

A Rollercoaster

Wong Chin Hung

Every Sunday at nine p.m., at the Philadelphia Fitness Center, someone would put a brown canvas bag in locker number thirty-six. Inside the bag there was a hundred thousand dollars. The locker was locked, but a key was left dangling in its lock. Everybody could open the locker. Everybody could get the bag.

I was one of them.

I wished I hadn't.

The changing room was empty. It was so quiet that one could hear someone's breathing. The bag was lying open on a long wooden bench. The bills inside were shimmering. They were talking to me, "Take us home." I swallowed. I have never seen so much money. *I have never been so close to so much money before! So close that I can touch them, feel them, count them and smell them! But time won't allow me to stand here any longer. I have to make up my mind: take it or leave it. If I take it, I'll have to plan how to get away and get rich. If I take it and get caught, I'll have to spend some time in jail and I'll hate myself. If I leave it here, I'll spend the rest of my life in some sleepless nights.*

I grabbed the bag by the handle and sprinted out to the street. The street was embraced by sheer darkness. I looked for a taxi but there was none. I walked along on the quiet street with a bag of cash. This would mean a deer treading into a lion's territory. There might be people lurking around the corner, with knives in hands and ready to strike like snakes. But they wouldn't daunt me. They wouldn't keep me either. My mind was full of

other thoughts, thoughts about what to do with the money. *I might spend like a rock star and get myself some good girls, or to play it safe, I might find a stock broker and let the money roll like a snowball. Or I might go to Egypt. Yes, Egypt is a marvelous place. I have always wanted to see the pyramids there! And the Sphinx!*

I saw the phone booth, which was only one block away from my apartment. *Several minutes away from my dream. My dream of adventure! My dream of getting rich!*

Good Lord —

I heard a thud.

And I fell. My face hit the ground.

The back of my head hurt. I rolled on to my back and saw a dark figure against the dim street light. Rain was pouring down and I couldn't see his face. He drew closer and crouched down beside me.

"You have been to the Philadelphia?"

"Who are you" I gave a grimace.

"What's in the bag?" He lifted his chin towards it.

"I don't have —"

He slapped me in the face hard.

"I bet there's some money." He spat.

My vision went blurred. Rain fell like thousands of chilly arrows on to my face. My tongue couldn't move. He stood up and held out a baseball club. He hit me with that, I suppose.

"What were you thinking," he started walking around me "when you ran away with the bag?"

"Do you think, oh, some stupid guy has left a bag of cash here! How can I not take it?"

His circular movement made me dizzy.

“Has it ever occurred to you that it is a trap for some greedy people like you?”

“Why?” I mouthed.

I saw blood with water at the corner of my eye. I was bleeding quite heavily.

“I’ll tell you what. I enjoy seeing people who get so much hope and suddenly lose everything right away. Their eyes are filled with frustration, sorrow, dismay and horror. They are scared when they know what’s going to happen to them.”

“You are sick.”

He crouched down again and raised the baseball club with both hands.

“It’s a rollercoaster.” He brought it down to my face with all his might.

