

## Fish for Sale

A pair of feet hit the floor with a small thud followed by a quiet sigh. Two weeks had passed since the old man's wife's funeral, and he had been carrying on a depressing, empty life. No friends, no family, just himself in the small flat above the store that he inherited from his father. Slowly his daily routine was carried out. Just like any other morning, he got dressed, brushed his teeth, ate his breakfast, and descended the steps to his shop.

As he entered the small store, he was hit with a pang of sadness. The store that he had poured his heart and life into sat in a disarray of dirtied barrels, shelves, and crumpled newspapers. He and his wife used to spend afternoons cleaning the shop together with the radio on. They would spin around each other, singing and laughing as they swept the floors and washed the barrels, and, for the first time in his life, he could truly say that he was, more or less, happy.

That was before an out of control car took what he loved most from him, right before his eyes. Since that day, life had more or less gone back to normal, and the once joyful man fell into a state of deep depression; he couldn't bring himself to clean the mess around him. Soon after, the shop lost what little business it once had.

The man continued his way through the store and set up shop outside on the street. Four plates lay in front of him with fish on each of them. He himself sat on a small stool and watched the people walk up and down upper Chinatown, but no one seemed interested in what he had to sell. As the minutes passed, the widower spent his time looking at the scenes the town presented to him. A gang of teenagers biked down the street on their way to school. One of them turned and waved at him as they passed. The man waved back and responded with a sad smile. He seemed to have aged ten years in the past two weeks, but he could still recall the times when he was as young and carefree as them, when he had first moved here from China

and met the shy girl down the block. She almost rode into him with her bike - and he had loved her ever since. A tear formed in his eye but was quickly brushed away.

“That was before,” he thought, “way before.”

The widower lowered his gaze to the ground and looked at his weathered hands resting loosely on his knees. Blue veins ran the length of his arms down to his knuckles, and age spots stained the skin that his wife had fallen in love with. Then, to his surprise, someone did decide to buy fish from him: a stooped man with a tattered coat. His hallowed face portrayed a look of paranoia and many sleepless nights. Once he was given the wrapped fish, he quickly paid the amount due and was off without another word. The widower watched him hobble limply down the pavement.

“Poor man. He must have quite a story to tell,” he thought, “one I’ve heard far too many times.”

After his customer had left his sight, the man reverted his gaze to the people around him. A newsboy stood at the corner holding today’s paper up to whoever would look.

“Extra! Extra! Uruguay beats Brazil two to one in World Cup Final!”

Men could be seen through the window of a pub, drinking their cares away. They laughed with their arms around each other, singing incomprehensible songs in their drunken state. The widower had thought many times of turning to the bottle after his wife’s death, but he never did. He couldn’t stand what she would think of him if she could see him in that state.

“It will just bring you more pain in the end,” he said to himself “Besides, you are too old to drink.”

His eyes crossed the path of a father and his daughter walking their dog in front of a china shop. The girl seemed a little over seven and looked around with such amazement in her eyes that the widower could feel his heart melt. Instantly he was sucked into the days of his

past, the days when his hands weren't stained, when every night he lay awake tending to his wife's needs and jumping at every sudden move by her, for these were the days when his wife was pregnant. The widower had always dreamed of being a father, of raising a child with a better childhood than he ever had, in a world where he could laugh and play without having to worry about what he was eating the next day. When his wife became pregnant he couldn't be happier. He spent his days doing everything he could for her and dreaming of finally being a father. When the day of his daughter's birth did come, he made a mad scramble trying to get his wife to the hospital any way he could. She was quickly placed in a room and the soon-to-be father watched from her side as his dream was fulfilled. He was a father, even if it was for just ten minutes.

"I think the doctors said pre-eclampsia?" he thought. It didn't really matter to him what the reason was. He tried not to think of that day, but the look of pure despair and sadness on his wife's face lay burnt in the back of his head. Those events had an everlasting effect on the couple that they never truly conquered.

"I came to this country for a better future, a proper chance at life. But is my new life here really an improvement over my past?"

The old man's shoulders slumped even more than before, and the wrinkles on his face stood out more prominent, a reminder of the pains of his past.

"No!" he suddenly cried out. "I've had experiences, a life, I found true love, I became a father!"

He stood up, stepping on the fish in the process, but he didn't care. People turned to see what caused the sudden uproar.

“I danced! I sang!” he continued. “I was happy. I saw a world beyond the pain and war of my country. I loved and lost. Nothing in life is more natural than that, and if I can’t see the privileges I’ve had than I don’t deserve to have them at all!”

And with that the widower stormed back into his store and didn’t stop cleaning, singing and dancing until every nook and cranny looked immaculate. A realisation came over the old man that would be felt all over the community. He continued to run his father’s newly cleaned store with a skip in his step and a smile on his face for the rest of his days, with a newly painted sign that stood a staple of Chinatown to this day.

“Freddy Wong, Fish for Sale.”