

*Yau Ma Tei District, Hong Kong, Friday, 7:31 p.m. It was not supposed to be like this.*

Again the words come back to Horace Yang, persistent as the cat he kicks in the alley by his home, that wretched bag of fur that returns nightly to beg for what Horace doesn't have.

The words come back, like the blotch on his toe, a mustard-colored rot that vanishes with a touch of rice vinegar, only to bloom again when it dries.

He banishes the words from his mind, but they return.

*It was not supposed to be like this.*

They return when he awakens in his flat, which seems to shrink by the year, and again when he takes the day's work orders and prepares for the day's disappointments.

*It was not supposed to be like this. It was supposed to be different.*

The words remain after other words are forgotten. They remain after he answers a question from his son, a boy without guile and without future. At night they keep him company in bed, while he counts the ways that life has thwarted him. And now they return in full voice as he clutches a knife bought in haste to kill a man.

There should have been time to plan, time to choose the weapon and the place, perhaps even a minute to tell Mo what he thought of him first. That would have felt good, might have eased the stress. That was how it was supposed to be.

But for Horace, things are never as they're supposed to be.

It should be dark, but darkness, like silence, doesn't happen in Mongkok. A faint glow

washes in from lamps on Temple Street. Filthy and forgotten windows at the back of the restaurant shed their anemic light on crates full of rotting *choi sum*.

Horace approaches the dormant limousine, adding a few inches to his stride to speed things up.

Given more time, he could have taken control, and not had to sneak around. Why is it that people like him, who have the best minds and the keenest ambition, are the ones who can never get control?

One last look around. Except for Horace, the alley is empty. No one is passing on Temple Street behind him or on Woosung Street at the far end. If it's to happen, it must happen now.

Horace grabs the handle and throws the door wide open to reveal a small figure in the glint of the dome light.

“Who...?” The man stares up in confusion.

He drives the knife into the man's chest. They both gasp.

Up to this moment, Horace has thought only of himself: his own need for cover, for speed, for getting the thing done and getting away. And, of course, his resentment at how things have turned out.

Now, the deed done, he pauses to look at the man.

The wrong man. Not Mo Tun.

A stranger lies on the seat, eyes rigid in horror and pain. And then Horace sees what he

hasn't allowed himself to see till now.

Next to the dead man, another pair of eyes.