

Anak Sastra, Issue 3

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Paul GnanaSelvam has published short stories in the anthologies *Write Out Loud, Urban Odysseys: KL Stories, Body2Body*, and *ASIATIC*. Apart from creative writing, his reading interests include works of writers from the Indian Diaspora and New Literatures in English. He teaches academic writing and interpersonal communication at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman in Kampar, Perak.

An accomplished writer in his dreams, **Khairul Hj Anwar** has published a few short stories and poems in various online journals. This pleases him immensely as he does not know where he even gets the time to write. He lives in Kuantan, Malaysia, and works in the banking industry to pay his bills.

Karl Wendt is a German travel writer based in Berlin. He has written articles for local newspapers highlighting the benefits of travel to warmer destinations—particularly during the winter months. Writing about tropical locales, he reasons, helps him to survive the cold, transporting him to lands of short shorts, breezy beaches, and temperate oceans. When not writing or dreaming about the tropics, he travels there in person.

After years of tending to the every need of tourists at a hotel, **Paige Yeoh** started travelling herself. She has a true appreciation for how hard it is to keep tourists happy (some more than others) and enjoys very much being on the receiving end of that treatment. She aims to travel to every country in Southeast Asia before she runs out of money.

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March 2011 featured author interview with Paul GnanaSelvam

Q. How did you first get into writing? From where do you draw your inspiration?

Some of my close colleagues complimented on my ability to narrate stories and events with such vividness that they suggested that I should write. And I just did that. My first article appeared in the *The Star* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) newspaper that discussed on the increasing incidence of plagiarism among college students, something I felt deeply about. That was in 2005. Coming from the municipality flats where I was brought up, I have been exposed to the many 'real' and 'high' dramas that happened everyday that went unnoticed by the world. To think of them now, it often creates in me a sense of awe and inspiration on how humanity triumphs over everyday obstacles and these certainly have been the point of focus in my writing. People's lives are indeed uniquely patterned by different events, peculiarities, habits, and traditions. Thus, I believe that the stories about people are real and they should be put into writing and preserved as living stories for others to share, learn and get inspired in return. Simply put, I believe that all stories need to be told and heard.

Q. Tell us about your writing process. Do have any odd writing quirks?

I am a lazy writer and definitely not disciplined, partly because of my lecturing job as well as my studies that take up a lot of my time. But I let my imagination run wild all the time. When I think of an idea or theme, or a character, I let it take shape in my mind, be it two days, weeks or months. I day dream when I am not working, or when I am driving and I let my characters weave themselves into a part of my self. Then, I wait for the thought (fantasy) to ripen with a fully developed plot and characters and when the time is right, I sit and let them flow and etch themselves onto my story. It may take hours or days, but that's how my stories get completed. Finally, it's the editing, 7-8 times before submission. At the end of the day, each story is a series of many harrowing experiences, rejections, uncertainty and labour well spent.

Q. You work as an academic writing instructor. In what ways has this helped your creative writing? Do the conflicting styles pose any unique challenges for you?

Not at all. I tend to separate academic writing from the latter, though I do relate my writing skills and creative writing experiences per se when I lecture on the Descriptive and Narrative genres in Academic Writing.

Q. You have contributed to numerous short story collections. When you write your stories, what is it you hope to share with readers? Is there an element of the personal in them?

Probably it's unavoidable that when every writer writes, in one way or other, to a certain extent their written product reflects some part of their lives- in the form of experience, attitude, beliefs and exposure. At the end of the day, writers want their voices to be heard as it encapsulates their human joys, passion, needs, grief, displeasure, triumphs and failures. And many writers echo the same human emotions that transcend creed, colour, culture, nationality and language. Even though we come from different parts of the world, far or near, I always feel that our human experiences come from some form of common ground- be it in the form of migration, diasporas, sexuality, spirituality, poverty, marginalization, discrimination, compassion, materialism, birth and death. We are in a way, linked by these basic human experiences and the emotions that are attached to them. And I believe that the world will be a better place if every human being is able to discard their physical difference and start understanding, accepting and connecting on the basis of these internal human qualities. And definitely, this understanding launches the platform for writers to write, while the plots and characters are the imagined tools that bring these themes to life.

Q. What is your most vivid experience about having lived or traveled in Southeast Asia that you think is distinct to this region?

I think it's the all accepting smile that so beautifully conceals the political, religious and socio-economical differences.

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"Gblok"

<story removed from archives>

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"Budak Branded"

The plane landed at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on time, a fact much appreciated by Shah and Adi, who were there to pick up their friend Nabil. The airport was fairly empty as usual, so they sat across the hall from the customs exit waiting for Nabil to

come out after collecting his luggage. It had been four years since they had seen their high school friend. Shah went on to study at a local teacher's training college while Adi got accepted to the National University of Malaysia, only to drop out after finishing a year and a half of his studies.

Nabil, on the other hand, immediately left KL after finishing school to attend New York University (NYU). The boys rarely kept in contact but had the type of relationship where they could pick up where they left off the last time they saw each other. They were inseparable throughout high school and each cried when Nabil said his goodbyes before heading to the airport four years earlier. This was going to be a happy reunion.

"Do you think he will be fat now that he has lived in America for so long?"

"Adi, that guy could eat bee hoon for hours without stopping, and he managed to stay as slim as me. I don't think spaghetti is going to make him fat."

"Well, you never know," Adi retorted. "A lot of Americans are fat. All I'm saying is that he likes to eat, and he has been living with fat people. I think the odds are pretty high that he will be fat when he walks through that exit."

Shah did not think that Nabil would be fat. It was more of a case of wishful thinking by Adi who had let himself get a little flabby over the past several years. Shah knew that the boy who would walk through those doors would be a bit more worldly having lived in New York, but still the same suburban KL boy who left a few years earlier. Neither Shah nor Adi had changed all that much during Nabil's absence—why should he have?

As Shah and Adi were quietly thinking about how Nabil may or may not have changed and how they would greet him, they were interrupted by the guy who rolled his luggage cart over toward them. "Helloooo? Lost in space? I come all the way from America, and you two are staring right through me. Am I invisible all of the sudden? Ha! I don't think so. Look at me!"

"Nabil! So glad you are back! I must have been zoning out. How was your flight? How are you?"

"Shah...I just flew half way around the world. Do you know what that is like? It is hell! I need to shower. I need to brush my teeth. And I am so hungry. The food they served on the airplane was horrible. I didn't even recognize what it was. Let's get something to eat. We have so much to talk about. Help me with my bags, ya?"

"Are these all yours? Wah, you are like a hoarder. Keep everything you find, is it?"

"Adi, it would be wasting for me to stay in New York City for four years and not bring back all of the great things I bought. Ugh, do you think I could get even half of this stuff here? I don't think so! Come on, help me with my bags. I'm starving!"

Adi and Shah grabbed as many bags as they could carry, following Nabil, who was carrying significantly less than them, into the airport's McDonalds. They put the bags down around their table, trying to allow some room for people to pass by. Nabil was already queuing, obviously not able to wait a moment longer to eat.

"Hey Nabil, wouldn't you rather get some Malaysian food? Haven't you missed it?," asked Shah, who never much cared for McDonalds food.

"Not really. I don't eat rice very often. Only if I have to. It's just empty carbs. Does nothing for your body except make you have to work harder in the gym."

"And McDonalds does what for you?"

Nabil stared for a second, knowing that Shah had made a valid point, and immediately changed the subject. "Do you think that they have the Angus Burger here? It's so tasty. Uuuuhhhh, I don't see it. Hmph, figures! Well, you just have to try it. It's so juicy and good! Maybe one day Malaysia will get that on the menus here."

"Ya, sounds good. Maybe one day," Shah said agreeably, but not really caring whether or not he got to taste the Angus Burger. "So how was university life? Mega city life? Meet any interesting people? Celebrities?"

"Haha! I knew I would get asked that question. You think that movie stars walk down the streets of New York? Hellooo? They take stretched limos everywhere. Or maybe even their helicopters. It is not like KL where if you go to a Starbucks you can see singers and actors."

"So, is that a no?"

Perturbed by Shah's response, Nabil returned: "I saw Donald Trump's helicopter fly overhead several times, for your information."

"Oh, ok. Cool." Shah had imagined their reunion would run more smoothly than this. He wasn't sure what he was doing wrong. Asking about Nabil's time in New York should generate one thousand stories. Instead, Nabil just bickered with him. "Hey, I like your shirt. Looks nice."

"Thanks. It's Armani Exchange. The jeans are Guess, in case you were wondering. And check out my shoes. They're real Italian leather. You should get a pair...if you can find some here."

"Hey look Adi! Nabil is giving us fashion advice. Do you remember when he wore a fanny pack when we would hang out?"

"Haha! Ya, Shah, I do remember that. Those were the good ole days," Adi laughed.

“Ya, Do me a favor, and let’s just forget about that,” Nabil rolled his eyes. “I don’t wear fanny packs anymore. I was a victim of the times and the locale. Neither one of you had a problem with it then. And now look who is trendy and contemporary. While you two look like you bought your clothes at K-Mart.”

“Huh? What’s K-Mart?,” the two asked.

“Hmph! Even that you don’t know. What I mean is that you aren’t wearing any name-brand clothing. It’s very un-cool. People look at me because I am dressed from head to toe in nice, branded clothes. They look at you both and take pity on your fashion. But, let’s try to stay positive. At least you both looking so ‘casual’ and ‘carefree’ with your appearance probably helps build self-confidence in others who see you.”

“What the hell, Nabil?” Shah was getting angry by this point. “You have been a jerk ever since you arrived. We’re here to listen to your stories about living in New York. Not be criticized for everything we are and everything our country doesn’t have. Might I remind you that you are Malaysian, right? Not American.”

“Well, I feel as if I’m American at this point. I learned a lot living there. You think I wanted to come back to the jungle here? If only I could have extended my visa.”

“Jungle? Since when has KL been a jungle? Like two hundred years ago, maybe. I don’t think you were around then to remember it.”

“Simple Adi. You just don’t get it. No wonder you flunked out of university. Even a Malaysian university you can’t pass. At NYU I was treated as an equal...no special treatment because I was a foreigner. I passed and got my degree. You can’t be lazy. It’s embarrassing when negative stereotypes are proven true.”

The boys were oblivious to the gazing eyes of the other customers, listening as the conversation became more and more heated. Even the McDonalds staff had largely stopped working to watch. Adi became aware of this and attempted to cool things down. “Hey guys, let’s not do this here...or anywhere, for that matter. Maybe we should just grab something to eat on the way back to the city.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

All were in agreement. They slowly gathered the bags and walked out of the restaurant to the parking garage while being watched by the now gossiping crowd. The boys said nothing to each other until they reached Shah’s car.

“You are kidding me! You still drive the same Perodua that you had when I left? The used one in bad shape...which looks even worse now?”

“My car runs just fine, Nabil. And it has been fixed several times while you were away.”

“Ha! That’s because it is a piece of crap. That’s why you had to get it fixed again and again. When I would hang out with my friends in New York, they would pick me up in their SUVs or their Firebirds. Damn it Shah. Not even a Honda Accord? How do you expect me to fit all my luggage inside. I’m not going to try and squeeze in the back seat with all of these bags! This is just like you. Always trying to do the nice thing but never actually thinking about doing it correctly. What good?”

“Nabil,” Adi pleaded, “we will find a way to get it all to fit.”

Shah interrupted, his voice booming in the garage. “Adi, never mind. He is unhappy with our gesture of kindness. We should not make life difficult for him. Nabil obviously has better opportunities elsewhere. Perhaps one of his New Yorker friends with an SUV will drive him home. Let’s go Adi.”

With that, Shah got in the car and started the engine. He repeated: “Now, Adi!” Although hesitant, Adi gave one last look at Nabil and ducked into the small car. Shah reversed, knocking most of Nabil’s luggage into the lane and drove off quickly as Nabil cursed them while gathering his strewn bags. He eventually got a taxi to his parent’s house, paying an exorbitant amount for the usual fare, plus all of the excess luggage and the post-midnight surcharge. It took less than one week for all of his other friends to completely leave him alone, free to be content with his own sense of superiority and style...but only able to share this personal accomplishment with himself.

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"Warung Wonders"

My travels around Indonesia were loaded with sights and smells that my mind could not possibly envision without having experienced it in person. I thoroughly enjoyed every step of my archipelagic journey and attempted to stay off the tourist trail as much as possible. I would take trains and buses instead of planes to see more of the countryside. And while passing time on these often too-long transits between towns, I would read through my travel diary. I quickly noticed that my days seemed to be organized around meals.

It was a little surprising to find that what most interested me about my travels was the food. After all, I could get many of these same dishes at Indonesian restaurants back home. But the experience of eating in the country of origin was completely different to the sanitized and sterile environment I was used to back in Australia—literally and figuratively. There were bugs crawling around. Several of them, for that matter.

But it clearly didn't bother me as much as it would have back home. Most of the time, I was eating out doors, either snacking from the various push carts on the side of the road or dining at makeshift sidewalk stalls with a single wooden bench as a communal table. Cars drove within inches past us diners and stirred up the dust and debris in the road. And in one case, the legs of the stool I sat on straddled both sides of a sewage gutter. On occasion, I would even see things scurrying underneath me. Luckily, the food and people around me were more interesting to focus on than the creepy-crawlies that made their home at the eatery.

These *warung* offered the best opportunity to sample Indonesian cuisine. Then again, 'cuisine' is not exactly the best word to describe food served alongside the road. It was more authentic, though, than the food served in the restaurants. And to top it all off, the food was cheap...very cheap even. I could eat a good-sized meal for less than \$2. And thanks to my steel-lined stomach, I never got sick!

Eating at a *warung* is a universal sort of experience in Indonesia; it doesn't matter which island you are on, as the feel of it will be the same. Sure, the food is slightly different across the different regions and the languages they use are distinct. But...not to me. I spoke English and sign language with a "terima kasih" ("thank you") thrown in here and there. It was enough to get food on my plate. And my appetite took care of things from that point on. Paying was also the same, no matter which island I was on. The vendor would hold up a few fingers, and that is how much I paid. Simple.

So between my ignorance of the various Indonesian languages, cultures, and food varieties (which is mostly just rice or noodle with countless, minute variations), I was able to enjoy everything at face value and not complicate matters any further than asking myself whether it was nice-tasting or not. I will say, though, that my experience at one specific *warung* in Jakarta seemed to stick in my mind quite clearly long after my trip ended.

I was staying at the always rowdy Jalan Jaksa area near the main train station. There are a lot of backpackers that stay in this area because it is cheap. That's why I was there. Plus, it is walking distance to some shopping plazas and nighttime venues. The streets come alive at night as the roads are lined with *warungs*. With food, fun, and shopping all in one place, how could I go wrong?

As I walked the length of the stretch of packed *warungs*, I noticed one toward the end that was mostly empty. By this point I had not learnt that an empty *warung* at peak hour is a clear sign to stay away. So I sat down and went through the usual motions of trying to figure out what food he made and what I would order. When we settled on fried noodles, I sat down and began scanning the area. Being on the edge of the *warung* strip meant this section was only dimly lit. It was a bit uncomfortable. But I reasoned that I was only going to be there long enough for a quick meal, then wander off to more exciting venues.

The man scraped his wok with his metal spatula as he tossed my noodles around and added the seasonings. With the aromas starting to block out the smell of the dirty streets, my mouth was watering by the time he placed it in front of me. As I ate, I began pondering how I could convince my health-food-freak girlfriend to try cooking this greasy, heart-

attack-in-the-making dish for us when I got home. That feat would take a great deal of planning though. She once yelled at me for not buying organic tomatoes, arguing that it would ruin her salad if she used non-organic. For me, a tomato is a tomato, and this fried rice dish, with or without tomatoes, was delicious.

As I finished up, I went through the usual sign language to figure out how much I owed for the meal. Rp. 15,000. Can't beat that price back home. But when I reached for my bag to pull out the money, I was startled to find that it was no longer sitting on the bench next to me. I panicked and started looking furiously under the table for it, behind me, even behind the wok. It was gone. Someone had walked off with it while I was drooling over my noodles. The vendor started saying something, but I had no idea what it was. How was I going to pay him? I told him that someone stole my bag and my money. He looked at me with the same I-don't-know-what-you-just-said-so-I-will-just-smile-at-you face that I gave him earlier.

I dug deep into my pockets. At least I carried my passport on me. And as it turned out, I was able to pull Rp. 13,600 out of my pocket, the balance from my previous purchase. I gave it to him, apologizing profusely that it was not enough. He laughed and seemed to indicate that it was fine and he understood my predicament. I was relieved for that. But I still lost my bag. What would have been in there aside from my money? Camera, gone. Lonely Planet, gone. Airline tickets, gone.

I walked around the area looking for anyone with my bag or for anyone to approach me letting me know that they saw who took my bag, but I had no luck. I realized, however, that it was just a cheap bag. The camera was getting old and the Lonely Planet had been losing pages for days as I worked it to death throughout my travels. The airline tickets could be replaced with a simple call to the airlines. The only thing I was really losing were whatever pictures I had taken earlier in the day (and the ability to take any more pictures in my remaining three days in the country).

I took a deep breath and exhaled my stress over the bag, thinking that the person who took it is certainly in worse condition than I am and will hopefully make use of it to better themselves. I know it sounded lame, but I was trying to stay positive. I did not want to dwell on this minor blip in an otherwise grand trip. I would return to my hotel room and get a good sleep. The following morning I would cash my last traveler's check, buy a cheap bag at the nearby market, and go on like nothing had ever happened.

Walking back to my hotel, I decided to cross the street before passing the *warung* where I had just eaten. Sure I was accepting my loss, but that didn't mean that I wasn't still embarrassed at what had happened. I pretended not to see the *warung* until I had nearly passed it before taking one last glance over there. I saw the man offering another plate of fried noodles to his customer. I couldn't see the customer's face, but I did see the bag strapped to his back. It was my bag! I shouted, "hey!" and attempted to cross the busy street. As I zigzagged through the slow-moving cars, I saw the vendor point to me and then chase away the bag thief. By the time I got to the *warung*, he had disappeared down some narrow alley, and the vendor was standing there laughing at me.

He knew full well about my bag being stolen. He was in on it too, or at least, he was happy to make profit off of it. While he laughed at me, a million thoughts ran through my head. Should I call the police? Should I go running down that alley after the thief? Should I just whack this man upside the head until he stops laughing? In the end, I just turned around and went back to my hotel...bringing along the plate of noodles he had cooked for the bag thief.

* * * * *

"Tess Retires"

After more than forty years working at the Grand Eagle Hotel in Langkawi, Tess was both anxious and terribly excited knowing that as she walked into the hotel's sweeping lobby, it would be for the last time. She had decided to retire and, using the money she had saved up over the course of her career in the hospitality industry, renovate her own modest house into a bed and breakfast. Her experience was more than adequate to run such a small-time enterprise, and she gained numerous friends among the repeat customers who would come to the same hotel on the same island year after year.

Langkawi's beauty was not in dispute. But Tess often wondered what it was that they liked so much about the Grand Eagle itself. It was once the nicest hotel on the island but had long since been eclipsed by the large chain hotels that boasted their own private beaches. Grand Eagle had a nice little stretch of beach on its oceanfront, but it was often crowded with tourists from the nearby hostels and cheaper chalets. Tess was certain that her homestay would do well despite not having direct beach access. She even had the support of her manager, who obviously did not feel threatened by her upstart.

For Tess, her last day working at the Grand Eagle was one of constant distraction. She went about her duties as associate manager as usual, but she seemed to reflect on her tasks, moving very slowly throughout the day. She started working at the hotel just after finishing high school. Her father had easily secured her a position as a cleaning staff at the hotel while it was in its heyday. After all, the hotel's owner and general manager, Mr. Lim, had been the cousin of her father's sister-in-law. They were practically family.

Tess stood in the lobby looking at the young Indonesian cleaner mopping the main staircase. Hani was only slightly older than she was when she first started working at the hotel performing virtually the same set of chores. Tess walked over to Hani with a bittersweet smile on her face.

"Did you already empty the ashtrays near the front door, Hani?"

"Already, mem."

“What about the dining room? Did you sweep up after breakfast ended?”

“Yes mem. Hani already sweep.”

“Shouldn’t you be cleaning the rooms by now? I noticed several guests departing with their luggage when I arrived.”

“Sorry, mem. Hani will clean rooms now. Please mem, Hani need to know number room first.”

“Joy hasn’t given you the room list for today? OK, finish up mopping and then get the room list from her. I will make sure it is ready by the time you finish.”

Tess smiled at Hani. Then abruptly turned around to head to the reception desk, almost embarrassed at her gesture. Tess was not a mean person, not least of which to the cleaning crew. But she was not used to being friendly with her coworkers. Even a smile was rare, so long as there were no customers around, at least. Tess appreciated the way Hani worked. She was shy and introvert but worked quite diligently. It had been years since the hotels stopped hiring local Malaysians for the cleaning staff and opted for the cheaper foreign labor from Indonesia. Some were good workers, others were not; but all were good gossipers. But Hani kept to herself and did her work without any outward signs of discontent.

That is the way it should be Tess thought as she turned her gaze to scatter-brained Joy at the reception desk. Joy was several years older than Hani, a local Chinese girl who spoke comparatively better English, and even had a year of university study before quitting. Yet, she was not an ideal worker. If it were up to Tess, Hani would be sitting behind the desk and Joy would be working her ass off scrubbing every inch of the hotel floors. But Joy was the niece of the general manager, Tong, Mr. Lim’s eldest son. She couldn’t fire Joy even if she wanted to.

Joy had worked at the hotel as a receptionist for three years and still could not complete her responsibilities without being reminded almost hourly. Tess had tried all manners of subtle hints to Tong, but she knew it was futile; he would never fire his niece. At least, Tess reasoned, he was smart enough not to give Joy any more responsibilities than the ones she struggled with already. Tess crossed the lobby toward Joy’s position.

“Good morning Joy. Is everything under control here?”

“Yes, Miss Tess. No problems here. As usual.”

“Yes, as usual. And as usual, I see that you have neglected to give Hani the list of rooms of guests checking out today. She is not psychic, you know?”

“Oh, that. OK, I will take a look at the computer and get it to her soon. I just want to finish

straightening up all this paperwork the night crew left strewn around the desk. They're so messy...should be fired."

"Good. Make sure Hani gets that list by the time she is finished mopping though."

Tess did not care much for Joy—partially because she was the boss' niece and partially because she was a lazy worker—but she was very clean when she did her work and offered a nice counter balance to the admittedly disorganized night crew. And a tidy presentation is important to guests entering and exiting the hotel. Tess always emphasized leaving a strong first and last impression on guests. Joy played that part well.

As the day progressed, the hotel began playing tricks on Tess. She began having moments of déjà vu. Certain first-time guests seemed like old acquaintances, and incidents that had only happened once during Tess' long career at the hotel were occurring frequently. Or was it, Tess thought, the old hotel's way of sharing their joint memories and experiences before she departed?

She began to think back to some of the stranger events around the hotel and some of the even stranger people she encountered. There was that one time where the family of Arab tourists, who had booked the VIP suite for three weeks, demanded to be fully reimbursed and offered free transport to the nearest five-star hotel. The VIP suite, although the most comfortable and expensive room in three-star hotel, was not of five-star quality. This particular family booked it without even looking at pictures online, thinking that they had got a great deal on a five-star hotel. After some yelling and ridiculous behavior on the guests' part, Tess managed to figure out that they had booked the room thinking it was five stars based on the word "Grand" appearing in the hotel's name.

Tess chuckled to herself as she walked the halls of the hotel. When she opened the door to the beachfront swimming pool, another two memories popped into her head. She recalled the Swedish family that stayed for a week during the Christmas holidays. The parents were insanely tall and pale skinned. But their four-year-old son was so fair that even his white-blond hair seemed to blend right into his skin. This child was the center of attention wherever he was...and not in a good way. He was well-behaved and quiet, but had a tendency to make unintentional scenes.

The first time was when he was swimming in the ocean just behind the hotel. Very abruptly, he began to scream as if a shark had bitten off his leg. His shrieking was so extreme that several other sunbathers ran over to see if he was alright. Tess herself had heard the screams from inside and came out to see what the commotion was all about. As the parents lifted the child out of the water, there was nothing visibly wrong with him. His screams continued, though, prompting much searching over his body for any bite marks or stings. His mother lifted a small strand of seaweed off his leg and dropped it to the sands below. As the child began to calm down, he began to say what it was that had bothered him. The seaweed on his leg...he did not like it.

It was only two days later, however, that the same child would be at the center of unwanted attention, no doubt to the great embarrassment of his parents. He had made friends with two Australian boys a few years older than him while playing the hotel swimming pool. The boys were loud and hyper, but at least their parents were quick to keep them in line. As they splashed around the pool, one of the boys farted, leaving a string of bubbles coming up from his suit. His brother thought that was funny and repeated the act. The three laughed hysterically and tried to make more bubbles. The young Swedish boy, however, did not understand exactly how they were making the bubbles. It did not prevent him from trying. When all was said and done, the Aussie boys were running out of the pool as the younger Swede sat wide-eyed, wondering what happened, as a single piece of his poop floated behind him.

Tess gagged a bit at the thought of her memory. She made a mental note to never install a swimming pool at her place. There was no way that she wanted to be responsible for cleaning up any accidents like that. She looked around the pool area for the groundskeeper of the hotel, who would normally be servicing the pool about this time, before remembering that he had taken the day off for personal reasons. Tess would not get to see him again and thank him for his hard work under her watch before she left.

“Tess. There you are. I’ve been looking for you.”

“Hello Tong. You are here early today.”

“Not really. Only a few minutes early. I wanted to make sure that I had some time to properly say goodbye to you and to thank you on behalf of my family for your dedication to the Grand Eagle over all these years. It has been a long time, you know? I was still a school kid when you started working here!”

“Yes Tong. I am old. I realize that. Which is why it is time for me to move on and let some fresh blood come in. Have you made a choice for my replacement yet?”

“Well, I figured that I would just let Joy move into your shoes. You are both so similar in so many ways. It seems appropriate. In fact, she was telling me just the other day how you have been so kind to her. She has some great ideas for this hotel. I almost can’t wait for her to start implementing them. Er...no offence, ya, Tess?”

“Oh, no Tong. No offence taken. I’m sure you will be pleased with how Joy will help you run this hotel. You probably won’t even know I’m gone.”

“Ha ha ha! Tess, of course you will be missed. But you are right. This hotel will continue to operate as normal...if not better! Er, again, no offence.”

“Tong, I think that you deserve to work with Joy, and she deserves you as well. It will be a great team, I have no doubt.”

“Thank you Tess. And good luck with your little hostel.”

“Bed and breakfast.”

“Of course. Either way, Grand Eagle is in another class altogether. You should know. Still, I will be sure to suggest to any walk-in customers your little place if our rooms are filled.”

“That’s very kind of you, Tong. And I will do the same.”

“Well, enough chit chat. I have a hotel to run, and you need to turn in your name tag and retire already. I hope that you will stop by and visit us here from time to time.”

With his typical abruptness, Tong smiled at Tess, shook her hand, and walked off. Tess could not say that she liked Tong as a friend, but they did work well together. He never second-guessed her actions, and she never challenged his authority. The invisible lines were drawn, but both knew where they stood. Tess watched him walk away through the all-glass doors and turn down the hall toward his office. She decided that she would keep her name tag for her memories, and also so that she didn’t have to follow him into the office. Instead, Tess turned toward the beach, kicked off her shoes, and walked away as the sun set.