In a well-structured society, yes,” Bacchus says. “But ask yourselves, who is not bound by society?”

“But society regulations or conventions keep us human. At least to keep us in order.”

Athena comments.

“Sister, that’s where things get arguable. I say, fuck order. The world and all its orders are built by men to oppress women, ever thought about it? In a primitive world, since females have the ability to expand the population, they are the most useful members of the society. Men only provide sperm and are useless once the females find other males. To establish their value, men set a lot of conventions. The one man one woman marriage to ensure a female only gets offsprings from one man, men build an economy which females cannot join and had to rely on men, keeping females in the household. They set industry and order, the working

environment in which females with maternity leaves can never sustain long and thus concentrate all power to men. Of course men suffer from it being forced to prove useful as a man. But getting drunk, we can forget those for a while and do what we actually want. No order, females choose her sexmate, and fight against this order.”

“Is that your excuse of raping drunk ladies?” Apollo says.

“Brother, if you have studied a bit of Psychology, you will learn that Freud suggests that human motivation is governed by sex and aggression. If reproduction is a must-do of all living species, and Homo Sapiens are living beings, what’s wrong with females being walking vaginas and men being walking penises? Just because we deem ourselves as sapient, why are we hiding these primitive sides of ourselves and follow social constructs willingly or unknowingly? Wine makes us free from the restraints of being too regulated and clever, allowing us to display the very human side of ourselves. It is exactly why wine parties should and always followed by orgies.”

“That’s not the Bible’s way,” says Athena.

“The Bible is just one way of worldview. And it is written by men, with God as a father figure. I mean, this is only specific to humans to have such a social order where females are the oppressed. Look at how people shall work in animals. The sexual relationship of humans should be like monkeys. A female often mates with several males under her choice, and no one actually knows who the father is. So that all members take care of the offsprings together. Of course I know I am human and know it is not what the Bible suggests. I would say, humans as sinners would always defy God even if the Bible isn’t there. Yet the most scariest ‘Christians’ are those who uses the bible to rationalize oppression towards females and slavery. I am just merely exercising my version of worldview.”

“You are not going to lecture him?” Meander asks Auntie Juno.

Auntie Juno sighs, “What can I even do? I don’t know what he is talking about. I will let God deal with him.”

This Saturday is a Bible Camp where our fellowship is joining other youth fellowships for a two-day-one-night camp, titled “The Hope in Lamentation”. Theologist Doctor Ko Ming-him is leading us to read *Lamentations*. “*Lamentations*? I thought it is just called *Jeremiah Sad*,” I say to Zedekiah.

“And *Lamentations* is a collection of really unique poems,” lectures Dr Ko, “it is an acrostic, a letter song. It will not take you long to realize that, each chapter except the third has 22

verses. And the first letter of every verse can be taken out and form the Hebrew alphabet. 22 verses, each follow the alphabetical order of Hebrew, from Alpha to Omega.”

“Another thing prominent in this *Lamentations* is that you can see the quick shift of emotions. One verse the writer is blaming God for all these happening, another verse praising God. Yes, really unusual indeed. But think about it, this is supposed to be an emotional book. Think of those who are facing devastating events and are in the turmoil of feelings. They can be really sad at a brief moment, and suddenly hopeful, and suddenly dismal.”

“Zion as a female is mentioned a lot as a metaphor of the suffering of the city. Interestingly, whenever the Bible depicts the helpless and the suffered, they use females. Females give the most direct impression of weak, fragile and protection. The daughters of Zions are most feeble.”

Jason sitting in the front rolls laughs upon this, and his girlfriend Sarah smacks him, striking him several times playfully.

“Of course we are modern people now. The daughters of Zion as a weak character does not apply anymore. Now it should be, the sons of Zion.” And he makes the crowd laugh.

At night, we gather around the campus and have our own activities. It is a tradition, an unofficial compulsory camp activity of this church, to have cup noodles at night, interact group by group. I join a card game called “What If”, Christian card set. A player starts with “what if”, another picks a card with a concept or a character, and the third one picks the alternative of it. I am not planning to speak much, since I am playing with the “brain people”, those such as Athena, Tim, Joseph and Sophia. At first we are following the card game. Soon we decide to just make up situations ourselves, to free our hands for cup noodles.

“What if,” I start.

“Adam and Eve,” Meander follows.

“Had not eaten the forbidden fruit?” says Sophia, and her suggestion gets us cheering for a while.

“Wow,” Joseph is aroused, “that is a really critical question, because a lot of the central issues surround the forbidden fruit. Think about it, humans would not sin, we would not leave the Garden of Eden, and such and such.”

“We may not die,” suggests Jacqueline, “because it has been mentioned that God actually prepared a Tree of Life for us. And, we might be still having intimate relationships with God, being able to actually talk to God, preferably face-to-face.”

“I would just imagine the snake still has his 4 legs,” suggests our mentor Simone.

“I dunno about mortality,” says Meander, “now we would not die and the world is limited. And God told us to multiply, where do we live?”

“Don’t worry Meander,” Athena responds, “if there is no sin in the first place, God has his own plan for the ever-growing population. Perhaps we might have evolved to be capable of space travelling to live on different planets. For that God has created other planets too.”

“You know, speaking of multiplying,” says Sophia, “I have learnt from some certain documentaries that the pain of childbirth is because of humans’ unique behavior of walking straight on two legs. Now that we have not sinned, and women won’t endure that much pain in childbirth, we might not be walking on two legs. I dunno.”

“Whatever, feel like that can expand to be a larger topic,” says Joseph. “Anyway shall we move on?”

“What if,” starts Jacqueline.

“Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” Zedekiah continues.

“Was a female,” Athena says. Her idea puts us thinking for a while.

“You know what,” says Joseph, “God is genderless, or at least we don’t actually know the sexuality. God our father is just the projection of humans. In fact, there should not be a gender for God, or else there would be doubts of where the mother is in the father, the son and the holy spirit. Jesus is male, perhaps because it is more acceptable for humans to accept him.”

“Well, if Jesus was a female,” says Sophia, “Jesus’ blood might have meant differently. You know what I mean.”

“It WOULD be difficult to convince people that Christ is a female,” Jacqueline suggests, “think of what society it was. Women are oftentimes more powerless. I bet that she would be less likely to gain followers.”

“On the contrary,” says Athena, “I think she would get loads of support from the poor of that time. And the power would not accept him that much. Well think about it, he was doing that as a male as well.”

“Gain public support eh?” Simone says, “in China, there is a woman claiming herself as Christ, returning as a female. There are people who support her. Despite we all know that it is not true since Jesus told us about some fake Christ, I don’t think Jesus as a female would make much of a difference.”

“Yeah,” expresses Joseph, “but now the way she would sacrifice would be different. Now that Christ is a female, the Romans could not crucify her. I mean, crucifixion of females was rare, or not much recorded.”

“I have read a short story called ‘Oceanic’,” says Tim, “where God sends her daughter Beatrice to the Earth, and she drowned and died for people. The whole plot of that story is how the protagonist, a male scientist, discovers about how the belief of a drowned Christ can be co-existed with science. Don’t understand it, but interesting to think of these alternatives.”

“Creative indeed,” Joseph responds, “but the crucifixion of Jesus is destined as the prophets wrote many times in the Old Testaments. It shall also be bloody since in Moses’ time it has been stated that the blood from livestock in offerings can figuratively wipe sins. Anyway, would be complicated on the topic.”

After some thinking and deciding not to talk, we move on.

“What if,” Simone says.

“The Bible,” Tim continues.

“Was written by females,” Joseph suggests. That gets us excited again.

“That’s a good one,” Zedekiah says, “because the Bible is men-centred. Most of the leading figures are males, there are a lot of rules binding females, and there are even verses in the New Testaments setting rules for females on what to do.”

“Don’t forget the metaphors depicting weak females,” I add.

“That is so true,” Simone responds, “the Bible is very patriarchal since it is written by men.”

“Exactly,” says Tim, “remember, the Bible is written in a Jewish context, where men are rulers and the more powerful. The culture it is created in, is patriarchal. And the ones who are translating it, are patriarchal. One popular version of the English Bible is the King James Version. King James was a terrible translator. When I say popular I wanted to say notorious. He translated the Bible according to his will. The word choice and the degree of meaning can vary a lot from the source text. If you want a version more loyal to the meaning of the source text, try NIV, New International Version.”

“Sarah would not call Abraham ‘lord’,” Jacqueline suggests, “to say the least.”

“If the Bible was written by women,” Athena suggests, “I bet there would be more stories focusing on the wives of men. We would get more verses on Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel on childbirth. We would get more description on Luth and Mary. We are going to see more first person views of the females of the Bible.”

“There would even be more changes,” Sophia hypothesizes, “Not Paul teaching females to be obedient and well-mannered when he wrote to Timothy in the New Testament. It would be Paula teaching Tiffany on how to lead the church as a woman and choose from loyal, competent men.”

“I dunno,” says Joseph, “it seems to me that the bible has always been favoring males and building norms to constrain females. Like, Paul instructs females to be obedient, and that is barring females to achieve greatness like men. Now that reminds me, is it just me or is God patriarchal?”

“Oh, God has no problem,” Tim says, “God is the all-fair and the almighty. He, She, whatever, is perfect. It is the humans that are problematic. We are all sinners. And no matter what our ideals are, when we execute it, it is all flawed and someone is oppressed, ignored. And trust me, Christianity is already the least harsh about females. Think about Ancient China, think about certain religions allowing men to have several wives and such. This topic is a bit heavy,” he looks at me, “can we move on to another one?”

“What if,” I start.

“The Bible,” Meander follows.

“Seriously? The Bible again? Umm...” Sophia expresses. And in a smile she suggests “was written in China,” and she gets us cheering.

Soon it is the seventh of October, my birthday. After Meander has done an interview, Meander, Athena, Zedekiah, and I order take-aways and have dinner right at a corner in the Shue Yan University 2/F public area. Alex is joining us as well. Honestly I have forgotten my birthday, not until Meander takes out a really huge cake and sings a birthday song.

“Today is my birthday?” I utter.

“A birthday is what?” asks Alex.

“You know,” answers Meander, “quite literally birth day. Everytime we humans survive 365 days, sometimes 366, we celebrate. Something somehow humans do.”

“Birthdays are really important,” adds Athena, “especially in the ancient times, nurturing humans was difficult. Many things can effectively kill you. That’s why each year we live is a milestone.”

“Yea, if Bobby was here,” Zedekiah says, “he would tell you that birthday parties originated from satanic rituals. People sit in a circle, light something on fire, chant repetitive words, and cut something open.”

“How you know he would say that?” asks Alex

“He won’t,” I say, “he would just correct our grammar.”

“You know what?” Athena says to Zedekiah, “we can make it happen next time during your birthday.”

“Speaking of the Windownesian,” I say, “quite a pity he is not here. He will never get used to the opened windows here.”

“Well,” says Meander, “if we light candles in a sealed room, we are going to trigger the fire alarm. We can save a slice for him. Anyway, what are you waiting for,” she hands me a knife, “cut cake!”

“This is an extraordinarily huge cake. And with this sharp metal knife?” I take the knife.

And it is a suspiciously large cake, larger than any cake I have seen. It is strangely decorated with just some coloured cream as well. Anyway, I aim the knife at the top centre of the cake, slide it down. And when I feel the tip of the knife touching some different surface, the cake suddenly explodes, splashing cream on my face, designed to splash most cream on my face. Through my creamed eyes I can see Alex shocked, Zedekiah laughing hysterically, Meander and Athena giving each other a cheerful high five.

“Don’t be so pissed Jon,” says Meander, still laughing, “I have an actual cake,” and she takes out one.

It is exactly at this moment, Zedekiah’s phone rings.

“Hahahahahaha. Oh, it’s mum, I better answer that. [Clears throat.] Yes ma. What? Hold on, I move to another place. Yes what? Rona? Again? Yes...yes...but ma...”

“Oh Jon,” Athena takes out a small box out of a paper bag, “we have a present for you. Happy birthday!” I take the box with a “thank you”. “Unwrap it!” says Athena eagerly. And so I unwrap the paper wrap, open the box, and see two watches. One black, and one white. These are the watches with the simplistic design, no other things worth seeing on it other than the time.

“These are for you and Meander. A pair of couples watch! So that you don’t need me to remind you of the time anymore. Go on, put it on and show me a smile!”

I let Meander choose first. She picks up the white one, and hands me the black one. Once we have both wear our watches, strange thing happens. We both radiate light from head to toe. I cannot see anything other than golden lights. Slowly I float to midair, hanging straight above the chair. I automatically move to Meander, and feel a strange feeling of our bodies merging into each other. As I descend into my seat again I feel myself lighter, more

nimble. As my lights fade, I am in the seat again. Actually, I am in Meander's seat. I randomly touch myself, I have a larger chest, and a smaller body. I let out a sound, and it is Meander's. I am Meander! Athena and Alex are both shocked, frozen in their chairs.

Zedekiah is walking to us, shouting,

"What in the world have you done! Where did you get my watches anyway?"

"You...you...you...said to pick anything from your desk I like as a gift," Athena stutters, "I...I didn't know..."

"Those are no ordinary watches, those are magic watches." And he recites a poem, "Be entirely another guy,
is never a chance you can buy.
Channel the experience, the act and the thought,
in the moments when ideas drought.
Black gives you his appearance.
White gives him his disappearance.
From the moment it is on,
three days he will be gone.
And you become him,
until the third day's moonbeam."

"These are body shifting watches!" he shouts.

"Three days?" I exclaim, in Meander's voice, "I have to wait for three days? No reset button or things?"

"So," Athena asks, "are you Meander or Jonathan?"

I can still feel a bit of disappointment from the fake cake, yet I still feel the joy of pranking. I am sure I am still myself, but not really sure am I still myself. So, "I don't know."

"I have recorded it," says Alex, "I can play it back to see you are who."

"You can?" I ask.

"I have a USB port at the back of my head. You can insert a USB and I play the video on computer."

"Don't have to make a fuss on it," says Zedekiah, "it is difficult to tell who is who. I have tried it."

[Note: Zedekiah had used these watches before when he first got them. Details see his story "On Both Sides of War"]

"Once you have worn these," he continues, "the only thing you can do is waiting."

“But umm...Meander? Jon? Whatever,” Athena says, “Do you have any activities these three days?”

“Well, Meander will hike with her family tomorrow, have a meeting for Technosci Culture on Saturday morning, and we will go to church at night.”

“Okay, so you are Jonathan in Meander’s body,” Zedekiah observes.

“It makes sense,” says Alex, “I can see when you merge, your light goes into Menader’s.”

Tomorrow is Friday, a holiday of the Chung Yeung Festival. I know by now I would have gone back to dorm with Alex, and sleep with Meander in the same bed in that airless chamber with Bobby softly playing the radio. Tonight, I don’t feel right without Jonathan here. Yet I don’t want to get back to my own room either. I don’t like my roommate Veronica. She is just an immature bully who forbids others to make a sound when she is sleeping or working on things, yet having no trouble to watch things on full volume when I am having online lessons or trying to sleep. She puts her clothes all over the place, and blames me whenever I happen to step on them. Not to mention her way too saturated perfume which she is obsessed with. She is the very reason I sleep with Jonathan almost every night, and can easily endure the windownesian Jon is talking about. Tonight, I don’t want to be in the hall. So I briefly pack my things, and head straight to home. Athena and Zedekiah offer to accompany me, but I just want to be alone.

On the way home on the MTR, I am suddenly uncomfortable. I feel something above my bladder and below my stomach squeezing. It is pain, not rumbling pain, but squeezing pain. I change a spot to stand, somewhere I can lean on. I feel something slowing flowing inside me, and eventually reach my underpants. I haven’t arrived at my destination, but I rush out of the train once it reaches the station. It’s no good, I feel something wet. Not quite watery wet, but sticky wet, something liquid. I can smell a mild scent of rust metal. I am on period. I ignore the constant pain, it has just turned from squeezing to twisting. I take a long piece of tissue, and lock myself in the toilet. I pull down my pants, glad that I wore black today. I look down, the lower part of my dense black bush is wet. I actually cannot see anything. So I place a hand on myself, and I move downward. I hold back a bit thinking this would be not respecting Meander. But I need to fix this right now. I move my hand downward, and feel a spot with horizontally parallel denser muscle, skinless, sensitive, soaky. Without thinking anything else, I wipe this spot with hard toilet paper to dry myself. It is less

blood than it feels, just a trace of red and all is gone. But I can feel it slowly dripping blood. I cannot stand here all day, not in a MTR toilet. I stack the tissue paper together, and place it on my underwear. As I am about to walk out of the stool, I suddenly remember something. I open Meander's bag, my bag, and in a really hidden area I find some sanitary pads. I open one, take a few seconds to figure out how to open it, and place it in my underwear. I continue my journey, and glad that the pain is growing weaker and weaker.

When I reach home, it is already midnight. Aunt Daisy, I mean mum, is in her room writing computer programmes. Uncle Tony, I mean my father, has just returned from his shift as a fireman and is sleeping like a pig. My mother recognizes me, but she just gives a glimpse and continues her work. I head directly to my room, quickly get rid of my clothes, especially my trousers and underpants, and put on my pajamas. I slide my clothes under my bed instead of taking them to the laundry basket. I don't want to say anything, I don't want to do anything. I just hop on my bed, and sleep.

Midnight, I am slowly awaken my small traces of pain beneath my belly. I wake up half-sleeping, and feel that somewhere in between my legs is wet. I don't want to care, I sleep. But I really can't. So I just keep my eyes closed, and sleep through the dreamless night.

When I wake up, it is still early in the morning. I cannot sleep anymore despite being tired. I check my bed, should have laid some cloth between my legs. There is a small but significant spot that is red and smells like blood. I know that both of my parents are asleep, so I smuggle my things to the washing machine, stove my things in it and click "quick wash". I cannot hang them openly, so I turn on the air conditioner in my room to full, and hang my trousers, underwear, and bed sheet there. At eight, my father wakes up, opens the door and sees my room. I look at him idly. But he just gives a smile and walks away. He returns shortly after with a steaming sweet drink, saying nothing and place the drink on my desk in my room. I drink it once he is away for another shift, feeling better.

After lunch, mother grabs me and we go hiking. For no reason other than this is the Chung Yeung Festival. And oh, it is a family hike, my aunties and uncles, several of my cousins are here. Mother drives me to the rendezvous point to meet other relatives, and the hike begins. The kids and preteens are walking at the very front. Young and old adults scatter across the line, chatting nonstop as if they haven't met each other for decades. Several

elderlies are accompanied by some aunties at the very back, except for my grand aunt who is at the very front walking with kids. Typical family hiking scene. Feeling not very comfortable, I walk at the back of the crowd. It is not as painful as yesterday night, still there is a meek trace of twisting and squeezing in me, and I have some thick padding to catch the blood. At one point, I see the ladies suddenly crowd around my cousin Kelly, so I go forward to see what's happening.

"Isn't it cute," compliments some aunties.

"Aunt Betty, what is going on?" I ask one of them.

"I am having my first born!" announces Kelly.

"Oh congratulations. For how long?" I ask.

"Six months already," answers her husband Bendith.

"Really? How come... Then where is..." I exclaim looking at her belly.

"It's a test tube baby," explains Kelly.

There are instantly some discussions on traditional mothering versus technology.

"This is Kel's idea," says Bendith, "so that she can still continue her work when having a baby, our baby."

"You are okay with this?" I ask Aunt Laura, Kelly's mother.

"I am still not comfortable with this one replacing the breeding we used to have," she responds, "but if that makes her happy, I am fine with that. At least I am able to get a grandchild nonetheless."

In the middle of walking I have the urge to urinate, so I notify the crowd, and move to a side track. I walk like a minute or two to find a dense collection of trees. Once I am sure that no one could spot me without effort, I stand facing a tree. I tuck my pants slightly down, and unease myself to urinate. I actually forgot, I am not a boy. Water splashed from my under, wetting the front top of my pants. I instantly halt the flow, tuck my pants, and go into the deeper woods to take cover. Once I find a place covered with bushes, I pull down my pants, and lower my underwear as low as I can, squat down, and let it go. When I am finished, I look at my pants, it is wet, a rather large part is wet. I stand still there, and try to let the autumn wind blow it dry. Perhaps I am gone for too long, I hear my name shouted everywhere.

"Meander!" that's mum's voice.

"Mum! I am almost finished!"

"Are you really okay? You have been gone for minutes!"

“Yes mum, I will catch up when I am done.”

And when I do catch up, almost everyone is gone, except for my mum and my great grand aunt, the oldest of the bunch who has been walking slowly but steadily at the very end of the line. My pants are half-dried now, but I’m still not comfortable walking to the front. So I convince my mother to move to the front and chat with my aunts, leaving me to walk slowly next to my great grand aunt. For the rest of the journey, I just walk beside my great-grandaunt and listening to her tales without paying actual attention.

“Your great-grand uncle and I, had 14 kids, of which only two are boys...I brought up these little rats alone as a little woman, working from day to night...my parents love my incompetent brother over me. He had the chance to study secondary school! When I actually performed better! I scored first place in primary school. He ended up becoming a school principal. That should have been me!...When I escaped China and cross border to Hong Kong, I held my first born’s hand, carrying my second child, and having the third child in my belly...Your great-grand uncle tried to sell my fifth daughter for some milk powder, when I insist to keep her...I raised all of my girls alone, and they all graduated from college...”

Thankfully the hike ends. Hiking on period and having the need to use the toilet is not the best experience. Thank God no one else knows all of these.

It is the 9th of October, a Saturday. I have scheduled a CloudSound meeting in the morning to discuss with my groupmates about what to include in the presentation of Technoscience Culture. I enrolled in this course as a minor, feel that it should be fun. Of course I am not taking the lead, Tiffany is.

“So umm...we need to do a presentation about feminism and Technoscience culture. Any ideas?” asks Tiffany.

“I think we need to list out some concepts so that we can narrow down what to include. Remember, this is a 40 minute presentation,” Adalia suggests.

“Good, we can focus on the ignored female scientists and their contribution, because it is about gender and science,” Tiffany suggests.

“No, it is too trivial,” Adalia protests, “and I have checked, another group is doing it too. We need something more special, like how science has treated females, or the place of the female gender in Technoscience.”

“You know what, from a science point of view, females are the inferior,” states Michelle, “they claim that males have the perfect body. Hence we see that the very famous

Homo Vitruvianus drawing, the Vitruvius Man, the 'perfect human body' is drawn with a male. They said that only males have the perfect body, and the females are born flawed."

"So, do they mean that females without male reproductive organs are not perfect human?" Adalia doubts.

"Moreover, they suggest that in reproduction, males are providing the mind, and females provide the body," Michelle adds.

"Ironical," says Adalia, "they state that female bodies are flawed, yet suggest that they provide the body. What are they trying to say?"

"Oh oh, we can talk about females and reproduction," Tiffany plans, "perhaps with real cases of how reproduction technology relates to females, and argue for it!"

"Nah, the group following us will be doing that topic on repro," Adalia doubts again.

"Why is everytime we think of good ideas, you find reasons to reject me!" Tiffany roars.

"I am not saying we can't, I am saying we shall not conflict with other groups to get a good presentation," Adalia responds calmly.

"You..."

"Meander, your boyfriend once studied this course," Michelle says to me, "did he give any hints?"

"Oh oh, Jonathan?" I am not actually paying attention, hard to when your inside is spinning and your outside is bleeding.

"He has done such a topic too. We...need to talk about Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto, which basically says everything about cyberfeminism, and females in technoscience. To begin with, cyborgs are man-made, they are genderless. Since it is genderless, any so-called female-robots, or robots designed to look like females deserves our attention to what society is expecting from women." I am pretty sure that is true since that is what I get from the interview. "Now that many robots are depicted as females, it can be argued what does the creator want, is it male gaze, that they make a perfect female body for themselves, or any other reasons. The cyborg manifesto also states that since cyborgs are artificial, they don't remember the world, which makes them unbounded from earthly stereotypes. This can be where we talk about embodiment and disembodiment, with robot females, to what extent is gender governed by sexuality."

"Good, we can follow that idea!" Adalia approves.

"But are we going to give examples of scientific discoveries?" asks Tiffany.

“We are English majors, we look into cultural texts such as books and movies to analyze the concept depicted within,” Michelle suggests.

“Professor Wong says *Ghost in the Shell* is a must watch movie as an English Major,” I further suggest, “as the main character is a female robot, we can use it in our text analysis.”

“They have made a modern version, we can look into it,” says Michelle.

“Movies such as *Alita: Battle Angel* and Hong Kong TV shows such as *AI Romantic* can also be discussed too,” I suggest.

“Good,” Tiffany starts typing, “so we have ideas from the Cyborg Manifesto and genderless females, embodiment, and we can apply to these movies *Ghost in a Shell*, *Alita: Battle Angel* for analysis.”

“I am interested in the Cyborg Manifesto,” says Michelle, “I can do the concept review part.”

“Good,” says Tiffany, “I’ll do *Ghost in a Shell*. Adalia, you do *Alita: Battle Angel*, and Meander, you help with Michelle on the Cyborg Manifesto. Just study them this week, and we can make a powerpoint before our presentation in November. Everyone’s fine?”

“Meander,” Michelle summons me, “why does Donna Haraway say she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess at the end of the manifesto?”

“I bet it is because when goddess are still bounded with sexuality and the hierarchy by gods, cyborg is made genderless, despite us setting gender attributes, they are capable of not being binded with their sexuality.”

On Saturday night, I don’t really want to go to church, so I just watch the online live worship, and sit still waiting for the magic to cast off. I am so impatient, it should be the time. I phonecall Zedekiah.

“Who the hell?” it’s Zedekiah on the other side of the phone.

“Zed, it’s me.”

“Meander? Jonathan?”

“I am Jonathan, I mean Meander. Okay both. Listen Zed, I am not kidding. It has been three nights. Why am I not back to normal again?”

“Let’s see. Thursday, Friday, Saturday...hold on. [He searches for something.] Ah here, ‘until the third day’s moonbeam’... Oh shoot. So, I think since you wore it on Thursday night, you’ll have to wait until tomorrow’s night.”

“Night? Zed, you gotta be kidding me. I need to help out Athena and you in the daycare center.”

“Technically it is Jonathan we want.”

“That’s exactly the problem Zed,” my belly squeezes again.

“Well, if Mrs Leung approves, I don’t think she minds extra help from Jonathan's friend.”

“Fine Zed, just arrange it for us.”

“Sure. We miss you two.”

“ ‘We?’ Miss us?”

“We are playing card game Saboteur tonight, it’s a shame that you and Jonathan ...umm...Meander is not here.”

“But...that’s my most favourite game! Our most favourite game.”

“I know, and we are playing it. Wait a second. My turn! Athena, block you. [Athena: “Oh how dare you”.] We will phonecall you when we have updates.”

“Zed? Wait, wait! Zed! Zedekiah! Yi Yong...You...son of a bitch!”

At night, I manage to sleep despite the constant pain and bleeding. I dream. I am lying on a white bed, twisting from the pain of something pushing and squeezing from my belly to my bottom. It is slow moving, yet pushing, crushing downward. I am gasping, yet the black cloth, a veil covering my face makes it more difficult. Several of my daughters, from 7 to 2, are standing around me. In pain, I lift my left arm in front of my face, beyond those sleeves of the abaya I see dark bluish purple scars laying patternless on my arm. Those scars, for some reason I know, came from my husband. He strikes me with a wipe whenever I don't deliver a son, miss his meals, miss some housework, or when he simply wants a punching bag. I raise my arms to my face to protect myself, ending up with these scars. I have no idea why I chose him, our marriage was arranged. I look around, these are the girls we have, not old enough to be cast away by their father or be sent to the girl camps. I really want a divorce, but doing so means that the offspring legally belong to him, and I will not see them again. Soon the huge lifeform in me drops to its exit. I feel my vagina crack open, and a large thing emerges slowly from it. I push, and it is finally out. The midwife shows it to my husband, then turns it to face me. I am really exhausted and sweaty, but I sit straight to inspect my newborn, it has a penis. The midwife hands my son to my husband. And after all these years, he finally smiles, for that I finally deliver him a son. Suddenly my remaining strengths are gone too. I drop back to the bed, and not feeling the bed. People start to run around me, the girls are screaming and crying. My husband is unmoved. I lay on the bed motionlessly, watching the idle hay ceiling,

and a black cloth covers me. I wake up shocked, removing the quilt covering my face, turn on my fan, and try to continue my sleep. The rest of the dream is, all in darkness.

On Sunday, as Athena and Zedekiah suggest and Mrs Leung approves, I take Jonathan's place in the children activity in Sunshine Daycare Center. Technically, it is Jonathan myself appearing in Meander's body. Every Sunday, parents leave their kids here, and attend other interest classes or activities. If it is not necessary, I don't really want to be here. But today is birthday week, the room is going to be chaotic and one more person means more help. And oh, I don't want to lose my part-time salary. When I arrive, the venue is half set with tables and chairs. It should be my work, Jonathan's duty. Judging from her sweat, Athena is doing that for me. When they are busy, some kids arrive early, and I go and greet them. Little girl Sally enters the door, taking the backpack from her mother. I kneel and open my arms "Sally!" The little girl is happy to see me, see Meander, and she rushes into my hug. She never let me hug her when I am Jonathan. Must be because of my sweat. I pick her up, pet her, asking about her weekend.

Today is the Center's birthday week, held once every three months with birthday boys and girls with games, cakes, and presents.

"And now boys and girls," Athena announces after Zedekiah pushes the cake out, "it is the time you are waiting for. We are going to invite the boys and girls having birthdays from October to December. We have six this time. So, please come out when I read out your name. Jack Chung, Kiki Chan, Garfield Cheung, Theo Leung, Gracia Tam, and Austin Yip. Come out, come out."

The kids line up, Zedekiah and I arrange them around the cake, placing a hand on the knife, and cut the cake together. Athena then reveals boxes of gifts, 3 toy guns and 3 baby dolls. That instantly creates problem, we have 4 boys. And Athena doesn't realize it until she hands a box to Austin, and finds out it is a doll.

"Ugh oh," Athena notices it, "Austin, can you give me a minute?" She then signals Zedekiah to look across the room to see if there would be any other toy. There isn't.

"Umm..." she whispers to Austin, "hey Austin, can you do big sis Athena a favour? just take this and take a photo first?"

"This doll?" the boy protests, "only girls will play with dolls."

"I know I know," Athena says. "How about you hold this one for a photo first, big sis will buy you a toy gun later and three candies. Deal?"

Reluctantly the boy agrees. And that photo is one of his grumpy face photos, sticking out among the smiling kids.

Right after I help with distributing the cake, I look to the side and see typical Athena Zedekiah interaction.

Athena bangs Zedekiah on the wall, "I thought I sent you a name list."

"No you didn't, you only said six children, so I bought 3 guns 3 dolls."

"You could have asked me earlier."

"How come I know to ask you earlier, I am not mind readers."

"You..."

"If you are done here," I take some cakes to them, "why don't you just eat some cake? And oh, you two are too loud in front of kids."

When we are having our cake, some kids have already finish their cake and start playing. The boys are already pretending to shoot from their toy guns, other boys are shaping their fingers to be guns. The birthday girls are hugging their dolls, through the packaging.

"You know," Athena says to me, "gender is a social construct."

"Yea I know," I say, "tell me about it."

"I bet it actually starts early in their childhood. Being a female doesn't necessarily mean mother. Mothering is just a role given by the society, by giving girls dolls to take care of early in their childhood. The girls get dolls to pretend to be a mother and taking care of offsprings. When they are older, more gender roles are assigned with housework. The boys are given guns, to act as the working force for the nation, ideologically the protector of the country."

"I am convinced," I comment, looking at the kids playing.

"In fact, this ideology is strong," Zedekiah says. "I once played Doraemon to them, there is an episode called 'opposite planet'. There is a scene where the mother is going out for work, and the father is wearing an apron and cooking in the kitchen. The first reactions of the kids were, 'eww'."

Some kids are picked up by their parents after the event. Some would stay longer because their parents are attending classes or chatting. This is usually the time we need to entertain the kids. Zedekiah is running circles in the open area, chasing the kids in a game of

catch. I don't want to move much, so I just walk around and look after the running kids. In the middle of the play, a burly man enters, shouting "Where is she. WHERE IS SHE?"

"Zed, take away the kids. Meander, get Mrs Leung. Alright kids, we will move to indoors. Move move move."

He is Donald Lau, the father of Hanna, Aunt Rachel's husband. I heard rumors, and from little Hanna, that they are going to divorce. Mrs. Leung is accompanying the crying Rachel, and quickly stops her from advancing any further once she recognizes it is Mr Lau. Mrs Leung softly orders us, "Meander, tell Athena and Zedekiah to keep the kids inside. You stay here, just in case things happen, run to notify Athena." Rachel shakes Mrs Leung's hands away, and walks to the man.

"What do you want now? I have already given you everything!"

"Everything? Woman, what do you mean everything?"

"Compensation fee, lawyer fee, and the freedom to sleep with whoever you want!" shouts Rachel, "something you should have given me!"

"Not everything!" the man groans, "you owe me a daughter."

"A daughter?"

"Hanna. I am here to take my child. She belongs to me."

"She belongs to you?"

"She belongs to me! Both legally and reasonably! She is my child!"

She says softly in sob, "your child," then she shouts, "YOUR CHILD?"

"Hanna is mine! Woman."

"I carried her for nine months. Give birth painfully for nine hours. Nurture her for 3 years. How do you think she is yours? Have you done any of this? None! Not even doing one thing for her and for me!"

Mr Lau shouts, "I insert a coin into a soda machine, and the machine drops a can of soda. Is that soda mine or the machine's?"

A few mothers awe in disgust. Rachael weeps, slaps him hard on the face, stunning him. He quickly rises, and raises his hand to return a blow. Mrs Leung and a few mothers rush in and stand between Mr Lau and Rachel. He puts down his hand, and wipes his left cheek.

"This is not over yet, bitch!" and he walks away.

At night, I still have not returned to Jonathan. Athena suddenly invites us to watch the opera *Carmen* in the Cultural Center.

“Why haven’t I thought of this earlier,” she says excitedly, “now that Jonathan and Meander are two-in-one, we can effectively save money. We could have gone to theatres, theme parks to entertain two people with the price of one person.”

“Yes,” Zedekiah looks at the ticket, “but why *Carmen*?”

“Well...”

“It’s my idea,” Athena’s brother Apollo shows up by the harbour, “have been wanting to watch it.”

“Hey Meander, or Jonathan, whatever,” asks Athena, “are you going to join us?”

“Your effect lasts for at least three more hours if I am correct,” Zedekiah informs.

“Yea right,” I say, “I have nothing good to do anyway.”

“Sis,” Apollo says to Athena when we are entering the theatre, “are you mixing up Meander and Jonathan? And what is ‘effect’?”

“Hard to explain bro.”

“I love brain games.”

After the opera, Apollo comes out complimenting the show.

“What a marvellous show! The actresses and actors are on spot with the acting, the music is great. Worth the price!”

“At least now I know where the French-speaking people are,” I jest.

“I didn’t know many of the famous songs came from this play,” Zedekiah says.

“Yes, the music, proves that great music can overshadow many things,” Athena comments, “the thrilling music covering the actually bloody bull fighting, and music about lust and love.”

“But sis,” Apollo responds to her, “don’t let music fool you. Love and blood really are the main point of this show. And don’t forget they highlight prostitutes as well.”

“You know what,” Apollo continues, “this is a really subversive drama at the time. Let’s look at the plot, basically other than toreador, you can easily find out that it is all about Carmen going wild on men. Well let us recall. The male protagonist Don José is the supposed fiance of the female side character Micaëla, a village lady. Yet he is hooked by Carmen, a street prostitute, and turns away from Micaëla. Carmen then has relationship with both Don José and the toreador Escamillo. Misleading Don to give up everything for her. In the end, José kills Carmen when Escamillo is bullfighting. See what is subversive?”

“Cow and women dying in the hands of men?” Zedekiah answers.

“Yes, that too,” Apollo says, doesn’t look happy about the answer.

“Female choosing on men?” I ask.

“Yes! Exactly!” he continues, “see, Micaëla, the village lady is the good girl of this show. She is loyal to José from start to end, delivering a letter from his mother. She is the typical woman men would want. Carmen on the contrary, is not. Hooking up on men, several men, and not being a lady at all. I specifically love the actress of Carmen, successfully capturing the very wild Carmen, always showing legs and seducing men. I am not saying it is right or wrong, I am just saying *Carmen* is different from its contemporaries. She is the active women when it comes to sex, and seduce people whenever she wants.”

“One more thing worth noticing,” Apollo says, “in traditional opera, female protagonist is usually soprano, and the female side character is usually alto. In this show, it is quite the opposite. The good village girl Micaëla is soprano, but she is the side character. Whereas the pungent Carmen is alto, but the leading female. Anyway, it doesn’t seem that people of that time liked the show. Let’s say they just receive more tomatoes than compliments. I still like Carmen’s song. [Sings Habanera] Love is like, a re-bel bird, oh-o-o-o it do-esn’t make an-an-ni sense. Love is like a gyp-sy child, I don-no wha da fuk is go-wing-ing-ing on...”

When Apollo is singing, I feel a soft pulse in my hands, and I put my hand in front of my head, it is shining.

“Umm...Zed?”

“Oh shoot! Quick, find a place to hide, when they are not looking back.”

We are in the mall, so I run back, and find a toilet, the female toilet, and lock myself in a slot. The light spreads from my limbs and goes to the centre. I float to midair, and feel that things are splitting in me. Just after a minute, I slowly descend onto the toilet, sitting on the right when Meander is squeezing on my left on the toilet seat. She turns to me, and slaps me.

“Ouch! Why?”

“Do you want explanation?”

“I pick the wrong place?”

“Part of the reason.”

I observe her suppressing her smile, then she leans on me.

“I have had some bad days,” I say, “but now I know, I will take better care of you.”

Meander slaps me again, and says “I have already got used to it.”

We are silent for a few seconds.

“Why are we here,” she says, “get out!”

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by The Sapient Sabre