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IN MY THIRD YEAR OF LAW SCHOOL, I attended for four experiments in the psychology department. The first department flyer I happened across by chance; it was taped to a column in the CAW building, overlapping other flyers for an open mike night and a CD launch party. Male smokers between the ages of twenty-five and thirty. The experiment paid ten dollars for an hour and a half, and when I phoned the departmental secretary, he told me I could arrange to come in at my own convenience. With only a week before the Christmas examinations, not too many students had yet signed up.

The study turned out to be thesis research for a Masters project. I was the only subject that day, so the psychology student and I sat alone in a common room attached to the grad student offices while he asked me questions. How old was I? How long had I been smoking? Was I currently in a sexual relationship? Was I currently in a romantic relationship? Twenty-seven. Four months. No. No.

I hadn't been involved in any relationship in some six years, but I didn't mention this. With each of my responses, the tester scribbled on his clipboard and nodded as if he approved of my answers.

Then he changed the paper on the clipboard and handed it to me.

"In a moment, I will leave the room and you will watch a series of slides. On each slide, there will be a picture of a woman whom I would like you to assess according to the following scale." He pointed to the clipboard with his pen and read from the survey. "One, I find this woman extremely attractive. Two, I find this woman somewhat attractive. Three, no opinion. Four, somewhat unattractive. And five, extremely unattractive. Do you understand?"

I said I did.

"Do you have any questions before we proceed?"

I said I didn't.

I'd say the youngest pictured was probably eighteen and the oldest couldn't have been over twenty-two. In the photos, they all stood in the same pose in the same location. Standing in front of a tree, leaning backward slightly. The park was probably right in Windsor, but the background in each photo was unclear and I couldn't place the location.

None of the women was dressed especially provocatively, but none of them was dressed especially conservatively, either, and to be honest, I found all of the women appealing. But I varied my survey responses between extremely, somewhat attractive, and no opinion.

Around the twentieth photo, I noticed some of the women in the photos held a cigarette between their fingers and a thin line of smoke ran up their arm. This was the point of the experiment. I should have realized this earlier. I was meant to find the smoking women more attractive. Or less attractive. I'm not sure now. For the rest of the photos, I graded the smokers high and the non-smokers low. This is what the tester wanted, I supposed.

When it was over, the experimenter shook my hand and gave me the ten dollars in cash. I was curious about the ultimate purpose of the study, but I left without asking.



I had stopped following the assigned law readings some time in October, and by November, I had stopped going to classes altogether. This happens in law school. Some students don't survive and drift away. Members of my study groups in first and second year had, in fact, shared these stories of danger. Someone misses a few lectures here and there, and then no one even sees him in his library study carrel anymore. And then he's just gone. Classes, assignments, and exams just march on without him, and pretty soon his name and face are forgotten. Like all the study partners, I had nodded my head when these stories were shared and told myself I would never let this happen to me.

When this did happen to me, my greatest fear was of bumping into any of the people I had met in law school. Although I had no close friends there, many people in the programme knew my face, and I imagined turning a corner among the stacks only to be confronted by a classmate who would ask how my Constitutional Law paper was coming along. And since I lived on campus in a senior student apartment and I took my meals in the student union when I didn't feel like cooking, I was uneasy for about a month. I imagined the details of a family emergency just in case. It was my

father. One of his traffic court rulings had been overturned and he'd turned to drink. I had to take a break from my studies to care for him.

Most of my former classmates ventured no farther than their study carrels or the Paul Martin Law Building, though, and I never did have to explain myself.



When the Christmas break came, I took an evening train from Windsor to Toronto to spend the holiday with my father. At the last minute, I put two textbooks in my suitcase, but the pretence wasn't necessary since he was out of the house most of my visit. When he left for work in the morning and I slept late, he probably imagined that I was reading late into the night. Over the entire holiday, he only took off three days off from the courts, and the majority of that time he spent stopping in at the homes of family friends. He had bought several identical gift baskets of jams and crackers wrapped in red and green foil that he delivered in person. The friends were all couples he and my mother once spent a lot of time with, and he worked to maintain these connections after her death.

Most days I spent alone in the house, sleeping late in my old room. In the afternoons, I watched television and enjoyed the cable choices my father paid for, the Documentary Film and the History on Film Channels that he probably never turned on himself.

Sometimes I walked from room to room just to look around. My mother had never worked outside the house during her life, and she had laboured to keep each room in perfect order. Even the guest and family rooms, which were seldom used, were vacuumed and dusted once a week throughout my childhood. Although my father didn't help with these chores while she was alive, he had since taken up her cleaning routines, and all of the rooms maintained their quiet order. The carpet in the guest room even had tracks in the pile where he'd vacuumed but no one had walked.

I imagined him coming home from court at the end of the day and setting right into these tasks. He would change out of his pressed slacks and shirt shortly after he came through the door, hanging them neatly in the closet before he put on the grey sweat suit he wore around the house. Maybe he used the same orange rubber gloves my mother had always worn when she cleaned. He would crouch on his knees and scrub the corners of the kitchen floor where the mop couldn't reach.

Boxing Day was set aside for a dinner with the Wus and Xings, and father spent the day preparing a variety of dishes in that same grey sweat

suit. I came into the kitchen late in the morning and he had already begun arranging ingredients to cook in the afternoon. Pork and beef were minced in a metal bowl and he rolled balls of the meat into dumpling papers.

“There is tea on the stovetop, Xiaolong.”

He was wearing a white apron over his sweat suit and didn't look up from his work. I sat down across from him at the table and watched as he placed the dumplings in neat rows on a cookie sheet. He frowned in concentration while wrapping each piece. Beside the cookie sheet, there was a bowl of chopped cabbage and tofu that he would encase in spring roll wrappers with equal concentration. I stood to take my tea back to my room, and he reminded me to dress appropriately for company. He had pressed a blue dress shirt that he would like me to wear, he added.

During dinner, I listened as Mrs. Wu and Mrs Xing talked about their children. The Xings' daughter Samantha was finishing studying dentistry at Queens and the Wus' daughter was engaged to marry in the following fall. It seemed that the more time I spent alone, the less I was able to engage in conversation, as if talking were a habit I'd fallen out of. Still, I nodded and agreed at the points I was expected to do so. Although my father was able to prepare a meal that would remind guests of my mother's meals, he was not as adept at playing host and during dinner he only offered comments to what had already been said. Dentistry was the shrewdest of all medical specializations, my father commented, because the training period is relatively short and the stress was less intense in the long run. And an autumn marriage is best. Summer was much too humid for a proper wedding.

When my mother was alive, holiday gatherings had seemed more boisterous to me. I remember sitting on the floor colouring with the Xings' Samantha while a number of adult conversations floated about the room above us. But perhaps my childhood perception isn't as accurate as I remember. Maybe conversation had always been as strained as it was on Boxing Day.

As was expected, I excused myself after the meal, but from upstairs I continued to listen to their conversation. My father lied and said that I had helped to prepare the dinner. The eggplant was all my doing and I'd wrapped most of the spring rolls. He wouldn't boast to his company but he said that I was progressing in school. Mrs. Wu expressed her relief and I imagined all of them nodding.

Before law school, I studied History. General European History as an undergrad and mostly Medieval European History as a Masters student. It was generally agreed that such pursuits would not lead to a profession, and in private, my mother and father had threatened that they would not pay for tuition indefinitely. Mr. Xing added that at least history was a good

preparation for international law, and as a border city, Windsor was probably a good school for such a programme.

“Children sometimes have to take an indirect route,” Mrs. Xing said.

My father would have turned his face down to the table and remained silent at that point, as I had seen him do before. Although he had been the one to bring up my studies, he would have been embarrassed to continue the topic, and his guests knew enough to move onto other matters.



Although the courts weren't open, my father went into work on New Year's Eve to review cases that were postponed over the holidays, and I took an evening train back to Windsor. Most of the tenants in my building had not returned from the holidays, so the building was quiet. After putting my suitcase on the bed, I flipped through my mail and decided not to stay in.

The Detroit River is a couple of blocks across near the campus, and in January it looked frozen over. It wasn't, though. The current moved too quickly to freeze much of the river, and even when there was a crust of ice over its surface and a layer of snow on top of that, there was still the danger of falling through. Although it looked like you could walk on the ice, getting to the States wasn't as easy as hopping over the rail at the bank of the river and walking over. It wasn't as if one could simply walk into an entirely different country and expect to get away unnoticed.

When I first moved to Windsor, I came to the river once a day to run. Although I was never a standout at meets, I'd been in track throughout high school, and I kept up the running through my first six years in university. Once in grad school, my classmates would ask how I found the time, but I relaxed when running and often went just before writing term papers. The path from campus extended along the entire length of the city, and I would follow it past downtown, past the riverboat casino, and past the permanent casino once it was built. I turned back once the path started to enter suburbs, and I'd pick up speed, pushing myself as much as I could. In total, the jog took an hour, and by the time I was back near campus, I would be winded and have to sit down to rest on a bench underneath the Ambassador Bridge.

If not for the cold, I might have run that night.



I found a second posting for an experiment some time in the middle of January. By then, my neighbours had all returned to the building and the campus was again busy, so I was stayed in my apartment during the day and only went out for walks only after dinner. Individual offices closed after five, but I had run of the hallways and walked through all of the connected departments in the Chrysler Hall North and Chrysler Hall South. Of the four ads outside the Psychology office, all but one called for female subjects only, and the one study I did qualify for didn't pay cash but promised movie vouchers.

The experiment was once again held in the graduate students' common area, but the woman running the study wasn't ready for me when I arrived. I stood in the door and watched as she moved the extra chairs in the room and rearranged the two tables. She was thin and tall, probably the same age as me. Her hair was long and she wore it pulled back tight in a ponytail that hung down across her face as she stacked the extra chairs against the wall.

"May I help?" I asked.

"No, that's about it. Sit. I have to grab a few things from the other room."

I waited, and when she came out, she was holding a series of file folders jumbled in her arms.

The experiment itself had to do with memory. Using her watch to time herself, she placed a series of cards with unrelated letter in front of me for ten seconds, turned the cards over, and then asked me to list the letters I had seen. Fsut. Trel. Nial. From four letters, we moved to five, six, and then seven letters, each stack of cards from a new folder. Histiel. Bubblew. Ecotrum. As long as I could pronounce the nonsensical words in my head, I had no trouble remembering, but once into ten letters I found myself confused. Bitlerwerq. Tderibophl. Gwilghulte.

I apologized.

"No, no. You're meant to get them wrong after a certain point."

She took some time looking for the movie pass in her office desk, and while I waited I tried to think of a conversation I could start with her. She took so long, though, that I'd talked myself out of the conversation by the time she returned. At home, I put the movie pass in a drawer where I forgot about it until I was moved out in May. By then, the pass had expired anyway, and I threw it in the garbage.

At the beginning of February, I started swimming in the afternoons. The Addie Knox pool was far enough from campus that I wasn't likely to meet anyone as long as I left my apartment after morning classes began at nine. The lap swim didn't begin until one, but I would sit in a donut shop drinking coffee and read until then. Because I was swimming in the middle of the day and in the middle of the week, most of the other swimmers there were older men that I imagined were either retired or widowed, perhaps both. There were five or six of them who went regularly, and they all seemed to know one another.

They would stay for the entire two hours of the adult lane swim, half of the time paddling laps and half the time resting against the side of the pool chatting with their elbow propped up on the deck and their chest pushed out. I caught some of their conversations but mostly I swam steadily. I would do forty laps of breaststroke and thirty laps each of sidestroke and back crawl. I had tried front crawl on my first few times in the pool, but I was smoking more and more and found that the front crawl tired me out too quickly. I didn't hurry myself while swimming, and the breaststroke was my favourite. With breaststroke, most of the time is spent underwater, bobbing up only for air, and I found it much like jogging. I could relax and think of nothing but getting the most distance out of each stroke to propel myself forward at a steady pace. Afterwards in the change room, the widowers and retired men talked and joked with each other, shouting out from the tiled shower room to the benches that ran along the rows of lockers. Although old and sagging, they were as lively as boys in high school gym, and they insulted one another and egged each other into arguments. Their fun made me anxious; if they saw me often enough, they might wonder why I was at the pool in the middle of a weekday, and given time, they might even try to make me part of their sport. They never did though.



Although my father was a widower and would retire in another two years, I couldn't place him in these men's company. From what I remembered, jokes and insults were not the way he was with his friends. Not that he would have disapproved of such behaviour. I just could not imagine that he would be up for such lightheartedness.



While I was a first year graduate student in History, there was a student who was attacked in a washroom at the Leddy Library. This grad student was a year ahead of me and wasn't in any of the classes I was taking, so I didn't know him well, but I did remember seeing his face around the department. We probably saw each other dozens of times while checking our mailboxes and walking from office to office.

The day he was attacked, he had been going through microfiche in the bottom floor of the library, printing pages of texts and marking them up much the way I did when it was time for my own thesis project. He'd taken a break from his research, and in the washroom he was struck solidly on the back of the head on his way out of a cubicle. His injuries were severe, and his assailant had most likely kicked him in the head or neck after he hit the floor. The washrooms in the basement of Leddy are out of the way, and as I heard it, nobody found him until the building was closing up for the night.

I signed a card that the History secretary passed around, and she told me that he had regained consciousness after the first uncertain week in the hospital. Later, I learned that he had suffered damage to his short-term memory and would not be able to complete his degree. He joined the military after his partial recovery, and over time, people spoke of him less and less.

Why this memory should have stayed with me as strongly as it did, I am unsure. While the details of his misfortune are violent and unpleasant, there was something in the way that he was able to remake himself entirely that I thought of often. He was able to cease being what he was and become someone unlike his former self.



Around the same time I started to swim, I received a red envelope from my father in the mail. Inside was his usual hundred dollars of lucky money to celebrate the Chinese New Year. He had included a short note to tell me that I should go out for dinner and remember the coming Year of the Horse. He did not mention that this would have been my mother's year and that she would have turned sixty had she lived another three years, and I wondered if he had made the connection. Perhaps he meant for me to think of her while I sat alone in a restaurant. I did not treat myself to a dinner, though, and instead spent the money on a swimming pass for two months.

In truth, the New Year was never a special holiday in our house, any more than Christmas was. On both occasions, I was given an envelope and told that it was money that I wasn't to save. My parents didn't exchange gifts, but they did make a large purchase together to mark occasions. Usually something that they wanted for the house. A large-capacity microwave one year, and a gas snow blower another year. As far as I remember, they didn't even buy each other birthday gifts.

Like Christmas, part of the New Year holiday was dinner at our own house and trips to family friends' homes. I can recall the crowded homes of the Wus and the Xings, but there were probably more that I can no longer remember. The families in these homes included sets of grandparents who lived with their children and increased the size of the parties. The parties were loud, and for the children, there was an excitement in playing games in front of so many admiring faces. I can remember someone's grandmother urgently pulling me away from a game of Risk to ask what I wanted to do with the New Year. At that age, it felt like I was being asked what I wanted to do with my whole life. Her question confused me and she eventually released me to ask other children how they planned to spend the year.

While driving home after these parties, my father would share memories of childhood holidays. Extended families from across three provinces would gather, he said, and they would all celebrate together. There would be red envelopes from all his relatives, even from the far-off relatives whose names he was not sure of. What he seemed to remember most was the food, dozens of courses in succession and meals that would last four and five hours.

"Here," he said, "my own parents do not even live with us. Here, we live with very little connection."



On the day that the New Year came, I sat in the psychology students' common area once again. This was the longest experiment I attended, but the least interesting. First I filled out a seven page list of foods and indicated how desirable I found each choice. Chocolate cake, four for somewhat appetizing. Corn chips, three for indifferent. Buttered popcorn, one for wholly unappetizing. A second survey listed the same foods and asked how often I ate each.

My vices, then as now, were cigarettes and coffee, and I don't think I was the kind of subject best suited to the study.

At the end, the graduate student stretched a measuring tape around my waist and recorded the results. Then he asked me to step on a scale, and I saw that my weight had gone down. I was fifteen pounds less than my usual body weight. The change worried me but I attributed more to the swimming than anything else. He thanked me and gave me twenty dollars.



When reading week came in late February, the school emptied out, but all of the buildings remained open. It was understood that I would not return home to Toronto for the break, as it had been understood throughout my years in university. I was meant to spend the time off reading ahead or reviewing what had already been covered in classes. Except I had nothing to review that year.

During that week, I felt free to move among the university buildings without worrying about meeting anyone who knew my face, and I took to reading in the CAW building in the mornings before the afternoon lane swims.

Sitting across from the food court lines, I noticed a street person who seemed to have the same schedule as me. It was strange to think that homeless people kept daily routines as much as anyone else, but for several days running I watched him pick up a plastic tray and make his way through the food stands to the cash register. All I ever saw him purchase was a coffee, but he carried the single coffee on the cafeteria tray and acted out the same ritual of all students in dining halls as if he were not at all out of place.

For the most part, the homeless in Windsor stayed downtown and did not make their way to the campus, but this particular man must have had some connection to the school that had drawn him. Perhaps he studied here decades earlier, or he had estranged children who graduated from here. His face was unshaven but clean.



Once, while reading and waiting for my afternoon swim in the donut shop, I saw a professor's assistant from the law programme. She had been a marker in my Property class, a lecture section with over two hundred first-year students. I didn't think she would recognize me even if she happened to look up from her work. With school nearly finished for the spring semester, she was no doubt loaded down with final papers to mark.

She did look my way twice, though, and the second time she smiled and nodded. I nodded in return and went back to my book. The novel could easily have been taken for school reading. Maybe she thought I was cramming for exams. Or she might have thought I'd just finished exams and was treating myself to some pleasure reading. Either way, she couldn't have known I hadn't been to classes in nearly six months.

I thought of a joke I learned before starting school at all. My father was out of the house for long days then, beginning to try cases, and my mother raised me almost entirely by herself then. Much of the time, she read to me, and although my parents had moved to Canada some eight years before I was born and had always spoken English in front of me, my mother would still sometimes come across unfamiliar words and phrases in the early readers and picture books.

The passages that gave her the most trouble came from a child's book of humour, and the joke I remember best was about an armless man who lived in a bell tower. This man would toll each hour by running headlong into the town bell, but one day he overshot his mark and fell to his death below. No one in the crowd that gathered around his body could identify the dead man, but one woman was sure that his face rang a bell. My father explained the meaning of this word play to us later at dinner, and I remember that even once she understood, my mother didn't smile or react. It was, she said, a sad joke.



By the time my father telephoned in April, many of the students were moving out of my building. Exams had ended and many of the apartments were already empty. While we spoke on the phone, I watched a couple move their belongings into a U-haul trailer at the front of the building. The boyfriend kept disappearing into the building and bringing out boxes for his girlfriend to load into the trailer.

“Did you celebrate the end of the school year?” my father asked.

“Not yet.”

“It is still early. Some of your classmate still have late exams, I imagine.”

“Yes.”

He told me to make sure I celebrated with friends once school was finally over.

“In a few years, you will find that these classmates were an important part of your school days. And they will remember you the same.”

He mentioned a few names of friends he had gone through law school with. Some were still lawyers in Toronto and he saw them around the courthouse from time to time. I didn't recognize any of the names.

"I was frankly lost during much of my first year," he said. "I was too new to North American education, and there weren't too many Chinese students in the law school then. Plus I was already married and a few years older than most of my classmates. It was difficult to get to know them well. But as time went on, I found I had more and more connections."

The couple outside my window had finished packing the trailer, and after they closed the back gate, they kissed and walked back into the building together.

I had already given my notice to leave the apartment in Windsor at the end of April, but I had not yet decided how I would tell my father that I wouldn't be returning to the school the next year, and I didn't know what I would do after I told him.

"I look forward to having you at home this summer," my father said.

"Pardon?"

"The house is quiet."

He talked about selling the house in a few years and perhaps moving into a condominium. Something farther out of the city. Maybe north.

"There won't be reason to stay in the city once I retire."



Shortly before he was to retire, my father died in his car on the way home from the courthouse. He was driving alone, and the police said he might have had a slight stroke or heart attack before he went off the road and into a guardrail. After his body was taken away and the car towed, the police had gone to his house but no one came to the door. I was contacted by phone the following afternoon.

By that point, I'd already been living out of the country for over a year. At the end of the conversation, the police officer said he had appeared in my father's courtroom a few times, and the death was a sad loss. They'd not known each other well, he said, but my father had always treated him courteously during trials and had always greeted him when they saw one another in the courthouse.

My wife offered to take time of work and travel to Toronto with me, but I wanted to be alone to make the arrangements by myself. I took a month off teaching and contacted a realtor as soon as I returned to the

city. Mr. Xing had passed away earlier in the year, but Mrs. Xing and the Wus came to the funeral and spoke well of my father.

“I hope that you will still keep in contact with us from time to time,” Mrs. Wu said.

Although the house was in good condition, I cleaned it thoroughly on the days that it was shown, and it sold after only three weeks.



Before I left Windsor, I attended one more study in the Psychology department. The student running the experiment was reading when I went into the graduate common room, and she looked pleased to see me.

“You’re Xiaolong?”

I said I was, and asked if this was for thesis research.

“PhD dissertation. I started collecting the data in the September, but I had to stop to finish my coursework. I started up again in January but I’m still seriously behind. The year just seems to have gotten away from me.”

“Do you have much more to do?”

“I should finishing collecting the data this month. It will take me the summer to go through it all. After that, I don’t know.”

She was wearing jeans and a bulky wool turtleneck that made her look friendly, like a skier just taking a break from the slopes who would be happy to chat over a hot chocolate. She wore a wedding ring and that somehow calmed me.

“Are you a graduate student?” she asked.

“Yes. In History. It’s my second year in the PhD programme.”

I hadn’t intended to lie, but such things came out of my mouth when I forced myself to chat. They still do, but less and less.

She talked with me another ten minutes, and even though I had to keep up the lie I had already started, the conversation was pleasant. Unlike the other Psychology students I had worked with, she was not in a hurry.

She sat beside me at a desk and put a sheet of paper between us. The results of the study were for research purposes only, and my results would be wholly confidential. My name would never appear in the final dissertation or in any subsequent publications. I signed the disclaimer and she explained that she would read a group of words and that I was to repeat back as many of the words as I could recall. After she read the list, but before I repeated the items back to her, I would be required to count backwards by three from the number she gave me.

“Do you understand?” she asked.

I told her that I did.

“Zebra, dingo, lion, black bear, gazelle, leopard, lemur, tiger, panda, grizzly bear, eagle, penguin, ferret, kangaroo, polar bear, koala bear, sparrow, mole, gerbil, yak.”

She paused and gave me the number eighty-five to count down from. By the time I was at sixty-seven, she stopped me and asked how many of the list I could remember.

“Polar bear, black bear, koala bear.”

“Yes.”

“Tiger?”

“Yes.”

“Lion.”

“Yes.”

After only recalling five of the first set of words, I concentrated harder when she read the next list.

“Bobsledding, football, javelin, squash, hockey, discus, hurdles, wrestling, rugby, cricket, baseball, fencing, basketball, racquetball, diving, archery, figure skating, pole vault, volleyball, surfing.”

This time I was able to recall football, baseball, basketball, volleyball, racquetball, hockey and squash. I also said swimming but she told me that it wasn't on the original list.

“Sorry.”

“Not at all.”

She moved a pegboard in between us on the table for the second part of the experiment. The blue board contained about twenty pegs of different sizes arranged in a random pattern. She explained she would touch a series of pegs in a certain order and then I was to repeat the pattern by touching the pegs myself. The patterns would grow more difficult.

Leaning forward in her chair, she touched the tops of the pegs and watched each of my repetitions. Her hair was pulled back but strands that had fallen free hung down over the pegboard. Compared to the first memory task, this was a quiet activity. She would smile after each of my correct responses, and after ten minutes of this, I felt the unspoken movements of our fingers were becoming somewhat intimate. She knew I would fail to repeat the pattern eventually, but each time the pattern became more complex, I felt as if she was daring me. Finally, after a pattern of nine pegs, I was unable to repeat her movements.

She shrugged and explained we would repeat the process, but I was now to repeat the patterns backwards. I concentrated on her hand moving over the pegs, but was once again distracted by the silence in the room and her smiles. The patterns of six defeated me this time.

Afterwards she told me that her dissertation project was on associative memories. With the ability to recall meaningful memories over the ability to recall insignificant details. I nodded as if I understood and no further explanation was necessary. Payment for the experiment was a fifteen-dollar certificate at the school gift shop and bookstore, and I redeemed it before moving back to Toronto.