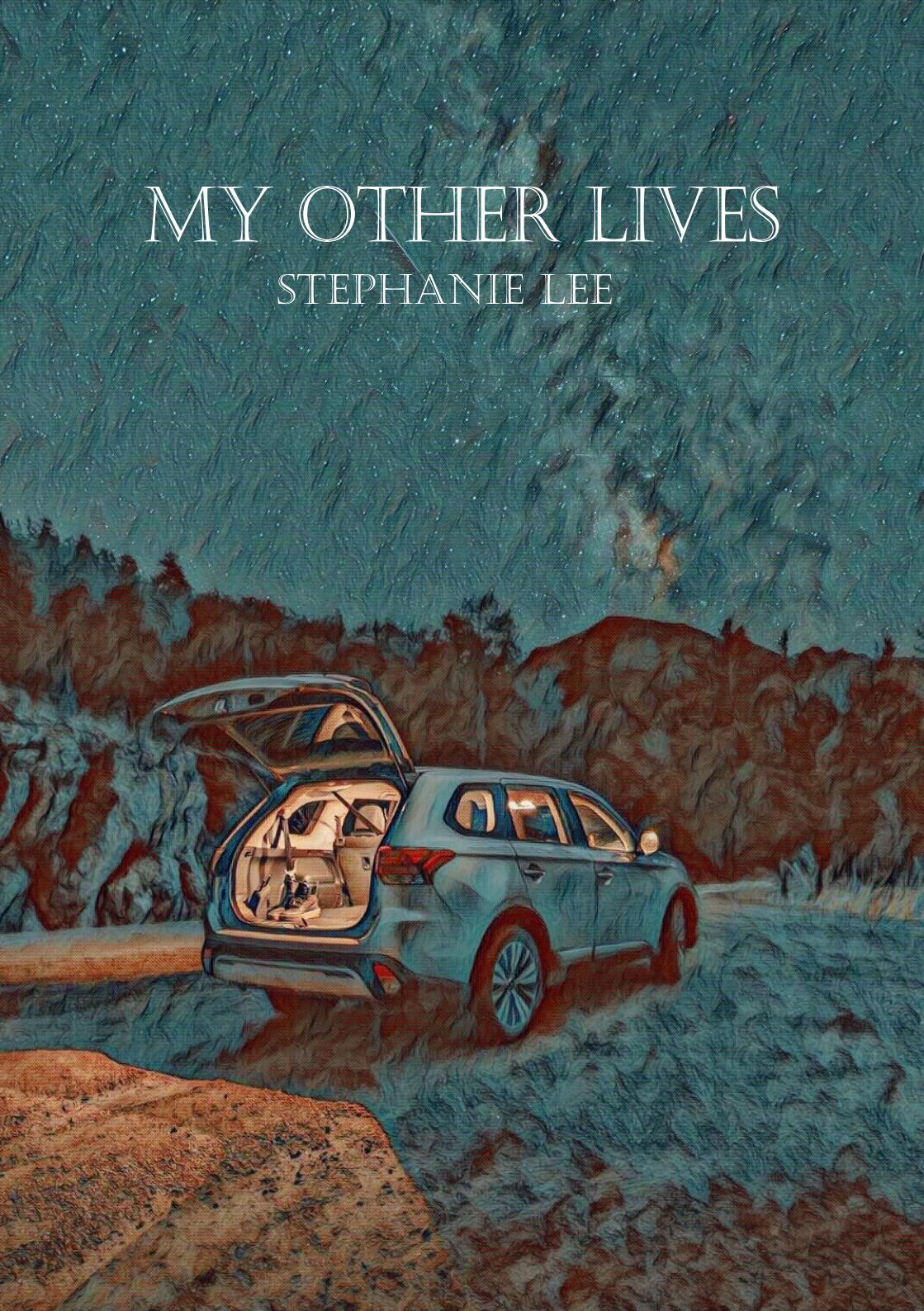


MY OTHER LIVES

STEPHANIE LEE



Chapter 1



It was not a typical happy opening of any story. I never thought this would happen. At least not now. The day still came even though I didn't want it to. I stood right in front of the podium and was ready to give a eulogy. Mason's parents sat on the first row of pews in the church. I could not see my step-parents' faces, but I knew that they wept with a broken heart as I did.

"Hello, everyone. Thank you all for coming to help us celebrate Mason's life and share our grief at his passing. My name is Michelle and I have been his wife for 6 years. I have known him for half of my life. I still remember the day we first met at high school. We hated each other and would never talk. God is very good at pairing people who hate each other into couples. After 5 years of dating, we finally got married 6 years ago. Even though he leaves me today, I am thankful for his company through these years."

Every memory flashed back inside my brain when I talked about our past. I felt like they just happened yesterday. I wished to sob crazily, but I held back my tears and tried to finish the rest of the eulogy.

"Mason is a fearless and brave person. He led me to do something that was out of my comfort zone. We both grew a lot in this relationship. One thing that you guys may not know is that Mason loves stargazing. He wished he could build a rocket to explore the boundless space. I will try my best to achieve this. In the honor of Mason, I'd like all of us to sing a hymn together now..." .

Friends and family gave Mason a eulogy followed by me. I could not hear and think. My tears kept running down from eye to cheek.

"How can you leave me like this?" I thought selfishly. I could still recall the car accident that happened a month ago.

It was 9:00 pm on a summer evening.

"Is this Michelle Lee, Mason Cheung's spouse?" an unfamiliar voice asked on the other side of the phone.

"Yes, I am," I replied with a curious tone.

"Mason was found in a severe car accident. He is in the emergency at Western Hospital. Come now! He may not last long!"

My heart sank when I heard this. I dropped my phone and ran out of my house in my cozy pajamas. I kept crying while I was driving to the hospital. I would never forget the scene that I saw at the hospitality emergency.

"Heart rate!?" A doctor screamed.

"none!" A nurse shouted.

"Defib paddle!"

I saw blood everywhere on Mason's body. I really meant it. It was the most terrible scene I have ever seen. I just stood there and did not know what to do, while several doctors and nurses were busy saving the dying Mason. I tried to come closer but a nurse closed the curtain around the bed.

I could not do anything.

Hours after hours, I have been waiting until 1:00 am. I saw nurses went in and came out behind the curtain with blood-covered hands. A cop told me that Mason had a car crash on a hill. He drove faster than the limit and tried to avoid a deer, which ran across the road. The car went straight to the trunk.

A doctor came out eventually at 2:00 am. I was nauseous when I was

waiting for him to talk.

"Sorry, we have tried our best."

I cupped my mouth to try to cover my grief. I believed my eyes were super red. My hands held tightly to the handrail to prevent myself from falling. I knelt down and held myself into a ball.

"How can it be?" I thought repeatedly in my brain. Did I do something bad so God had to take him away and make me be alone forever?

Since the tragedy, I have never slept well. It haunted me every night. Lying on the same old bed but it felt unfamiliar now. Cold and lonely. I could not stand it anymore so I made a decision after Mason's funeral.

I would end myself.

On a Saturday afternoon, I visited a nearby pharmacy to get sleeping pills. I guessed taking sleeping pills would be the most painless death. When I was choosing the pills, the old pharmacy owner was rearranging products beside me.

"Night Time's pills will help you!" He said with his breathy voice. "Have a good sleep and everything will be fine tomorrow!"

"Thank you," I tried to be polite but I could not help but reply without any expression on my face.

I planned to do it that day. It's a breezy night with a clear sky. It would be nice to be with my husband. After my last dinner, I sat beside the bed and glanced at the Newton's Cradle on the table, which was the first gift Mason gave to me. He said it would keep swinging for years. But its balls lost all energy after 11 years and stopped eventually. I poured half of a bottle of

sleeping pills on my hands and swallowed them without thinking. Soon, I became very tired and my eyelids could not stop dropping. So, this is the feeling of dying?

"Yo! Time to wake up sweetie! You gonna be late for practice!" A familiar voice woke me.

So, I died right? I kinda wondered how long it would take for people to discover my body. Also, I always wonder where people go when they die. I would know now.

I opened my eyes to see what it was like in heaven but to my surprise, I was lying on a bed inside a tent. What caught me off guard was the person, who called me sweetie.

"Did you sleep so much that you forgot who I am?"

I was sure he was Mason.

Chapter 2



"Where the hell am I ?" It was all I could think of.

"Mason?" I asked in a doubtful tone.

"Why do you look at me like that? Get out of bed now! Tom's gonna be mad!"

"Who is Tom?" I still could not believe what I saw.

"Are you out of your mind? Tom is the circus ringmaster!"

Mason grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the bed when I tried to ask more questions. Walking out of the tent, there was a giant colorful circus tent. A sign "Water Elephant Circus" was on the top of the tent. I was pulled inside this tent while I still had so many questions in my brain.

"I told you to gather at 6:00 am! It's 6:30 NOW!" A regular man with a huge mustache yelled and pointed at me.

Glamorous decors were all over the tent. Everyone dressed in bright-colored clothes like a peacock. Trapeze ropes, Cyr wheels, giggling rings were all over the place.

"I have never thought heaven will be a circus." I thought when I looked around the place.

"Hey, Michelle! I am talking to you! You really need to relearn manners and show some respect to the ringmaster!"

"Um... So...rry. Where am... I now?" My bad habits started to show. I would stutter whenever I feel nervous.

"Are your brain f**king rotten? We of course are in Paris now! Today is our

first day of the performance!" Ringmaster Tom kept shouting at me.

"I have no time to talk to this idiot! Let's start the final rehearsal! No one can ruin the show today. Do you guys get me?"

"Yes!" Everyone replied.

Mason told me to climb up to a trapeze platform when I still had no idea what on earth was going on.

"You're joking right?" I stared at the at least 30 feet high platform and asked.

"Who has the time to joke with you now? C'mon, hurry up and practice!" Mason yelled and slightly pushed my shoulder like asking me to climb up.

I had a really complicated feeling then. On one side, I was scared as f**k, on the other side, I felt relaxed. Climbing up the ladder, I stood on the platform. I thought I would pass out when I stood on it, but it was the complete opposite. I stayed so calm.

I grabbed on the trapeze handle and jumped off the platform like it was my second nature. It felt amazing! Without thinking, I freed the hand that held the handle when I flew in the middle of the place. I did a flip and grabbed the handle on the other side smoothly. Although I had been learning gymnasium since 6, I stopped when I was in high school because of the heavy school work. How could I do all of this?

I was shouted at a lot by Tom throughout the day. It was finally showtime. A lot of audiences started to fill the empty seats. I have never liked speaking in front of a crowd. Never!

" I wi...ll not per...form, right? Wasn't it ju...st a practice?" I started to stutter

again.

"What do you mean? You are the star of Water Elephant! You will do great!" Mason said with shining eyes.

Okay, so in the end, I was forced to perform. It was not bad at all. I still did not figure out how to perform all those stunts. But it was over and I had a lot of questions to ask. Heading back to my tent, I sat down on a chair beside Mason.

"How did you get here?" It was an awkward question but I had too many things I wanted to make clear. I randomly picked one.

"You are so weird today. We have been in a circus for like 4 years."

"What? We had a funeral for you just yesterday."

"Haha! Funeral? Do you really want me to die?" He seemed like he did not believe me at all.

"You drove too fast and had a really bad car accident! The doctor said you are dead."

"How can I have a car crash when I do not even have a driver's license?"

"What are you talking about? I am sure you have gotten it at your 20!"

"How can you forget I am 19!"

I was speechless. Mason always looked young but I did not doubt that he really looked like 19. Things turned really complicated here. He was not dead and he was 19!? Was I in a prank show now?

"What year is it now?"

"2008"

" If you are 18, we should be in high school now! What you are doing in a god damn circus?"

"You said you would never want to give up gymnastics and one of your dreams was to become a trapeze artist!" Mason looked confused too.

I remembered I said this when I was in grade 10. I had really wanted to be a trapeze artist.

"We didn't apply for college after grade 12 and went to Water Elephant's audition. Do you remember now?"

Obviously, I didn't understand a word of what Mason said and why he is still alive. However, I could tell that people wore old-school clothing that was popular at least more than 10 years ago.

"Did I time travel?" I thought.

If that's what happened, I should have still been in high school studying my ass off for college. I have already given up many of my dreams for college. The only thing I could think of was that Mason is still ALIVE! He hasn't changed a bit whether he was 18 or 33.

I wished we could do it all over again.

Even though I did not know why I ended up going back to 2008, I was glad that I did. I just loved the time to be with Mason and complete the dream that I did not have a chance to. For almost 3 months, I continued my life as a trapeze artist. Practicing and performing every day and night.

That might be the happiest moment in my entire life.

Chapter 3



I have performed countless shows in these 3 months. It was 7:30 pm when it was almost Mason's and my time to perform. As usual, we checked our costumes and makeup to make sure everything was okay.

"Do you wanna swing from my platform?" Mason asked while he was tidy-ing his custom.

"Oh... why?" I asked

"That platform is right under the AC, I guess you will be cold under it. I saw your goosebumps in practice!" He smiled.

"Haha ya, it's kinda cold there. Is it alright to switch positions?"

"It doesn't make any difference, so it should be fine."

I guessed it should be okay as we actually practiced on different platforms as well. So, I went with Mason's suggestion.

"He is such a sweet man!" I thought to myself.

"Ladies and gentlemen! After watching some juggling, here is the most expected show... TRAPEZE!" Tom screamed in his ridiculous ringmaster custom.

After a brief introduction, the lights were turned off, and Mason and I were in the spotlights. We were standing on the platform and were ready to swing. We bowed to the audience, I held the grip tightly and stepped my feet off the platform. Swinging in the middle of the air and doing a front flip and caught the grip on the opposite handle.

Back and forth, I was now grabbing on my original handle. It was Mason's turn to perform. As usual, Mason stepped out and swung from the other

side to the middle. However, I noticed he swung over the middle point. All ropes were designed to be able to swing half of the distance only unless screws loosen up on the ceiling...

"Unless screws loosen up on the ceiling..."

Until I realized how serious the problem was, the ropes detached from the ceiling, and Mason fell down right in front of me without a signal. A safety net was installed above the ground to prevent any accidents. I did not have the courage to look down until I heard people screaming, and running toward the exits.

Starring from the top of the platform, I could see there was a big hole on the net and Mason's cold body on the ground with blood leaking from his body. My tears ran down my cheek uncontrollably, and I did not know what to do.

"What has just happened?" I thought and I could not believe what happened.

Mason's clothes were soaked with blood. His limbs were fractured and crooked. He was certified dead when the paramedics came. His body was covered with a piece of white cloth. The whole scene seemed simple yet I would never forget it. Every team member was in pain by seeing this.

Why?

Why could I never stop him from dying?

It's all because of me.

After that day, the show has been stopped completely. Mason's funeral happened a week after that. Is there anyone in the world like me who

attended her husband's funeral twice in her lifetime? Similar settings with different people crying for Mason. Everyone wore black and had a grieving face. Sadness could not describe how I felt at that moment. Twice. He left me twice. How could a normal person face a tragedy twice? All members of the circus came to comfort me. Even Tom, who was usually rude, expressed his sorrow with me. Although Tom swore a lot to Mason, I knew they were like brothers with different mothers.

"I really do not know how to comfort people. I cannot imagine how much you are suffering right now. I am sorry for your loss." Tom said. He did not shed a tear for all of this. He was not good with words but I knew deeply that he was suffering not much less than I did.

That was my turn to give a eulogy again. I have practiced it before at Mason's first funeral so now I could do it anytime.

If that was not for my dream, Mason would not end like this. I should be the person to die instead of him. HE DIED TWICE ALREADY. How could God be so cruel to let a person die twice!? If I didn't switch positions with him, he would not die.

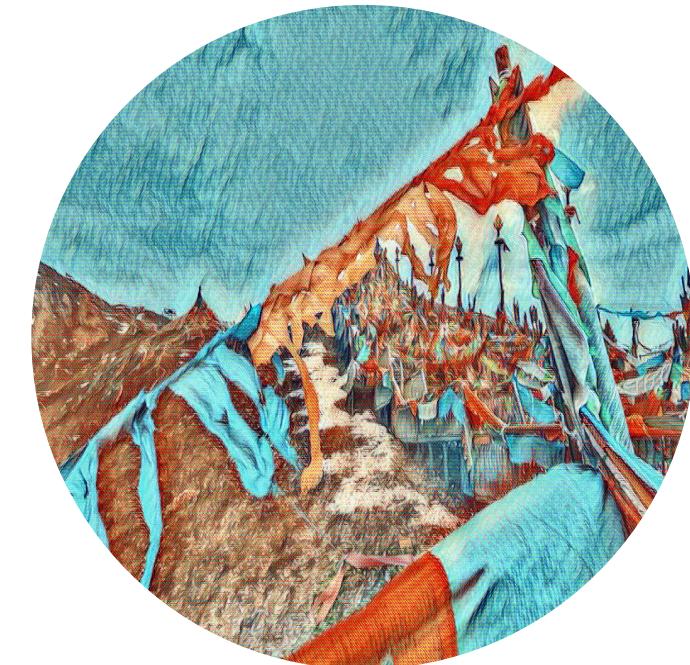
I went back to the circus tent after the funeral. I stood alone on the platform and cried bitter tears.

"Maybe we can die together." I thought.

I jumped off the platform. Freefall like this was much more horrible than going to a drop tower. I was able to understand how lonely Mason was to fall and die alone. When my body almost touched the ground, I squeezed my eyes shut.

I felt my body touch the ground but it did not hurt or I did not feel any pain.

Chapter 4



It was weird that I felt myself sitting on the ground. I heard some chanting melodies coming into my ears.

My curiosity made me open my eyes. I was in an unfamiliar place again. This place was so peaceful that I forgot I was on Earth. Huge incense coils were hung from the ceiling, brick-red paint on all walls, and a golden statue stood in front of me. From the environment, I was sure I was in a monastery. Like in the first time I traveled back in 2008, Mason was sitting next to me. His eyes closed while he was sitting up straight with his legs crossed on the ground. He breathed steadily as nothing had happened.

"Please be focused." The man with a bald head in a dark red robe said.

The monk's voice was calm yet dignified. I could not help but follow his command. I sat up straight with my palms closed together and let my eye-lids drop down.

"You may now gently open your eyes," the monk said after around 15 minutes.

"Today's meditation has ended. I bless you all. Thank you." He continued to say with his closed palms placed in front of his chest and bowed.

"Thank you, master." A group of people showed their appreciation to the monk.

"I have never felt this calm before!" Mason said.

I looked at him without a reply because this time he looked different again. He aged a little bit more than he was in the circus but he still looked good.

"Let's go get some food!" He suggested.

"Sounds great," I replied. I didn't want him to think I'm weird so I didn't show my shock.

But I must find out what happened this time.

"Please come again tomorrow." We were stopped by the master monk when we tried to step out of the monastery. I was surprised by the master monk's invitation.

"Please ask me anything if you have doubtful thoughts. You can pour out your heart to me." He continued with a friendly smile on his face.

"Thank you for your invitation! We really enjoyed the meditation today. We will definitely come tomorrow!" Mason replied.

We then left the monastery. I turned my head back and had a quick glance at the master monk when we left. He still had a kind smile, but the way he looked at me was like he knew something. His gaze seemed like he was trying to say, "I have the answer you are looking for."

From that moment, I knew that I would come back tomorrow.

I did not mention the above but I felt it was difficult to breathe here. I realized where I was when we passed by the iconic Potala Palace. It was understated by photos on any guide books or travel blogs. The palace was gorgeously built on top of a hill. It was shining under the golden sunshine. I could feel the calmness just by looking at it.

We arrived at a local Tibetan restaurant. It was warm compared to the cold weather outdoor. We sat down and ordered some tsampas and dumplings.

The restaurant was designed like an old Tibetan noman tent. A large

Tibetan Buddhism painting was on the right-hand side of the entrance and colourful prayer flags were hung around the restaurant.

I would never have had a chance to visit Tibet if I was in my original life.

"Thanks to you, we get a chance to visit this bucket-listed destination!" Mason said gladly while we were waiting for our food.

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, if you are not a travel writer, it will be tough to come to Tibet without a company's support."

I was a travel writer this time.

"I guess I have made my dream comes true!" I meant it when I said it. My interests were very diverse. I had never known what I wanted to be when I grew up. However, working in a job that allowed me to travel around the world was one of my dreams.

"Life always prepares some unexpected elements, doesn't it?" Mason said.

"For example?" I asked.

"Like look at you. You were majoring in accounting and see where you are now!"

"I cannot believe it either! Could you still recall what made me become who I am now?" I wished Mason told me more about it.

"Speaking of that, I still remember your parents were so mad about you quitted your stable accountant job!"

"Haha, I bet they did!" I could imagine my mum would scream like a psycho and throw anything in her hand when she knew that I quitted my job.

"I am sure they hated me so much that they wished me to disappear from your life!"

"Haha, you always do some things that test my parents' limits!" Come on Mason, tell me more about what you and I did!

"I saved a poor girl from her evil parents! Luckily, I helped you to give your resignation letter to your boss and escape from that boring ass job! You blamed me a lot before. But look at you now. Exploring the world and do what you like!" I could tell he was so proud of what he did.

Did he just say he gave my resignation letter to my boss? I knew he could do something I could never have the courage to do, but god, he helped me to quit a job without me knowing? However, thinking back to it, I was blessed to have Mason on my side. He helped me to make a good decision to quit that job I did not like.

A Few Years Ago

"Don't listen to this man's words, Michelle!" My mum screamed. She made a tight fist.

"Auntie May, have you ever known what Michelle wants to do?" Mason fought back.

"Are you judging my way of teaching my own daughter? Do you have any politeness at all?" She shouted at Mason. Her eyebrows were squeezed tightly.

"It is hard to get a job like this in the present days, Michelle! Don't come home if you quit!" My mum always used this to threaten me.

"Please just let her choose her own way!"

"You will understand me when you become a parent one day!"

I could only remember several pieces of memories that happened a few years ago. There were a lot of shoutings when it came to my career and education paths. The best way to avoid these fights was to obey my parents' choice. I was forced to do something I did not like.

Although he was repulsive when he quitted my job for me, he changed my life, which I have been longed for.

Chapter 5



As we accepted the master monk invitation, we went back to the monastery on the next day. Like what we did yesterday, we meditated for an hour. However, this time there were only three of us.

Did I need to pay extra for this private meditation class?

The master monk started to chant with a deep voice. I had a baffling feeling during meditation. I was in fear but at the same time, I was immersed in happiness that I have never experienced before.

"You may now open your eyes." The master monk said slowly.

"That's refreshing!" Mason said.

To me, it was not refreshing at all. I was overwhelmed with different emotions.

"Sir, would you like to explore the monastery? Since some parts of it are only limited to males visitors, madam will have to stay here a bit." The master monk gave Mason an offer.

"Bo, do you mind waiting a bit? I really want to see what's inside!" Mason asked excitedly.

"No problem! Go ahead!"

The master monk came in front of me when Mason left. I knew he had something to say that he did not want Mason to hear.

"Thank you for leading the meditation." I started the conversation first.

"Are you surprised?" the master monk asked friendly.

I told you! He knew something! I believed he had the answers that I have been searching for, so I ended the small talk and asked my all questions.

"I know it's awkward, but I want to know why I am here, what the date of today is, why my past was changed, and why Mason my husband is not dead?" I poured out a lot of questions that stayed in my thoughts for a long time. I have finally got someone to ask.

"You are here because of your job in this life. Today is 10th December 2016" the monk smiled like he was expecting these questions.

"Every choice you made creates who you are today. You have forgone different choices every day. You do not have a chance to experience them does not mean that they do not exist. He is good at making surprises in people's life!" He said as he was pointing at the sky.

"Do you mean I made wrong choices so my life was a disaster and I was never happy?" I asked.

"No choices are wrong. Pain is an important element in life. You won't be happy if you did not suffer from pain." He sounded like an all-knowing human being when he spoke.

"Why does it happen to me? How do you know I travel around time? What should I do to stop my husband from death" I asked. I was so anxious that I almost cried.

"There are no answers to every miracle. What do you think I spend hours meditating for? I am not just sitting there. I believe me and Him are slightly connected."

"Then can I prevent Mason's death?" That's the question I wanted to know the most.

"Remember, Fate was determined at everyone's birth. It will not be affected no matter how you change your decisions, even if you jump around time and space. Acceptance is the hardest lesson to learn in life, but you will only have happiness when you learn to accept" He said sincerely and earnestly.

Why did I have to accept it?

If I can travel to the past, I can save Mason's life too.

I could not forget every single word the master monk said. I deeply believed the future could be changed.

I would do all I could to save him. My life would not be completed without him.

We were packing our luggage and preparing to leave Tibet after a week we met the master monk. It was a pleasing vacation. Well, I meant work as well. Not only because Tibet was such a beautiful place, but I was exploring this mysterious place with my loved one.

"I love traveling around the world but sometimes I miss the stable life in our home!" Mason said.

"Are you being sarcastic? We are going home soon." I replied while I was looking at the photos we took during the trip.

"I guess you may forget our next working trip to Manila is in 2 weeks!" He said while he was folding the clothes.

God! I thought a travel writer's job did not have to work that hard.

Chapter 6



Time passed fast, we had already arrived in Manila after more than 16 hours of exhausting flight. We were picked up by a man at the airport. I could tell he was a tour guide by his appearance. Holding a flag that wrote "Your Authentic Tour" in his right hand, wearing a cap that matched with his navy blue tops, and wearing a name tag in front of his chest. This is a typical tour guide's outfit.

"I thought we were traveling by ourselves," I asked Mason softly so that the tour guide could not hear us.

"This tour company paid us a lot to write a tour review," Mason replied.

"I see..."

"You must be Miss Lee and Mr. Cheung! Welcome to Manila! My name is Kevin by the way. Nice to meet you guys!" Kevin spoke at a higher pitch and in a melodic fashion.

"Thank you, nice to meet you too." We both answered.

"Our schedule tomorrow will be tight. Please take a lot of rest tonight!" Kevin talked while his limb wrist was doing a lot of gestures.

We were led to a tour bus after we had waited for all the tour members.

Travel tours should be safe, right?

Manila was hot. With the humid environment, the temperature felt like 40 Celsius degrees. We have visited several local markets and tried local food like Adobo and Kare-Kare. They tasted delicious but we ate outdoors. I sweated excessively and I admitted that I smelled awful. I watched over Mason very carefully. I checked what he ate, where he went, and what he buys throughout the day. I kept him away from suspicious things to pre-

vent deadly accidents.

"How are my lovely people doing?" Kevin asked with a chuckle when he was wiping his sweat with a floral towel.

"Great!" Everyone on the bus answered bluntly. Everyone longed for ice cream.

"It's 5:00 pm now. We are now heading to our dinner. It takes around 40 minutes to get there. Please take some rest and drink some water."

That was good news. I wanted to take a bath right now.

Driving down narrow streets, golden sunlight entered my eyes through the gap between buildings. Everyone started to fall asleep after the bus set off for 5 minutes. I hoped the remaining journey would be safe and sound.

The bus' sudden pause made me fully awake. Everyone peeked to check out what happened. A man with his lower half face covered with a white cloth broke into the tour bus with a handgun and an M16 rifle.

"FREEZE!" The man shouted and pointed his gun around.

Screaming and crying sounds were everywhere on the bus.

Did fate finally come?

"Put your arms above your head and bow down!" The kidnapper yelled.

I and Mason were in the middle row of the bus, so we could not see the kidnapper's face clearly. My palms were sweaty and my heart rate beat rapidly. My tears rolled down from my eyes because of my nervousness. Mason held my hands tightly.

It is a prank, isn't it?

No one knew why he hijacked the bus, but everyone obeyed his order. There was a child in the back row who sobbed loudly.

"Stop that kid from crying!" He shouted.

The mum covered the kid's mouth and tried her best to comfort his anxiety even though she was not much better than him.

"I don't want to hurt anyone. I just want to be heard!" After an hour's silence, the kidnapper began to talk.

"That's unfair. That's totally unfair! How could they fire me like this? I've spent half of my life working there!" He talked to himself while he was pointing his gun towards the tour members.

Although I bowed my head down, I could still manage to peek at the window. There were police cars not far away from where we were.

"Btzz..." someone's phone was ringing.

It was the kidnapper.

"I will not release these people unless I get a fair answer! I will rather die together here!" He shouted and negotiation failed.

It was 12:45 am. We were captured for more than 6 hours. The rescue was slow. What made it worse was that television was equipped inside the bus, so the kidnapper knew where the police were from the news.

He grabbed some papers from Kevin and wrote down a few messages to show from the bus's windows.

The big deal will start after 2 am.

2:30 am deadlock.

These were the messages.

I was shivering after reading the messages. We were all gonna die at this rate!

It was 1:10 am.

This must be everyone's longest day. 2 people from our tours decided not to wait anymore and try to escape from the emergency exit at the back of the bus.

"Bang bang!" The kidnapper rushed to the back and shot twice.

Did they die?

Fortunately, I saw two shadows running away from the bus towards the police cars.

We should go.

My instinct told me.

The emergency exit was just 2 meters away from us. I looked at the exit and looked back at Mason. I knew he agreed on us to escape just by nodding his head slightly.

We could not go now because the kidnapper was cautious, but we had to leave before 2 am.

1:43 am

Time to go.

I pointed at the exit to imply “run now”. Rushing toward the exit and landing on the ground.

We made it! I thought.

Several gunshot sounds broke my thoughts. Mason did not manage to get out of the bus. He could escape just by taking one more step. The police decided not to wait any longer. At least 10 armed police broke in from the back of the bus.

But it was too late. Mason’s upper body was lying coldly on the floor of the bus. Blood spilled out from his scalp.

A lot of gunshot sounds and screaming kept coming from the bus. It was hell for everyone inside.

You could never escape from your fate no matter where you go, right? Who would have thought a Philippine tour would end up with 8 people dying and 10 people injured? What else could I do?

People said there were 5 stages of grief. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I did the first 4 but I was never able to do the last one. Why not did all this over again when I could jump around time?

I fished a folding blade knife, which I have always prepared for emergencies, and cut around my wrist. Blood started to flow out from my wrist. Slow and steady. No one paid attention to me as they all focused on defeating the kidnapper. I could finally feel what Mason felt in every death,

loneliness, and pain. The last thing I saw was paramedics running towards me before I blacked out.

Was that a wrong decision? Should I accept fate?

Chapter 7



I wondered where I would be this time. White walls with a lot of equipment around me. It was weird that I felt very light like I was floating and it was so quiet that I could listen to my heartbeat.

I moved closer to the small window behind me and observed the outside. What I saw was the giant blue planet that you could see on the Discovery Channel! I was out of the Earth! It was crazier every time I jumped between times. I heard a door-opening noise coming from my back when I still could not believe where I was.

"Good morning!" Mason flew from the other side of the space pod and spoke. He handed me some liquidized food for breakfast.

"Good morning! What year is it now? I have been working outside of Earth for so long that I forgot the Earth year."

"It's almost a year since we left Earth! So it is 2034 now!"

If today was 2034, then it means Mason did not die in 2021? Has his destiny changed finally?

Back when we were 16

"What are you taking for grade 12," I asked Mason when I was tidying up my locker and getting ready for the next class.

"Um... Physics, Calculus, and Chemistry." He answered while helping me to hold my books.

"I cannot imagine you will fly outside of the Earth one day. You must look so funny in a spacesuit."

"Not only me. You have to do it too!" he replied back.

"Nah. Are you out of your mind? My mum will go crazy if I do such a risky job."

"I think it's riskier to stay forever in the comfort zone." He said.

I sometimes was jealous of Mason. He could do whatever he wanted to do. My life was full of resentments and regrets. I wished he could achieve anything he wanted to.

But I was here exploring the unknown space with him. He brought me out of my comfort zone in different lives. My heart turned bitter when I thought about how useless I was, and the one who deserved to live was him, not me. His life would be more meaningful than mine.

"Remember we used to go far away from the city to stargaze?" Mason asked.

"We spent nights in the cold to do that," knowing that he might die in front of me at any moment, I replied with mixed emotions.

"It feels weird right? We used to stargaze but now we live around stars! So stop saying you are useless. We made it." He said with a chuckle.

"If it wasn't you, I would be still on Earth working at a boring office," I said when I thought about my past experience.

"No no no. Even if I am there, you had to make the right choices for yourself, which led you to be here today. It's cliche to say that but your life is your choice." Mason disagreed with me.

Was I finally the master of my own life?

"Do you believe in fate?" Ending the last conversation, I asked. I wished to tell him everything I have experienced.

"You know I was an atheist before I was an astronaut. After all these days out there in space. I think everything is planned purposely by someone. The galaxy, the moon, humans, and everything. I deeply believe that fate was set at the very beginning." Mason looked outside of the window and said.

"But if fate was set, why do people work hard to achieve something?"

"Well, I mean fate is not only about the destination you are ending up at but it's all the choices you made. You may end up in the same way but the process of it can be totally different."

"So, what if you suffer a lot in your choices and it doesn't end well?"

"Um... let me ask you another question. If your next life is gonna repeat everything you have done in this life, including all those suffering and misfortunes, would you do it all over again?" He asked me while putting some liquidized food into his mouth.

I was speechless when I was asked this question. Did I want to suffer from all those misfortunes again? But when I thought about the happy moments that I had with Mason and my family, I wondered if I would do it all again in my next life for this short period of happiness?

"To me, yes, even though life is full of pains and regrets," Mason answered his own question before I did.

"Why?" I was surprised by his answer.

"If I did not go through all those pains, I would not have any happiness right now. We may have given up everything on Earth but we complete our dream, which I think is the happiest moment in my life. I dare to say my life is completed. Do you?" he said

Do I? I bet my dream has been completed when I traveled to different times of my life but was my life completed without Mason?

Days have passed in the spaceship. Even though the capsule was not a luxurious hotel suite, it was comfortable for 2 people to live in. Checking equipment, doing regular exercise to keep our muscles working, and eating disgusting food has become my common routine now. I was a million kilometers away from home but I felt at home here. Everything was still here until an explosive movement ruined the peace.

Chapter 8



Yes, everything happened in an eye blink. The emergency alarm was activated and red lights in the capsule started to flash.

"This is ground control speaking..." I heard the muffled sound from the speaker on my left. We both paid close attention to that and the scene turned tense.

"Commander Lee and Commander Cheung, the oxygen tanks just exploded causing a malfunction. Oxygen will be used up within 40 minutes. End the mission and return to the Earth now!" The other side of the speaker ordered.

"Let's go ho... me... home together!" I said as I got butterflies in my stomach.

"Joan and Juno have longed for a Disney trip. Remember Juno's elementary school graduation ceremony will be in the last week of June. Joan will have to visit the doctor monthly and make sure you guys go to Disney. We promised them last year before our mission." Mason reminded me while floating around the spacecraft and gathered tools and pushed them to me. I realized his intention in a split second.

"We are going home together! Don't you dare to leave me alone again!" I grabbed his arms and I shouted as my lips twitched.

"There is no way for 2 people to go back alive at this rate! I have prepared everything you need for the return. Our children need a mum" He screamed back.

Children?

"They need a father too! How can you make this choice for me? Please, I don't wanna lose you again... I am nothing without you. You are the one who completes me! I don't want to regret my whole life." I wept uncontrollably.

He took a deep breath and hugged me tightly. It was gonna be the last hug

before we separated forever.

"Listen Michelle, the only person who can complete your life is yourself. So, please live out your dream. We all have to sacrifice something for something. You used to blame how you didn't make the right choices in your past. Life is just the sum total of all decisions we make every day. It is the worst to live in regret so I don't want you and me to live in regret. Thank you so much for being there to create all those happy memories with me. I believe I already am the luckiest person to have someone that makes saying goodbye so hard." Mason was trembling in his voice when he spoke. He was afraid too but he chose to sacrifice.

"30 minutes left!" The ground control shouted.

"As long as I sacrifice for you." He said.

The master monk and Mason might be right. Our destination was set, but all those processes were not. I was already blessed to experience something I regret not doing in the past. To the previous question, yes, I would do it again even if my next life was full of suffering for this short happiness.

I wished this hug would last forever. I could remember every touch and the warmth of Mason's body. In the dark cold outer space, his temperature warmed my body and my heart up. No matter how long it took, I still felt like not enough. The master monk was right. Fate was cruel and I could only accept it. I have made enough regrets in my life, I didn't want this to become Mason's greatest regret either. Sometimes, it may be best to let go. We loosened our arms and I wiped out the tears from my swollen eyes.

"Ahh... Thank you for making all those decisions for me in my life, but I will make the decision this time. It's time to go." I tried to stay calm but it felt like a thousand knives stabbing in my heart.

Taking all materials and stepping inside the escape pod, which is only able to hold one person. We had the last gaze at each other and we let go of our last touch. We never said the word “goodbye” as there was no real separation for those who love with soul and heart.

“Don’t worry, I will take care of our family and myself.” I forced a smile when tears kept dropping like a waterfall.

Even though the escape pod drifted further away from the spaceship, my eyes could not move away from it. We promised each other that one day we would live in a place that no one would find us and say “no” to us. Mason archived this before me. I would complete Mason’s will this time and I wouldn’t let him worry about me again.

Until I see you again, Mason.

Chapter 9



"Mom, can I stay in Disney forever!?" My lovely children asked from the back seat.

"We will come back soon, honey!" I replied.

10 years ago, I could not even imagine having kids screaming around the house. Mason was right, he said I would enjoy it when I was 40ish. Even though they messed around and cried a lot, they were the cutest creatures in the world, weren't they?

I could not deny that I turned old. I was exhausted after a whole day queuing. My children slept right away after they had a shower. I finally had some time to rest on my bedroom's balcony. Enjoyed my Earl Grey tea while I was staring at the boundless night sky. No matter which time I traveled to, this view would always be stunning. I wondered where Mason was now. Was he close to any undiscovered planets now?

He asked me to look at Betelgeuse Star whenever we were apart. Since that accident, I have looked at it every time when the sky was clear. If Mason was here, the children might play even crazier than today.

"Wish you were there." I chuckled to myself. I took out my agenda and crossed out "Go to Disney". Under this item, there were countless items waiting for me to do. Since that accident, I was a different self. I still missed him but Michelle's adventure journey just started. Scuba diving, sky diving, making fried rice... you named it! I wonder if I had enough time to complete all of them before I die.

"Tick tock..." I heard repetitive sounds coming from the bedroom. My curiosity made me turn my head to check out what happened.

It was the sound of the ticking Newton's Cradle on my bedside.