

關麗珊：天使與天使的光環  
**The Angel and the Angel's Halo**  
By Patsy KWAN Lai Shan  
Translated by D.E. Pollard

*Translator's Note*

The work translated here was published as an independent story in *Hong Kong Literature* 香港文學 No. 135, March 1996, but it may help the reader to know that it also exists as a section of a novel entitled *Sleeping with an Angel* 與天使同眠, which is also the title of the third section. In the novel the 'multiple personalities' which share the body of the heroine Song Keyi all act out their parts. Apart from Song Keyi herself, they are Angel, an avant-garde writer, and Anna, a good-time girl. The character Bluebird, who thinks she *is* a bird, also appears as a patient of the psychologist Hu Guowei.

In a very few places I have taken the liberty of conflating the texts of the two publications. \*

## O

I know Patsy Kwan is not a serious writer. Her attitude to her work is shockingly casual. She never reads over what she has written, she just hands it like it is to her editor. I would have the luck to be created by such an irresponsible author. Unfortunately there is nothing much I can do about it: my fate is in her hands.

As a secondary character I have had little opportunity to occupy the author's thoughts. She spilled a lot of ink on portraying the heroine, but ignored the fact that minor characters also need a rounded personality. I was very upset about that.

To begin with she just put me down as the assistant to the hero Hu Guowei, and was too lazy to even give me a name: it was just "his assistant this" and "his assistant that". Afterwards she realized that a clinical psychologist ought to have more than one assistant, especially her hero who enjoyed a territory-wide reputation: how could he manage with just one assistant? So as not to get the reader mixed up, she plucked a name for me out of thin air: Shiweiya.

I was pleased about that, yet I knew that it was just the first common English girl's name that she thought of: Sylvia. It would do for a bit part. I tried every way I knew to make Patsy Kwan think of me as more than a mere assistant, and eventually she gave me some 'secret admirer' dialogue, to bring out the hero Hu Guowei's attractiveness. What I could not forgive her was that she didn't bother to think up a real Chinese name for me, she just split off the first syllable as the surname 'Shi' and let the rest serve as a personal name 'Weiya'. I was afraid the reader would confuse me with the moisturizer that is marketed under a similar name.

Writers usually forget that supporting characters are also people. As the assistant to a clinical psychologist I had a respectable profession, presumably being a specialized registered nurse, and my work was no less demanding than Hu Guowei's. Though my social standing was inferior to that of the hero and heroine, I was very conscientious, and a good and upright person besides, so why should I be overlooked? Why did my author not concern herself as to whether I read good literature in my time off, or did a bit of writing myself? Did I have a sense of humour? Could I understand Oe Kenzaburo or Milan Kundera? It does not necessarily follow that a minor character must have low tastes, and only read gossip magazines and watch brainless television shows.

In 'Sleeping with an Angel' I was an entirely insignificant character, so much so that the author could have called me Maggie or Josephine instead of Sylvia without it making the slightest difference.

I want to play the leading role, I want to transform my fate in the author's hands, and make Sylvia unique and irreplaceable.

1

When Keyi returned to Hong Kong after two years' absence, she found things had changed. Nobody planned for the future, because nobody knew what would happen the next minute. You might be sacked, your business could fold up, the paper you had read for decades might disappear from the streets tomorrow; no one was predicting how they would find the world when they woke up the next morning. All eyes were on the present.

Keyi's multiple personality disorder had been ironed out. It wasn't that the foreign clinical psychologists were superior to the local ones, it was that when she was abroad she had her own private space. She wanted to look upon herself as a sheet of blank paper, and colour it in in a new environment, where no one (including herself) would force her to do anything she didn't want to do: she would eat when she pleased, sleep when she pleased, and work when she pleased.

For a time Keyi thought she should consult a psychiatrist, in the hope that injections and drugs might be of more help, but when driving one day to a psychiatric hospital, she passed a church in Gothic style. The sun shining on the steeple moved her with its serene beauty, so without pausing to think she braked, parked the car, and ambled into the church. It was completely deserted, and despite the sunlight coming through the stained-glass windows, darker than outside.

Keyi sat down in a pew, and stayed sitting for the whole afternoon. She asked herself, why should I consult a psychiatrist?

There were candleholders for votive candles on both sides of the church, more of them empty than filled. Keyi went over, put a coin in the offertory box, and lit a candle. But what supplication should she make? For a while she couldn't think, then the image of Hu Guowei came sharply to her mind. Her wish was for Hu Guowei's health and happiness.

Afterwards when she felt lonely or dispirited she would go to that church and sit quietly. The big church with its high ceiling, its neat rows of pews, its stained-glass windows picturing the acts of Jesus, gave her a sense of comfort. Her consultations with her psychologist got shorter and shorter, until one day the tubby foreigner told her: "You needn't come any more. I wish you joy!"

Keyi accepted his benediction with a smile, paid the bill and left. She drove to the church, lit a candle, and wished her mother and grandmother peace in heaven. She no longer had any hatred towards them. Even her father she had ceased to hate. At last she had realized that hating a person consumes much more energy than loving a person.

Actually her memory store was in great disarray. It was cluttered with too many items, some important, some not, some useful, some not. Keyi often felt there

were problems with her memory. Sometimes it was truthful, sometimes imaginary, and she could not be sure which memories were of what had really happened and which were simulated. She remembered often watching the sea as a child, and listening to the sound of the waves, but her family home was in a noisy urban area with a dense population and crowded dwellings; there wasn't even a swimming pool nearby.

She didn't know whether to believe her rather intriguing memories of Hu Guowei. So she decided to come back and put them to the test.

## O

I am thoroughly fed up with the author's attitude to her work. She still persists in this day and age in not composing on a computer. What is worse, her handwriting is an ugly scrawl, which results in lots of misprints. I can't help getting impatient as she scratches away on her lined paper, trying to describe me.

I am mystified where Patsy Kwan got her idea of how to write fiction from. Just as we begin to take shape in her mind she goes off to watch television. She comes back and writes a line, then she watches some more, or sketches through a newspaper. When she has got a bit of the plot sorted out, what do you think? She goes off and takes a siesta, and when she locates us in her mind a few hours later, she forgets to follow up the cleverly planted clues and hints. Still, it was when her brain was still fuzzy like this that I at last got my chance.

Her idea for *In Step with an Angel* was that the love between hero and heroine would be thwarted. Song Keyi would wait for Hu Guowei and Hu Guowei would wait for Song Keyi, but because of a trivial misunderstanding each would wait in vain. What a bore.

This misunderstanding is now going to hinge on me. I am not going to play the walk-on part of a secret admirer: whoever heard of a secret admirer in the nineties?

I discover Song Keyi's letter to Hu Guowei on his computer. The author has put me down simply as 'a decent sort', which is really absurd. Who is 'a decent sort'? Who is 'a bad lot'? Who is to judge?

I have already spied out Hu Guowei's password, and anyway I am more familiar with his computer than he is. Actually the author has said in passing, "Shiweiya was a computer genius", but this too is irresponsible. To know how to kill computer viruses and run a few applications is quite commonplace, something even a primary school student understands. You don't have to be a genius.

Never mind, I've already given up on Patsy Kwan. All I did was run some

virus-infected software on Hu Guowei's computer (the virus was called da Vinci, if I remember rightly; the fact that even computer viruses have names just shows the intolerable disregard she had for me); it spreads right through the system, and reduces everything to gobbledegook. Naturally Song Keyi's letter goes down the pan too.

In the limited confines of the author's imagination, the computer merely 'happened to' get a virus, which prevented Hu Guowei receiving Song Keyi's letter. Song Keyi left Hong Kong as planned. She had hoped Hu Guowei would ask her to stay, but in the end she made her way to the airport disappointed, her notebook computer still in her hand.

Since I am 'a good assistant', 'a decent sort', and a 'computer genius', naturally I can help my boss to sweep the virus clean and restore the carefully saved files to the computer. By this initiative I can make Hu Guowei feel I am 'really a rather nice girl'.

The next step is to insinuate myself into his home. When he needs to take home some material to work on, I give him a diskette with a virus, then in my capacity of 'technical expert' go to his home and clean up the virus for him.

I could have established an extra-professional relationship with Hu Guowei without the author's arrangement. The author set about creating rounded personalities for the hero and heroine from the beginning, so as to make them three-dimensional, creatures of flesh and blood, and inject interest in their encounters and twists and turns of fortune. However, she completely overlooked my existence, relegating my role, as is always the case with marginal characters, to paving the way for the next step the chief character is to take. If only she had given a little thought to it, she could have imagined me tailing Hu Guowei in a taxi, then getting all dolled up and waiting for him in a bar he frequented, then bumping into him accidentally-on-purpose. I had waited a long time for that opportunity, but she had to arrange things so that it was the hero and heroine who met in the bar: it's always the heroine who gets the breaks.

As to my looks, the author has never written a word about them. After I had used all my wiles to establish myself as a regular visitor to Hu Guowei's flat, eating with him and playing computer games with him, I had a right to some dialogue, but the author never gave me any. Our relationship should have developed, and I expected that the author would give us a steamy scene—I wouldn't even have minded leading him on—but this stick-in-the-mud author only allowed us the most limited intimacy, commenting only obliquely, "Afterwards Shiweiya brought her personal coffee cup."

I could have killed her. Why shouldn't I take my personal toothbrush, pyjamas, and my panties too, to Hu Guowei's house? Were two mature people supposed to play computer games all evening, then sit opposite each other drinking coffee? Since

the author had already stated that the hero was a man who didn't object to a one-night stand, why shouldn't he take an interest in me? Did the author conceive of me as a completely unattractive woman?

## 1

Before she left Hong Kong, Song Keyi had rented a very small apartment. Yet she owned two other apartments, one formerly her father's, the other her grandmother's. Both had painful memories for her, so she had let them through an estate agent. The rent from them went into the bank: she had not used a penny that came from people she couldn't put up with.

When she came back to Hong Kong this time she resumed possession of her grandmother's flat, and moved in herself. She remembered how strict and stern her grandmother had been. Her obsession with cleanliness was another thing she could never forget. You could see your face even in the toilet floor tiles: after using the toilet she would always wipe clean her footmarks and the splashes made when she washed her hands.

The tenants had obliterated all traces of her grandmother's occupation. After having it cleaned up Keyi moved in with her bare possessions. She liked the stains on the wallpaper, the unpolished floor, and the greasy kitchen, because they made the place seem lived in.

Her grandmother had spent the greater part of her life cleaning her dwelling. Besides sweeping, tidying and cleaning ten times a day, her life had been a blank. Keyi had feared and hated her. It was only some time after she left this world that Keyi realized that her obsessiveness stemmed from loneliness.

Keyi had sent three e-mail messages to Hu Guowei from abroad, and her computer indicated that they had been received by his, but she had had no reply. Naturally she was unaware that only Shiweiya had seen the messages.

She sat around at home for a couple of weeks. After making a call to the magazine that she did some translation work for, she had not used her newly connected telephone line. She could not work out why she had no friends in this city she had grown up in. Where were her classmates from primary and secondary school and university? Her colleagues from work? The people she had met socially? How come no friends came to mind?

Keyi listened intently to the recordings she had made in the course of her treatment, and read over the letters she had written to herself, but she could get no clue to the Song Keyi of old. When she went to the swimming pool and discovered she could swim, she could not recollect when she had learned. When she passed a

piano studio, she found Beethoven's 'Für Elise' came easily to her. She drove well, but she hadn't taken her driving test till she went abroad. After she bought a pile of books whose titles attracted her she found on reading them that she was already familiar with them. She was at a loss to know what she could do and what she could not.

After passing some time quietly like this, she began to explore the city, map in hand like a tourist. When she came across somewhere she had an impression of, she would stop and see if there were any people or events worth recalling. Sometimes when taking public transport someone would wave to her, and she would hastily return the greeting, afterwards cudgelling her brains to think who it was. She began to distinguish fact and fiction in her memory. There were traces of her personal history all over the city.

Not having got round to changing her driving licence and buying a car, Keyi travelled a lot on the MTR. Once she bought a box of cakes to take to the fashion magazine publishing house where she had worked to look up her old colleagues, but the magazine had been wound up and the office was now an investment firm. Nevertheless, she was sure that she had not just imagined that she had worked there.

Several times she hung about outside Hu Guowei's office, but could never pluck up the courage to go up. Her four e-mail letters having elicited no response, she did not know how she should address him. As a former patient, come to thank him for dispelling her psychological demon? Or as an old friend?

Wandering aimlessly along the street, she saw in the distance a bar sign in typical Hong Kong English: 'So Shine So Blue', which she interpreted as meaning 'so sunny, so depressed'. She wondered if that had a special message for her.

The bar was a tiny little place. Keyi had the feeling that people sometimes get on visiting a place that they know they have never been to, that it is somehow familiar; or on saying something, the sense that they have said it before.

Keyi sat on a bar stool and said to the bartender: "Beer."

The bartender gave her a bottle of beer and a glass. The beer was her favourite brand.

"You've made a lot of changes here," she said, pretending to be an old customer.

"I haven't had any alterations done. It's just that you haven't been in for a long time."

Keyi deduced that the man was the owner of the bar, and that he knew her. She also felt that she knew him. She asked jokingly, "Do you remember my name?"

"Anna," he said.

Anna? She knew that her multiple personality disorder had made her change into a girl called Angel, but what was this about Anna? She could remember nothing. Her mind was a blank.

"Was I a regular customer—I mean in the old days?" she asked nervously.

"No, you only came two or three times. But you always met a friend here."

"Why do you remember me?"

The bartender was drying a glass. He smiled faintly. "Because you are good-looking and sexy."

Sexy?

When she had finished her beer, Keyi got the inexplicable desire to hug a man to her, yearning for his warmth. This feeling, this entirely unanticipated rush of desire, startled and alarmed her. She blushed to the roots, and felt hot and flustered. She put down the money for the beer, and prepared to leave.

"Are you all right?" the bartender asked.

"I'm OK," she said embarrassedly. She couldn't wait to get out of the bar.

Walking along the street, into a light breeze, she felt very agitated, as if some sinful thing had emerged from deep inside her to taunt her, to warn her, to brutally tear down her defences, to mock her original sin.

Keyi lost all sense of direction; she ran blindly past a blur of people, cars and lights. She felt utterly abandoned and forlorn. Why was there no guardian angel to direct her footsteps?

She squatted down at the roadside and began to cry. She was divorced from her surroundings, crying in an empty wilderness. She wept without ceasing. Some passers-by stopped and bent over to ask if there was anything they could do, but in Keyi's eyes they were malicious apparitions seen as if in a distorting mirror. They only made her feel more alone and defenceless.

## O

Patsy Kwan has gone to have a nap again. She is so sloppy, she always starts writing before she has got the story line properly worked out. She puts her stuff together anyhow, working things out as she goes along, and when she can't think of what should follow she goes and listens to a record or has a siesta. She is still stuck over the last two years in Hu Guowei's life: should she present him as the same as ever, or as greatly changed?

While she is dozing I catch sight of the hero in his well pressed suit, standing at his office window looking at the kites circling in the sky. I take advantage of this critical juncture to explore our fates with him.

——Look, she's gone to sleep again.

——Writing is an extremely demanding business. The fermentation period is normally a lot longer than the actual writing process.

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**YAM Ching Yin 任正賢**

*Female Stereotypes*, 1996.

Black and white print, 68 x 68 cm.

*Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1996.*

—You're the hero: naturally you take her side.

—It's you who complain too much. Everyone has to keep to their role.

—I want to control my own fate.

—What do you guess the ending will be? How are we to have control ourselves?

—I don't want to get into prediction, I want to create. On the basis of what she wrote before, you ought to choose me. We should be already married, which means Keyi will have to go back disappointed. Readers usually like novels that end with the heroine sobbing her heart out, and I'm all for it myself.

—That would distort the authorial intention.

—A good author accommodates the plot to suit the characters' development. You may not know that I made her give me a more meaty role.

—That's where you're wrong. Everything that you have done was in the author's plan. If she didn't put it into words, that was because she wanted to give the readers room to exercise their imagination. She thought that episode about the computer virus had been sown with enough clues to enable the reader to twig what it was all about.

—Why do you defend the author at every turn?

—Our present conversation is already in the author's consciousness or subconsciousness. A character in a book can't get away from the author's control.

—I don't accept that. Are you telling me that if I had gone along with her the story would have turned out as it has?

—Actually your rebelliousness was from the beginning programmed into your role: your character was not as flat and uninteresting as you thought.

—You mean we have no way of making a choice? Supposing we . . .

—The author stated at the outset, through the mouth of the heroine, "Life has no premisses", "Reality has no 'supposing's." At that time you would have been in my office, but she hadn't thought of you. At that stage she only intended to write a short story.

—To your way of thinking, our relationship ought to have stopped at having a meal and coffee at your home?

—I don't know. I really don't know. Whether you fall in love with someone or are completely indifferent to them is out of your hands.

—I want to get you, I want to be the final victor.

—I don't know how you define 'get', but I'm pretty sure it has nothing to do with love.

## 1

Hu Guowei liked to stand and look out of his ceiling-to-floor office window. Though he was surrounded by commercial towers, he still hoped to see some of the birds that survived in the city. A client called Bluebird had made an indelible impression on him. He had hoped she would come back, but she hadn't. He didn't want to classify her crudely as a case of paranoia, for no other patient had implanted such a firm conviction in him, making him believe for the space of one or two seconds like Bluebird herself that she really was a blue bird.

Hu Guowei's intercom telephone rang. He picked up the receiver and heard his assistant say, "There's a young lady to see you. She hasn't got an appointment." Without waiting for more information, he said, "Send her in."

As he drew the curtains again, Hu Guowei saw a blue bird fly past the window.

Such a small bird ought not to be able to fly so high. He hurriedly pulled the curtains back, but the bird had disappeared from sight: that blue flash was all he got of it. He would have stuck his head out of the window to search for it if his building had had windows that opened, but unfortunately its glass curtain walls only enabled one to look out by virtue of the special nature of their material; their basic quality of a wall was unaffected.

Though one got the illusion of being able to see the outside world clearly from inside, actually one knew nothing of it. Was it cold or hot? Was the wind strong or light? Was it noisy or quiet? Was the air pure or polluted? One couldn't tell.

Hu Guowei pulled the curtains to again. Following a knock on the door and his "Come in", his assistant brought Song Keyi and her file in. They had both rehearsed this re-encounter a thousand times in their minds. Song Keyi had thought of a thousand different ways of explaining why she had come back to see him, and he had worked out a thousand ways of reacting to her appearance. But now the moment came, every thought fled. His assistant signed to Keyi to sit down, put down the file, and nodded to Hu Guowei to indicate that she was leaving. Hu Guowei said to her, "You can go home. Just put up the 'closed' sign and lock the outer door."

The assistant nodded and smiled. She closed the door quietly after her.

Shiweiya breathed a deep breath when she closed the door of the flat. She had given up her job after she moved in with Hu Guowei. She had devoted herself to being the woman in the background. But within a year she had realized that this wasn't what she wanted.

Before she moved in she had got Hu Guowei to agree to her refurbishing the flat. Now looking at all the appointments of her own designing, they proved to Shiweiya that this was not her home. She could change everything in the flat, but she could not change its atmosphere, or to put it more imaginatively, its personality.

Sitting on the Italian sofa she had chosen herself, she was aware that its curve put pressure on the spine, and wished she had back the original black sofa, on which she had on her own prompting kissed Hu Guowei on the forehead, cheeks, behind the ears, and on the lips. After the new sofa was delivered Hu Guowei showed no sign of disapproval, but he never sat on it. He sat on the floor to watch television, sat on an upright chair at the worktable to read, write and use his computer.

She bought a new sixteen by nine flat-screen television and laid out a selection of videos, but Hu Guowei only liked to watch his old ones, like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Birdy*, *The Double Life of Veronica*, and *Wings of Desire*, films she could see twice at the most, but which he never tired of watching.

After the new audio equipment was installed Shiweiya made a new selection of discs every day, five at a time, and got him to guess the name of the songs as a game.

Hu Guowei forgot about his nightlife. His life became healthy and regular, consisting of going to work, coming home, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays going to the gym to work out, when he got home an hour and a half later than usual, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at home listening to music, reading or watching videos. Occasionally he and Shiweiya would go out with friends or relatives, and on their birthdays and special festivals book a table for a meal out, usually a candle-lit dinner.

Shiweiya gradually realized that she was peripheral to the course of his life. He lived in a self-sufficient world, absorbed in his reading, thinking and private pleasures. She tried to think of ways to break in: she read his books, watched his videos and listened to his music with him, but still she stood outside the window of his mind. She tried sedulously to approach closer, but when she thought only a hair's breadth separated them, she collided with a glass curtain wall, and they looked at each other in consternation.

A look of consternation froze on Hu Guowei's features. Neither was willing to speak first, neither being sure of how they stood with the other. If he said, "I've missed you, Keyi," and she said, "Dr Hu, I've come to thank you"; or if she said, "Guowei, I've missed you," and he said, "Miss Song, it's nice to see you again," it would have been too much for either of them to bear.

After they had stared at each other for some time, Keyi went up and put her arms around him. She had spent too much of her life in the labyrinth of words, twisting and turning and locking herself again in the prison of language. At this point there was nothing she wanted to say to him, nothing. Not a word.

The look of consternation was frozen on Hu Guowei's face. He raised his hands hesitantly and returned the embrace. He could feel she had got a lot thinner: his fingertips could trace the bones in her back and shoulders. He remembered her skin was fine and smooth, but he was quite content to keep his hands on her clothes and hold her lightly. His mouth and nose brushed against her hair. Her hair was very long, and had just been washed with an unscented shampoo. It tickled his face, and involuntarily he started to laugh.

When he laughed, Keyi laughed too. They laughed as if they had just heard the best joke in the world, uncontrollably. Keyi was not used to laughing out loud, and she had to struggle for breath. Hu Guowei pulled her to him, and when they had calmed down he lightly kissed her hair, her neck, the back of her ears, her cheeks. He treasured this sensation, because he loved her deeply. And yet, though

he had long been conscious of this love, he had almost reconciled himself to her leaving and letting their attachment fade with neglect. In the last analysis, he loved himself best.

In the end, she loved herself best.

In taking such great pains to accommodate him and please him she discovered her own self was being obliterated. She went to Hu Guowei's gym and played around with the equipment until he was ready to leave and they could dine together. She watched his collection of videos with him, only daring to watch the films she herself liked when he was not at home. She found his books unspeakably boring, but read them again and again to acquire a common language, but in the end could not discuss a book properly with him, because their viewpoints differed.

Who said that to win a man's heart you had to first please his stomach? Acting on this dictum, Shiweiya learned Chinese, Western and Japanese cuisine. She hoped that Hu Guowei would take a liking to her cooking, and thought a new menu every day would surprise and delight him, and make him grateful to her for providing so well for his bodily comforts. But the truth was Hu Guowei had never been particular about his food: he would swallow anything that wasn't too unpalatable. Finally Shiweiya realized that to spend half a day in the kitchen to prepare fine food for him was like racking one's brains to find a colour scheme to please someone who was colourblind. Of all the demands Hu Guowei made on life, that he made on food came bottom of the list.

Having dropped cooking, she enrolled on several courses in computing. She found there was no software on the market to facilitate a clinical psychologist's work. Despite the fact that the market was very small, and the protection of intellectual property copyright was inadequate in Hong Kong, with 3,000-dollar software being pirated and sold everywhere for 300 dollars, Shiweiya still had this impulse to design a software package for them. It was familiar territory for her, she knew the needs of clinical psychologists and their assistants. Yet when she pressed the first key on the keyboard she discovered there were large gaps in her knowledge. So she buckled down to reading extensively, and gradually gained entry into an intellectual world that interested her.

After they began to lead their own lives, a new harmony emerged in the space they shared. In their flat of a thousand-odd square feet they each had their separate existence: when Hu Guowei was in the sitting room Shiweiya was sleeping, and when she woke up and started to work he had grown tired and went to bed.

When was the last time he had kissed her? Neither could recall exactly. Shiweiya remembered turning her face away, and him hesitating; then he started chuckling, as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. She would never forget the

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**YU Tze Man, Ray** 余子文

Enjoy the Fine Menu Tonight, 1996.

Floppy, ink brush, wok and stove, 54 x 48 x 40 cm.

*Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1996.*

expression on his face; it should have wounded her. But in fact she did not feel wounded in the least. In this moment of awkwardness she found a kind of release: she would no longer pay any heed to this man's moods, she would no longer worry how long their relationship would last, nor seek to know how he felt towards her. His private thoughts, his likes, his loves, his habits, all these things ceased to concern her.

She turned away and lay with her back to him. She noticed for the first time that the bed was too soft. His original mattress was thin and hard, but she had wanted to change the feel of everything here, she wanted to imprint her identity in every corner; yet all the time she herself preferred the original furniture and decoration. She appreciated and was grateful to him for the tolerance he showed her. She had turned the whole flat upside down, yet he had not uttered a word of

protest.

He was such a kind man, and she was going to lose him, but from another point of view, if you can lose something, perhaps it never belonged to you: it may have come into your hands as an accident of fortune.

“Does this bed seem too big to you?”

“Mm, it’s a bit too soft.”

“I’ll have the mattress changed tomorrow, all right?”

“You do what you think best.”

“Then I’ll change it for a softer one, so that you get an even worse night’s sleep, as long as you suffer in silence.”

“Fair enough,” Hu Guowei responded with a smile.

Shiweiya was rather loath to part with him, but a relationship one had to work so hard to keep up eventually got too much to put up with. She hoped that one day she could finish the computer software she was designing, and she hoped that then Hu Guowei would still be the best thought of clinical psychologist in the city; the software could then reduce his workload, and he could concentrate his energies on attending to the bothersome patients attracted by his fame.

Hu Guowei was aware of the change in her, and his logic told him that now she had come to this pass, her next step would be to leave him. When that happened he would be upset, but the upset would not last very long, and his life would return to an orderly pattern. The first thing he would do would be to have the flat redecorated.

Neither party to the relationship felt the need to prolong it unconscionably. If they made a clean break now, they would both have happy memories to look back on. If they let it drag on till recriminations started, it would trail an ugly tail.

This affair had been built on Shiweiya’s efforts and persistence, and it was up to her to end it. She was aware that she could not compete with the Song Keyi in Hu Guowei’s heart, and a triangular relationship was a little too crowded. Furthermore, since the image of Keyi was stored in Hu Guowei’s heart, it would be embellished by his imagination, and could only grow and magnify, and become more beautiful. Just because she did not exist, she was an invincible rival.

She had sneaked a look at Song Keyi’s file and the letters she had written Hu Guowei, so knew the basic facts of her multiple personality disorder. She had thought that if she could put Keyi out of the picture, she could one day get through to him. But it was not to be.

Shiweiya had attended a Christian primary school, and gone on to a Buddhist secondary school, but she had no interest in religion. She had no hangups of the Song Keyi or Hu Guowei kind, and chose to be neither angel nor devil, but an ordinary mortal who had no need of even a guardian angel, as she aspired after only

an ordinary happiness.

As she closed the flat door behind her, Shiweiya experienced a sense of release. It didn't make sense to devote all your time and thoughts to pleasing one person. She decided to spread her investments in future, some on building her own career, some on loving with all her heart someone who loved her. She gave a great deal of consideration to composing her parting words to him. Eventually she left a message on his computer, and at the same time copied it onto a floppy disk so that he could not miss it.

In the belief that the shortest letters are the most memorable, she simply wrote:

*Guowei:*

*I love you. I am leaving you for that reason and no other.*

*Look after yourself!*

*Weiya.*

Shiweiya remembered when she got out onto the street that she had left her coffee cup in Hu Guowei's flat. The intimacy of their closest physical contact was no greater than that she had experienced when they two had sat opposite each other drinking coffee. She put her bags in her friend's car and told him, "You go on ahead. I'll follow later."

Shiweiya did not want to leave her personal coffee cup behind, but she also wanted to linger there a while. What she had once plotted and schemed to get hold of at any price seemed to have existed in order to be now abandoned.

The setting sun shone on her, imparting not oppressive heat or blinding light but a gentle warmth. Seeing her shadow cast on the pavement, she played with its shape by moving her feet. She remembered she had played with her shadow every day in her lonely childhood. She remembered the little song they had been taught to sing in the church primary school:

"A door has one thickness, but it has two sides. I am on the inside; which side are you on?"

"A door has one thickness, but it has two sides. I am on the inside; which side are you on?"

Keyi hummed this tune softly in Hu Guowei's embrace. Hu Guowei recognized it. He asked casually, "Why did that tune come to mind?"

"I don't know. Sometimes certain pictures or pieces of music keep occurring to me, of their own accord. I am always shut in or shut out in the cold."

"Well, we're both indoors now." Hu Guowei had no need to analyse Keyi's psychology any more; he just wanted to stand beside her, to love and protect her.

This scene seemed very familiar to Keyi: their dialogue, their proximity, their

postures, all seemed to have been thoroughly rehearsed and now expertly performed. Whether it really was a repeat or the product of her own imagination she couldn't be certain, but Hu Guowei's body did have a mysterious familiarity.

She had thought about the meaning of life, had plunged into the thick of it, had adapted to society's conventions, had flattered many prejudices, had performed many duties to the letter, but she felt that more than half of what she had done she had done in vain, and for another third of her life she had lost her way. The remainder consisted of the pursuit of people and things based on impulse. She wanted to lean on him to rest a while. She hoped he would give her courage, encourage her to continue her progress, for she was not as strong as her manner indicated, not as decisive as her actions showed. She was a bundle of contradictions, she needed a guardian angel, a kindly light to lead her.

It seemed to him this embrace had lasted half a century. He led Keyi by the hand out of his office and out of the commercial tower which had been vacated by all the people employed there. In the ground floor vestibule they met the duty guard. He said: "Working late tonight, Dr Hu."

"Yes indeed," he replied pleasantly.

They lived in the real world: they could not run into each other's arms and stay clinging together for ever. Hu Guowei did not know what he could give her; he only knew that whatever road Keyi took he would be at her side.

They had to find somewhere to eat. He asked her, "What do you feel like?"

"I don't mind. I've never been fussy about food."

He smiled and opened the car door for her. Then he took the driver's seat and set the car in motion without any particular destination in mind.

"Do you remember writing to me that you were going to give me one of those mirrors inscribed 'A benevolent heart, a benevolent art' to wish me a prosperous career?" Hu Guowei asked with a smile.

"No, I haven't the slightest recollection of that," Keyi replied, baffled.

"Have you ever thought of writing a novel?" he asked casually.

"I do have one or two ideas, but I don't know if I can put them into words. I'm afraid I might warp my meaning."

"None of us can be certain 'meaning' exists."

"Before I came up to see you I spent the whole day sitting in a church. I like a church with no people in it, no preaching, no sound of hymns or prayers. I think an empty church is the nearest you can get to spiritual peace."

"That's nice."

"I'd like . . . I'd like to write a serious novel—*The Angel and the Angel's Halo*."

"I'll be your first reader."

The night in the city is a changing world. A unique story unfolds under the lights of every flat. The denizens of darkness emerge onto the streets. On buses and trains people drag their weary bodies home, while others set out from home batteries charged. In dim corners begin to weave the temptations of the empire of the night, fallen beauty, degenerate pleasure, still pursued by moonlight youths and neon nightbirds.

They exchanged smiles in the car. Hu Guowei remembered his instant noodles at home, and without seeking her consent, for it would have been superfluous, he turned the car round and drove home.

No one would give an ordinary car driving along the road a second glance. But when it rose effortlessly into the air and started flying, the passers-by's jaws dropped and they cried out in amazement to see it disappear into the starry sky.

Five minutes later the streets returned to their normal business.

## O

Somehow or other the story has come to an end. I still think Patsy Kwan is not a serious author.

The one to end up choosing to go her own way should have been Song Keyi: why is she so dependent? I think it should have been me who soared up into the sky with Hu Guowei. Why did it have to be me who went her own way? Why did it have to be me who gave him up?

It's true I got more and more exposure as the story progressed, but I don't know if that was because I kept on at her or because she had planned things to develop in that way. She even mentioned, though only in a few words, that I had had a lonely childhood.

Was I playing with my shadow, or my shadow playing with me? Did I bring about this conclusion by my own exertions? Should I carry on trying to create my life?

No, I don't like this story at all. And I take leave to doubt whether a novel like this will find many readers. City people lead very busy lives: how many would take the time and trouble to follow this abstruse kind of stuff? If it were me, I would go for a nice weepy triangular affair, with the hero pursuing alternately two beautiful women, and having to choose between the spirit and the flesh and love and hate. I would have the hero and heroine bound together by the ties of tenderest affection, but him falling for the physical charms of another woman. The combination of tender love and carnal desire has always been the best recipe for good sales. From my point of view as a character in a novel, I naturally hope I will come to

life in the mind of the reader, but how many readers will choose a novel that they can't classify? And so how many readers will remember Shiweiya?

The author obstinately refused to listen to my advice, but I have no option but to go along with everything she has written, such is the inequality between author and character. Patsy Kwan has wasted her opportunities. She could have created a beautiful romantic fantasy, but instead her idea was to reconstruct some kind of truth. She doesn't realize that novels are just diversions made out of day-dreams. She always thinks she is in the right.

Though I am so fed up with her, I still intend to work away in her consciousness, and prevail on her to allow me the final victory. I want to be the master of my own fate.

Patsy Kwan, how about rewriting your story from page ten of your manuscript?

Trust me, the formula I propose will boost your sales by at least 10,000 copies. Make a different ending for me, it's not much to ask.