

In the early 2000s', Jack and his grandma came to Hong Kong to seek for asylum from their home, Ethiopia. The ethnic massacre there left Jack an orphan, and his grandma, childless - both his mom and dad were executed when Jack was just a child. Arriving Hong Kong through humanitarian aid, they faced language and cultural barriers. It was difficult and almost impossible for Jack's grandma to find a permanent job. The two led a harsh life, living on a monthly government subsidy. They lived a small room in Chungking Mansions. Jack's grandma did some part-time simple sewing and stitching work and Jack started studying in a local government school nearby. For their first year in Hong Kong, they felt trapped and helpless.

One day, Jack went to pick up a free food pack at a nearby community centre. A cheerful-looking young man gave it to him with a white envelope. On the envelope, there were the words:

*"Don't give up on yourself! If you can, then pay this forward."*

Jack did not understand the words then and just took everything home. When he and his grandma realised that there was a blank cheque of HK\$100 000 inside the envelope, they were both dumbfounded. They did not know why they were given the money. Jack also did not recall whom the cheerful-looking young man was. With grateful hearts, the two went back to the community centre asking for the man but no one seemed to know him. Considering how poor they were, Jack's grandma cashed in the cheque and living conditions gradually improved for them. In time, Jack and his grandma picked up Cantonese, built life and social circles, and with the help of the staff at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Hong Kong office, Jack and his grandma became Hong Kong residents. Jack and his grandma also started to lead a regular basic life – Jack as a hard-working student, while his grandma worked as a seamstress for an African-owned tailor shop in Chungking Mansions. The two kept good thoughts for their secret angel always.

With protracted and unremitting efforts, Jack earned scholarships and became a very successful optometrist. On weekends, he volunteered at the UNHCR medical centre to look out for the less privileged. Some were troubled refugees like he once was, some were those who stayed behind in Hong Kong but did not share his lucky fate.

On his last day of service at the UNHCR medical centre, Jack was assigned an old patient. It was an old man with a familiar cheerful smile. Jack diagnosed him with cataract. Since the medical centre was not equipped to help patients with surgeries, Jack advised him to have a minor surgery at another clinic immediately. But the old man expressed that he was too broke to undergo such an expensive surgery. He thanked Jack, stood up, and began to take hesitant steps. Jack asked him to wait for a while so that he could prescribe him with some eye drops. What Jack actually did was something else...

“Here, use this three times a day. I have put some leaflets about coping with cataract in this envelope for you. Don’t lose it.”

Jack slipped the white envelope in the old man’s tote and walked him to the door. The old man thanked him and left.

When the old man got home, he took out the envelope and read:

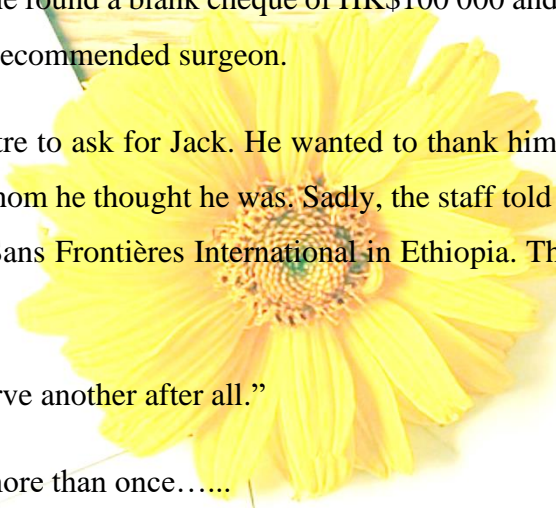
*"Don't give up on yourself! If you can, then pay this forward."*

He had already been flooded with memories and tears before he found a blank cheque of HK\$100 000 and an eye surgeon's name card. He used the money to fix his eye at the recommended surgeon.

Days later, the old man returned to the UNHCR medical centre to ask for Jack. He wanted to thank him and to verify if this African-looking Chinese-speaking doctor was whom he thought he was. Sadly, the staff told the old man that Jack had left Hong Kong to serve at the Médecins Sans Frontières International in Ethiopia. They had no idea when he would return.

The old man smiled and mumbled, “One good turn does deserve another after all.”

Had Jack known that he and this old man have crossed path more than once.....



Tony's parents were famous lawyers in Hong Kong. They were very clever when they were students, but their 15-year-old-son Tony was a weak secondary school student. Despite studying in a prestigious elite school, he always ranked bottom, so the majority of the schoolmates looked down on him, bullied him, and distanced themselves from him. Most of his teachers gave him little attention and encouragement. Even his parents saw him as a shame and spent little time with him. When they did, they mostly criticised him for his low achievements and would only nag him to study harder and more. In time, Tony became unconfident and did not like studying. He did not even like himself.

One day, Tony went to buy himself lunch at the school canteen. When he arrived at the canteen, he saw his classmate Thomas bullying a secondary 1 boy at the front of the queue. He was making the poor boy pay for his lunch. Other students just watched and did not help the boy. The weak boy refused to pay for Thomas' share and Thomas showed him his fist. Tony could not stand watching anymore and shouted,

“Don't hit him!”

Thomas turned red. He rushed down the queue and started punching Tony in the arm. He just kept pounding on him. Everyone else was too terrified.

Luckily, the new discipline master, Miss Wong, passed by in time. She pulled Thomas away from Tony and ordered him to stand aside. She saw that Tony's right hand was bleeding, so she took Tony to the medical room quickly and asked another teacher to handle Thomas.

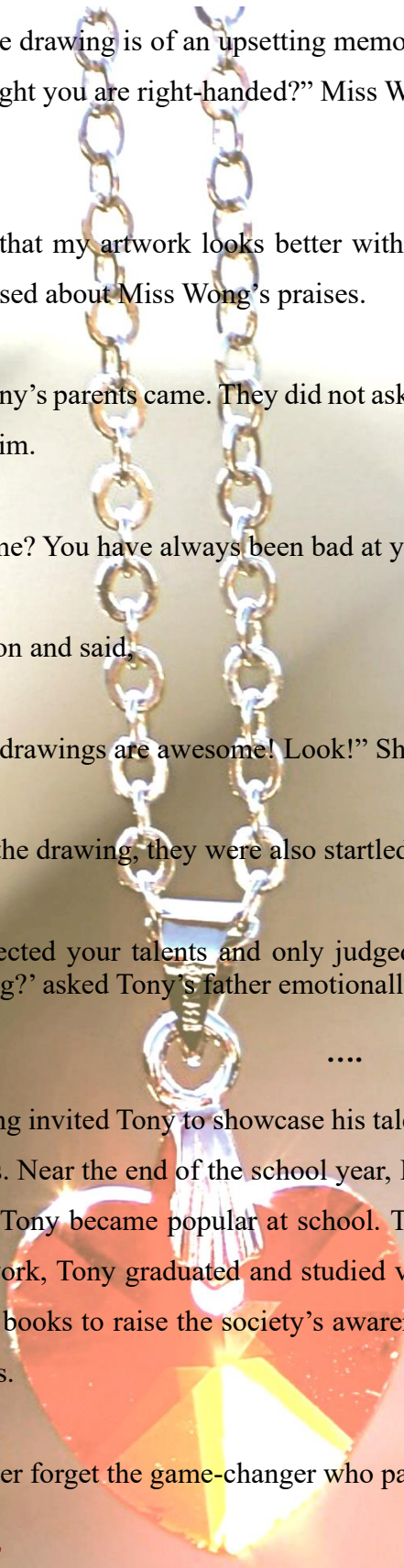
At the medical room, while wrapping Tony's bleeding hand, Miss Wong said,

“I will call your parents to ask them to pick you up to see the doctor.”

“Thank you, Miss Wong. They might not come immediately.” Tony mumbled, looking down on his feet.

“Can I have a piece of paper and a pencil to do some drawing while I wait here, please?” Tony asked timidly.

Miss Wong hugged him and gave him what he asked for. Tony was known to be right-handed, but Tony started drawing with his left hand. It was a sophisticated free-hand sketch of the bullying incident. Miss Wong was shocked; she could not believe that a secondary student could draw as competently as a professional artist.



“Tony, though what you are drawing is of an upsetting memory, your artwork is amazing! Why are you drawing with your left hand? I thought you are right-handed?” Miss Wong asked shockingly.

“I don’t know. I just find that my artwork looks better with my left hand. I draw whenever I feel stressful or upset.” Tony shared, confused about Miss Wong’s praises.

At around 6pm that day, Tony’s parents came. They did not ask about Tony’s injuries. Tony’s mom started scolding Tony the second she saw him.

“Why didn’t you listen to me? You have always been bad at your studies and now you fight with others!”

Miss Wong saw the situation and said,

“Your son is a genius! His drawings are awesome! Look!” She showed them Tony’s drawing.

When Tony’s parents saw the drawing, they were also startled. They were never aware of their son’s talent,

“Sorry son, we have neglected your talents and only judged you by your grades. Do you...do you...want to develop yourself in drawing?” asked Tony’s father emotionally.

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A few days later, Miss Wong invited Tony to showcase his talents. She arranged him to draw self-portraits for his schoolmates at lunch times. Near the end of the school year, Miss Wong also invited him to display his works at an art exhibition. In time, Tony became popular at school. Tony also became more confident with the chances given to him. With hard work, Tony graduated and studied visual arts at university. He became a famous local artist who uses his picture books to raise the society’s awareness towards bullying at school and asks people to recognise individual talents.

Till this day, Tony will never forget the game-changer who painted his world with colors.

*Every dog has its day*

If our city embraces and supports individual differences with greater enthusiasm, more individuals will glow.