

From Chinese Cinderella

Growing up in a wealthy family in 1950s Hong Kong, Adeline Yen Mah should have had an enviable childhood, but she was rejected by her dominating stepmother and despised by her brothers and sisters. She was sent to a boarding school and left there. In this extract from her autobiography she relates one of the few occasions when she went home.

Time went by relentlessly and it was Saturday again. Eight weeks more and it would be the end of term ... in my case perhaps the end of school forever.

Four of us were playing Monopoly. My heart was not in it and I was losing steadily. Outside it was hot and there was a warm wind blowing. The radio warned of a possible typhoon the next day. It was my turn and I threw the dice. As I played, the thought of leaving school throbbed at the back of my mind like a persistent toothache.

'Adeline!' Ma-mien Valentino was calling.

'You can't go now,' Mary protested. 'For once I'm winning. One, two, three, four. Good! You've landed on my property. Thirty-five dollars, please. Oh, good afternoon, Mother Valentino!'

We all stood up and greeted her.

'Adeline, didn't you hear me call you? Hurry up downstairs! Your chauffeur is waiting to take you home!'

Full of foreboding, I ran downstairs as in a nightmare, wondering who had died this time. Father's chauffeur assured me everyone was healthy.

'Then why are you taking me home?' I asked.

'How should I know?' he answered defensively, shrugging his shoulders. 'Your guess is as good as mine. They give the orders and I carry them out.'

Comment [MK1]: Foregrounding of time- imply that author is paying particular attention to it and in this case because she values her education and does not want school to end.

Comment [MK2]: Depress and wistful tone

Comment [MK3]: Reinforces that time is going by too fast for her preference

Comment [MK4]: Countdown, shows concern for event that is about to happen in this case- the end of school.

Comment [MK5]: Cesura to show her despair at upcoming event

Comment [MK6]: Sense of despair that is conveyed through the tone, foreboding creates tension

Comment [MK7]: The thought of leaving school in eight weeks is affecting her present state

Comment [MK8]: Pathetic fallacy- weather reflecting her present emotional state

Comment [MK9]: Despair at problem has become physical pain that is constantly haunting her. Metaphor- pain is almost physical

Comment [MK10]: Tension is created, unexpected interruption, emphasised by the punctuation.

Comment [MK11]: All thoughts related to home are immediately negatively

Comment [MK12]: Unclose relationship, only goes back when someone dies.

Comment [MK13]: Implication of a distant relationship, chauffeur is sent to pick her up not family. Chauffeur is more aware about family situation than she is

Comment [MK14]: Cold, emotionless relationship, short sentences, uncaring/offended tone foreshadows relationship with father. But also a good example of the traditional roles and shows the hierarchy of power and control within the household. Chauffeur is merely given instructions and told to carry them out.

During the short drive home, my heart was full of dread and I wondered what I had done wrong. Our car stopped at an elegant villa at mid-level, halfway up the hill between the peak and the harbour.

Comment [MK15]: Short drive and yet family did not come to pick her up

Comment [MK16]: Dread at going home instead of the usual excitement

Comment [MK17]: Fear and apprehensive, she immediately relates home to a place that she goes to because of her wrong-doing and punishment. Home is not a place that she associates with love and family.

'Where are we?' I asked foolishly.

Comment [MK18]: Distant relationship, is not even aware of her family moving homes, not informed of any of these things

'Don't you know anything?' the chauffeur replied rudely. 'This is your new home. Your parents moved here a few months ago.'

'I had forgotten,' I said as I got out.

Ah Gum opened the door. Inside, it was quiet and cool.

Comment [MK19]: Atmosphere of the house foreshadows the poor relationship within the family, cool not warm and quiet which suggest isolation and distance within the family

'Where is everyone?'

Comment [MK20]: No one had even bothered to come out to greet her even though they didn't pick her up from boarding school. Instead, Ah Gum the maid is there to welcome her home. Everyone is doing solitary activities, no family bonding.

'Your mother is out playing bridge. Your two brothers and Little Sister are sunbathing by the swimming pool. Your father is in his room and wants to see you as soon as you get home.'

Comment [MK21]: Even though none of them are busy, they still did not bother to pick Adeline up from school

'See me in his room?' I was overwhelmed by the thought that I had been summoned by Father to enter the Holy of Holies - a place to which I had never been invited. Why? ...

Comment [MK22]: Shows the degree of distance between the father and daughter. Daughter entering father's room is an overwhelming thought; something that should occur on a day-to-day basis is actually uncommon and overwhelming.

Timidly, I knocked on the door. Father was alone, looking relaxed in his slippers and bathrobe, reading a newspaper. He smiled as I entered and I saw he was in a happy mood. I breathed a small sigh of relief at first but became uneasy when I wondered why he was being so nice, thinking, Is this a giant ruse on his part to trick me? Dare I let my guard down?

Comment [MK23]: Formal tone once again shows distant relationship as well as the traditional family roles, father and daughter not close.

Comment [MK24]: Scared place and she is in awe which implies she has never entered his room before. Reference to bible- Jewish temple

Comment [MK25]: Use of short sentences, question mark and caesura to show build up of tension.

Comment [MK26]: Fear, apprehension, creates tension.

Comment [MK27]: Has to knock on door instead of just entering shows respect and also the degree of separation between them. Also shows typical family roles, and the respect that she has for her parents.

'Sit down! Sit down!' He pointed to a chair. 'Don't look so scared. Here, take a look at this! They're writing about someone we both know, I think.'

Comment [MK28]: Attention and sensitivity to these details suggest relationship is not usually good, she is afraid and looking for clues that might inform her of the reasons that she was summoned into his room.

Comment [MK29]: Temporary relief that Father is in a happy mood and that she is not in trouble for anything.

He handed me the day's newspaper and there, in one corner, I saw my name ADELIN YEN in capital letters prominently displayed.

Comment [MK30]: Shows she is normally defensive when she is at home, mistrust within the relationship, she is not at ease around her family.

Comment [MK31]: Once again, a lot of rhetorical questions to show the build up to tension once again.

'It was announced today that 14-year-old Hong Kong schoolgirl ADELIN JUN-LING YEN of Sacred Heart Canossian School, Caine Road, Hong Kong, has won first prize in the International Play-writing Competition held in London, England, for the 1951 - 1952 school

Comment [MK32]: Stereotypical family roles, children are very obedient towards parents and is in no way disrespectful.

Comment [MK33]: Her participation in this competition shows her passion towards school and the importance of it.

year. It is the first time that any local Chinese student from Hong Kong has won such a prestigious event. Besides a medal, the prize comes with a cash reward of FIFTY ENGLISH POUNDS. Our sincere congratulations, ADELINE YEN, for bringing honour to Hong Kong. We are proud of you!

Is it possible? Am I dreaming? Me, the winner?

I was going up the lift this morning with my friend C.Y. Tung when he showed me this article and asked me, 'Is the winner Adeline Jun-ling Yen related to you? The two of you have the same uncommon last name.' Now C.Y. himself has a few children about your age but so far none of them has won an international literary prize, as far as I know. So I was quite pleased to tell him you are my daughter. Well done!

He looked radiant. For once, he was proud of me. In front of his revered colleague, C.Y. Tung, a prominent fellow businessman also from Shanghai, I had given him face. I thought, Is this the big moment I have been waiting for? My whole being vibrated with all the joy in the world. I only had to stretch out my hand to reach the stars.

'Tell me, how did you do it?' he continued. 'How come you won?'

'Well, the rules and regulations were so very complicated. One really has to be dedicated just to understand what they want. Perhaps I was the only one determined enough to enter and there were no other competitors!'

He laughed approvingly. 'I doubt it very much but that's a good answer.'

'Please, Father,' I asked boldly, thinking it was now or never. 'May I go to university in England too, just like my brothers?'

'I do believe you have potential. Tell me, what would you study?'

My heart gave a giant lurch as it dawned on me that he was agreeing to let me go. How marvellous it was simply to be alive! Study? I thought. Going to England is like entering

Comment [MK34]: She has a duty in making her parents, family and country proud of her achievements, shows the importance of honour and 'face'.

Comment [MK35]: Winning this competition is her equivalent of a fairy god mother, it is her opportunity to go to school and to be away from home. Her joy and excitement at winning this also creates pathos as it implies how much she dreads being home and how desperately she wants to get away from her family.

Comment [MK36]: Excitement, overwhelmed, surprised and overjoyed. Rhetorical questions are used to express her disbelief at the possibility of winning the competition. Short sentences and punctuation. Transition from previous tension- summoned by father- is released and transform into excitement. Also isolation: she had not known she won and she had not inform her family about her participation in this event.

Comment [MK37]: Unaware of anything that is happening with his own daughter and if not for his friend, he would have not have even known of this. Shows distance in the relationship and also his lack of concern and care for his daughter.

Comment [MK38]: Friend does not even know of this daughter than he has, it shows the he does not talk about her and does not tell colleagues about his daughter.

Comment [MK39]: Sense of pride and face in front of colleagues, shows there is competition between the two men and he immediately compared to other instead of being glad for this daughter because of achievement. He is only proud because of the 'face' that she has given him through winning this competition and not really proud of her.

Comment [MK40]: Importance of earning 'face' for her parents. He is only proud of her because she has given his something to boast to his colleagues about. In addition, it also show how important this is as it is this event that has made him proud and radiant 'for once'.

Comment [MK41]: The thought of an opportunity to go study has left her feeling really excited. The use of hyperboles emphasise this and her excitement is conveyed through the tone of her voice.

Comment [MK42]: Distant relationship, father has no confidence in Adeline and his lack of knowledge about this subject shows that he does not know that she even entered the competition and much less about her writing talents, he is surprise that she has won this competition.

Comment [MK43]: Also has to be very humble about her achievements and not boastful- family duties.

Comment [MK44]: Suggest that even a mere question that he asks her is a test, approvingly is an interesting choice of verbs as he is not happy but pleased that she answered the question as he wanted her to,

Comment [MK45]: Asking a question is bold, shows distant relationships, and lack of communication. However, it also shows her degree of reverence and respect towards him, does not want to be rude and disrespectful at all. Gender roles- brothers going to England to study at university.

Comment [MK46]: He is unaware of any of her interests, talents- lack of communication within the relationship.

Comment [MK47]: Shows the degree of excitement, emphasised by the use of hyperbole.

heaven. Does it matter what you do after you get to heaven?

But Father was expecting an answer. What about creative writing? After all, I had just won first prize in an international writing competition!

'I plan to study literature. I'll be a writer.'

'Writer!' he scoffed. 'You are going to starve! What language are you going to write in and who is going to read your writing? Though you may think you're an expert in both Chinese and English, your Chinese is actually rather elementary. As for your English, don't you think the native English speakers can write better than you?'

I waited in silence. I did not wish to contradict him.

'You will go to England with Third Brother this summer and you will go to medical school. After you graduate, you will specialise in obstetrics. Women will always be having babies. Women patients prefer women doctors. You will learn to deliver their babies. That's a foolproof profession for you. Don't you agree?'

Agree? Of course I agreed. Apparently, he had it all planned out. As long as he let me go to university in England, I would study anything he wished. How did that line go in Wordsworth's poem? *Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.*

'Father, I shall go to medical school in England and become a doctor. Thank you very, very much.'

Adeline Yen Mah

Comment [MK48]: Mere joy at opportunity to study shows how important her studies are to her. The use of hyperbole to emphasize this

Comment [MK49]: Once again, family roles, never disrespectful to parents, always answer when expected to, duty to answer.

Comment [MK50]: Use of punctuation and relatively short sentences to show her excitement about winning the competition and the possible opportunity of studying abroad.

Comment [MK51]: She has already given thought to her future, shows her passion for it and her desire to be able to study.

Comment [MK52]: His criticism is brutal and is factually, bluntly delivered. He does not care about her desires and interest. It also shows the stereotypical idea and reaction towards a career that is creative- writer.

Comment [MK53]: Even after his harsh and blunt criticism she did not want to be disrespectful and instead, waited obediently in silence for her father to say something.

Comment [MK54]: Stereotypical gender roles and gender jobs and what women at that time are expected to do. Not given any choice about their future, life is dictated by parent's wishes. Adeline is being ordered to study what she wants to do, her interest and passions are not even considered and deliberated by her dad.

Comment [MK55]: Not really a question as he has already made it really made it clear that she will do as he wants her, he 'scoffed' at her interest and desires. His certainty that she will do as he wishes is shown through the repetition of modal verbs.

Comment [MK56]: The importance of studies to Adeline is shown through her acceptance to do anything even that her dad wishes. Also shows her duty in respecting and fulfilling her parents wishes even if they do not match up to her own personal wishes and desires.

Comment [MK57]: Shows her duty to do as he wants her to and what he has planned for. In addition, her willingness to do anything also shows the family roles and the importance of obedience towards her parents.

Comment [MK58]: Use of poem quotation to emphasis her feelings and excitement

Comment [MK59]: Excited and overjoyed at the mere thought of being able to go to university in England even if it is not what she initially wanted to do.

Comment [MK60]: Formal ending and thanks even though it is not what she wants to do emphasizes that she has to be obedient and respectful towards her parents.

Comment [MK61]: Importance of study to her and gratitude at being given the opportunity to study abroad. Typical family roles, has to be grateful for everything and thankful for everything.

Notes:

Genre: Autobiography, recount of a childhood event

Audience: Primarily young teens, although anyone could read it

OPs:

- The importance of education and school to the narrator (probably as a means of escape from home)
- The distance relationships between Adeline & her father/mother/family/home
- The traditional family and gender roles evident in this family- in particular the importance of duty
- Pride and the importance of her parents being proud of her; her earning her parent's 'face'
- Emotional progressions: Depression – anxious tension – uncertain relief – happy excitement