**The Cocoa Bar**

Isabel found a Cocoa bar as she was going through her drawers. Cocoa bars were her father, Kurt’s, favorite food. When Kurt was a child, he would always go to the candy store at the end of Da Huisi street to buy them. Kurt would hoard cocoa bars and hide them in his room from his sibling. The advertisements said that Cocoa bars never expired, though only the kids really believed that. That said, Mabel, Isabel’s mother, would give Kurt a Cocoa bar every anniversary. “If you stop loving me, at least you’ll stay for the Cocoa bars…. I know you’ll stay for a while.” she used to joke. She used to always joke. The Cocoa bar brought back many memories of her mother and her father raising her. She thought about that time when Kurt had a day off work and decided to cook dinner for the family, but he didn’t communicate that with Mabel. So, Mabel ended up cooking a meal too. They proceeded to have a petty argument, which they mutually decided could be solved if Isabel choose which dish was better: Kurt’s rice, soy sauce, beans and beef stir fry or Mabel’s fish and chips. Mabel was a better cook, but Kurt was more self-conscious of his cooking, so Isabel didn’t remember if she chose to tell the truth or to protect Kurt’s male fragility.

It was time to pack though. Isabel was planning to move back to her mother’s house for the final stretch of her PhD. She started folding her clothing, making sure to vacuum-seal her blazer. In high school, Isabel wore that blazer to give a speech about the West Lake in Hangzhou. That was the only occasion she had actually worn it. It was the first suit Isabel’s family ever owned. She was beginning to sweat and went to the kitchen to get some water. The water filter was empty so she filled it up and went to sit on her couch. Suddenly she got tired and decided to take a nap. Isabel’s favorite part of the day was the moment before she fell asleep where she experienced hypnogogic hallucinations.

Her phone began to ring, waking her up. It was her mother, Mabel. Mabel asked if she needed her uncle Shen, Kurt’s brother, to help Isabel move her stuff into Mabel’s place. Isabel said that would be nice and thanked her. Isabel asked how Mabel was doing today and Mabel said she was okay. “That’s okay to hear” Isabel replied. They stayed on the phone in silence before Isabel said she had to drink something now. They said goodbye and Isabel left the phone on the coach.

The clutter in Isabel’s apartment gave her a headache. She didn’t want to deal with it. Isabel’s family had a tendency to get claustrophobic even though they spent most of their lives in crammed apartments. It was quarter to two and she still had six hours to get organized. Isabel decided to take a break and go to the retro arcade down the street. The owner, Jianguo, lived on Da Huisi street with Isabel’s father when they were growing up. Immigrating to Canada was hard, but after years of struggle, he managed to ‘make’ it in the arcade business. Although he never found a wife.

The clouds looked like emdashes, Isabel noted, walking down the street’s octagonal shaped roads. She entered the dark arcade and sat down on one of the coaches. Jianguo had let her come play anything anytime for free. Mega Man 2 was Isabel’s favorite game as a child. When Isabel was growing up, she would play it every morning before school started.

ITEM 2 AQUIRED, GET YOUR ITEMS READY the television screen said. Isabel chuckled. Just then Jianguo walked out and put his meaty hands on Isabel’s shoulders.

“How ya doing kid?” he asked.

“Okay,” Isabel said.

“Goods to hear,” Jianguo said.

Isabel didn’t reply. The room was filled with the sounds of buttons clicking.

“Hey, I heard you’re moving today,” Jianguo said.

“I am,” Isabel said. Isabel just defeated Air Man.

“You gots some stuff in a safe upstairs. Do ya remember?” Jianguo said.

Isabel didn’t remember. Her family always forget where they left their things.

“Sounds good, I’ll be up soon,” Isabel said.

Isabel turned off the game and walked up the carpeted stairs. The stairs made a creaky sound that signaled their age. Isabel heard Jianguo leave the arcade, probably to smoke. When Isabel got upstairs, she herself in a small attic with a safe underneath a desk by the wall. The lights were dim and there were no windows. Isabel found the safe and tried to remember the code to open it. 0000, she tried. 1234, she tried again. Then she realized a brute-force algorithm for unlocking the passcode was highly inefficient. She called Mabel and asked what the code was. Mabel didn’t know, but said she should try the code 9999. That was a bad code, Isabel thought, before opening the safe. She probably could have brute-forced it.

When she opened the safe she found it sparsely filled. There were a few books in there, mostly contemporary East Asian literature. When she was younger, her father tried to get her to read to learn more about her Asian heritage*.* Isabel began to take the books out when she noticed a Baked Goods Box. She could not bake, but it had become a family tradition to give gifts in those boxes whenever possible. She looked inside and found two Starbursts, a copy of *Taipei* and a crinkled note written to herself. She took the note out and unwrinkled it. She tried reading it but it was too dark. She turned on a white lamp near Jianguo’s desk. She placed the note on the desk and read it. “Put Cocoa Bar here when they arrive and give to dad.” it said. Isabel stared at the note and teared up a little. Somethings do expire.