

O B S E S S I O N

Woo Keng Thye

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Preface

Many of these stories portray the obsessions, moods and passions of men and women entangled in the embrace of their own sexuality. A gamut of human sexual behaviour forms an integral part. In spite of the evolution of human sexuality from the primeval to modern man, apart from sophistry, the basic sexual drive has remained unchanged. The characters' actions are based on Freudian psychology and wherever appropriate, a medical explanation has been provided.

But what transcends the underlying sexual theme is the timeless urge to seek fulfillment, suffused with warmth and concern, tinged with romanticism. This is the overdrive – call it love or sexual love but this is a drive beyond Freudian psychology. To quote the poet Keats, “a condition of soul to which the sum of all things – foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor – is revealed as necessary and true and beautiful.”

Once, I found myself in a most exclusive club in Japan. There was definitely a sexual allure about the place. But what emanated from the hostesses was purely platonic. What I appreciated most was the warm, comfortable and secure feeling of being cared for. I borrowed these lovely words found on the club's coaster.

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Editor – Wong Wan Ling
Peter Cher

Cover Design by Barry Ng

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Moments we passed in quiet
Friends who are of help
In times of trouble
A sunshine we hungrily
Basked ourselves in
And the hope of finding
Fulfillment

Now surrounded by
A wreath of flowers
With a harmony
Of soft colours
We can find
Contentment

This is not a book on sex. It is a book about
love and sexual love. That is why, when love has gone,
the desire fades.

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Aftertaste

Your slender fingers, a solitaire
Offering shashimi in wasabe sauce,
An intermingling of warm flesh,
Hot blood and bone ash,
Slivers of myocardium
Pierced in icicles of sherbet.

Savouring the *gen mai*
In your green tea,
Sipping your nectar
Breathing the scent of your hair,
Leaving me with a residual
Salty tangy aftertaste.

At Shima

Sunday 15th Jan '95.

Obsession

Joe Tan was a son of a rich tin miner in Ipoh. Fair in complexion and medium in built, Joe had thick jet black hair with the slightest trace of curls. Side burns and a well-trimmed moustache framed his face. His eyes were deep-set with a very marked Mongolian slant and thick bushy eyebrows. A well-shaped Roman nose with a prominent ridge of loyalty and a large generous mouth with thick sensuous lower lips completed his physiognomy.

Joe's father had sent him to study Medicine at the University of Melbourne in Australia in the mid-sixties. As a medical student, Joe was particularly interested in Anatomy which involves dissecting the human body in order to study the various external and internal parts of which it is composed. It was not long before it became common knowledge that Joe would be the first to turn up at the dissecting hall and also the last to leave. Very often he would obtain permission from the tutors to stay back late so that he could do more work. On Friday nights some of the boys would go to the nearby pub to relax with a few rounds of beer while others would be out dating their girlfriends. When Joe was asked to join them, his usual excuse would be that he could not spare the time.

Apart from his interest in Anatomy he had another interest or talent. He was an artist and was good at pencil sketching, particularly of the nude human body. As a medical student his knowledge of the position and alignment of the human musculature lent him an anatomical basis which enhanced his drawings. He learnt that the male physique was influenced to a large extent by the development of the muscles. However, after a while, Joe found drawing male figures boring. The female form proved more challenging and exciting and with deft touches in strategic parts, Joe would enhance their physique. The female form was to him something intriguing and fascinating with unlimited potential for his creativity. The more sketches he did the more impressed he became with the female anatomy.

As he went round the dissecting hall to inspect the cadavers, both male and female, he was aware that the older male and female cadavers were very much alike with their shrivelled breasts and slightly obese abdomen and thick thighs. The younger female cadavers were better preserved and still retained their femininity. In their final repose a number of the younger ones still looked comely.

In the privacy of his apartment he would recollect the faces and forms of the comely ones and sketch them. He would sketch them in various positions — lying, sitting, running and could almost imagine them, so many female forms, coming to life. But he knew that in the end they would all be cut up like meat in the butcher's shop, and even if they did not suffer that fate, with the passage of time, the skin would harden and whatever was left of the female anatomy would still shrivel up, especially the

breasts. With their shaven heads and taut faces they would become like old wizened women or even old men when their breasts too shrivelled. He soon became obsessed with the idea of possessing his own female cadaver to embalm and restore so that it could retain its comely female appearance.

Most days, after everyone had left, Joe would make his way to one of the dissecting tables on which lay a female cadaver. Joe could not remember what it was that first drew him to it. But he kept returning to it. Sometimes, even though he could take a shorter route to get back to his dissecting table, he would prefer to go by the cadaver so that he could catch a glimpse of it as he passed by. Alone with it Joe always spent some time gazing at the body as if he was communicating with it. After a while he would go up to touch its face and then the various parts of the body. In fact it would be more true to say that Joe was actually caressing the body. For some inexplicable reason the sensation of being in contact with the cold naked body was for him a new sensuous experience. Touching the body provided him an erotic pleasure and he soon became dependent on this need for physical contact with the female cadaver because of the sexual fulfillment he derived from touching it. The need for such physical contact developed into a craving and never a day or night passed without his longing for it.

Sometime after his obsession grew stronger, Joe managed to obtain a duplicate key to the dissecting hall. He would slip into the hall to have his secret rendezvous with the cadaver. To give the impression that he did socialise he would sometimes appear in his tuxedo and

bowtie in front of his mates but would then slip away secretly for a clandestine visit with his favourite cadaver. Once, when accosted by a few of his mates, he told them that he was attending a concert. After that incident, rumours spread that Joe was secretly dating a girl somewhere.

As his obsession grew, Joe also developed an interest in embalming or the preservation of dead bodies. He had obtained permission to learn the process of embalming corpses from the morticians. A fresh cadaver was firstly given a wash with soap and water. It was then dried and laid on a stainless steel table. A widebore infusion needle was inserted into the large vein at the groin. Under great pressure, a dye called eosin and a preservative known as formalin, together with embalming fluid, was infused into the cadaver through the widebore needle. The liquid would then permeate the tissues in the body. After a while the cadaver would have a ruddy complexion because of the red colour of the eosin, and the formalin with the embalming fluid would prevent the cadaver from decomposing.

Joe was a picture of professionalism while embalming, deep in concentration and intense with reverence when he handled a cadaver. He was always very careful as he inserted the infusion needle, as if afraid he might still inflict pain on the cadaver. Sometimes he seemed to be lost in his own thoughts as he handled the cadavers. On such occasions he would be dreaming about owning his own cadaver which he could imbue with certain life-like qualities. He would keep it in his apartment as his private property to have and to hold. Consequently, every

opportunity to touch the cold naked body was for Joe a moment of sexual indulgence. The morticians' opinion was that if Joe could be so gentle and so reverent in his handling of a cadaver as a medical student, surely, they told themselves, he would make a wonderful doctor when treating his patients. Joe had earned their respect.

Bill was one of the morticians whom Joe became friends with. On a Friday evening Joe met Bill at a pub and asked him about the possibility of buying one of the corpses for his private research. Joe informed Bill that he wanted to keep the cadaver in his own house in the suburbs of Melbourne. He was prepared to pay as much as five thousand Australian dollars (which was about fifteen thousand Singapore dollars in those days). Bill warned Joe that this was very risky business as owning a corpse for private uses was against the law. Bill told Joe that if he were to be discovered by the authorities to have helped Joe get a corpse, he would lose his job at the University and both he and Joe would end up in jail, which would also mean suspension for Joe from his medical studies. Joe assured Bill that his father was a rich and influential businessman and that he knew people in high office. He then stuffed a few hundred dollar bills into Bill's coat pocket. Bill told Joe that he would contact him in a few days' time if he could find something suitable.

A few days later Bill met Joe, "Hi, mate, I've good news for you. There's this vagrant, unclaimed body, oldish man. You keen?"

"Come on Bill, you know my interest. I'm an artist. I want a female form. You know? Nice curves and right proportions. I won't have an old tramp even for free."

"Sorry mate. It's nigh impossible. The unclaimed bodies we have are mainly old men and women. Destitutes, found dead in public places."

"What about swopping an unclaimed corpse with one donated for research?"

Bill was taken aback at the idea and shaking his head, said, "You serious, mate? It's dangerous, very dangerous. Could land us in jail. Very difficult job and will need plenty of dole. You know, grease the right palms, including my supervisor."

"You do it, Bill. Money's no problem. Get me a good one and I'll pay for it." There was an urgency in Joe's voice.

"You need plenty of help from Lady Luck. Plenty of it and cash too. Give us time. I'll send word if I have something suitable. Okey, dokey. See you later, mate."

About a month later Bill met Joe again. "Hi, mate. How are you today?"

"Fine, Bill. Just fine. You have news for me?"

"Well, mate. We think we have something suitable. Corpse of a young woman, donated for research. But it'll cost you ten grand."

"No problem, Bill. I'll pay." Joe's eyes lighted up and his heart beat fast. He was filled with excitement. He – Joe – could at last have a cadaver that he could truly consider his own, a precious possession which he could keep in his home. He stretched out to shake Bill's hand, clapping him on the back.

Three nights later, Bill and four other men delivered a wooden crate to Joe's house in the suburbs. Joe directed the men to bring the wooden crate into a room in the

basement of his house. He gave each of them a handsome tip and while they waited outside the house, Joe wrote out a cheque for Bill. A very nervous Bill left the house as soon as he could, thanking Joe profusely and at the same time noticing that Joe's countenance appeared very flushed and he seemed very eager to have him out of his house.

Joe lost no time in locking up his house and putting off all the lights so as to give the impression to any potential visitors that there was no one at home. He proceeded to the basement and removed the ropes and the nails securing the lid of the wooden crate, earnestly expecting to see the face of the corpse, but the body was covered in a mortuary shroud. Hastily, cutting off the string securing the shroud and oblivious to the strong odour of the formalin, he removed the shroud and gazed for the first time at the face of the lifeless form.

It was the face of a young Chinese in her late twenties. Even in death, she retained her beauty. Joe hesitated and felt a little guilty when he thought of her grave. She was not going to rest in a grave. She was going to rest in his house and keep him company. She had a sharp oval face, a very fair and flawless complexion, a small nose and a pretty mouth. Her black hair was dishevelled and part of it appeared matted. Joe bent forward to remove what appeared to be a lump of brownish matter from her hair and discovered that it was a small clump of earth. Somehow he felt uneasy with the discovery of the earth in her hair. He did not know what to make of it.

An idea suddenly occurred to him. He ran out of the basement, climbed the stairs and made his way to his sitting room. There he went through a stack of

newspapers. Looking through the obituary pages of the past few days he found what he was looking for. She was Jin Tuan, a twenty-five-year-old woman who had died five days ago. The family thanked the doctors of the Neurosurgery Department of the Royal Albert Hospital. She must have had brain surgery which meant that she could have died from a brain haemorrhage or a tumour. From the information in the obituary he could see that she was unmarried. He stared long and hard at her photograph in the obituary page. She looked captivating and had beautiful eyes. Her funeral was two days ago and she was to have been buried at the Chinese cemetery. So Bill had become a grave robber, and he, Joe, was the receiver of stolen property. Joe could now understand why Bill had acted so nervously.

There was nothing that he could do that night. Just then the phone rang. It was Bill. Joe told him that he wanted to talk to him as he felt Bill owed him an explanation. However, Bill assured Joe that everything had been taken care of. The next morning, he would meet Joe, bring him to the cemetery and show him that all was well.

On the way to the Chinese cemetery Bill informed Joe that there was no cause for alarm. He had contacts with certain people in Chinatown who would exhume dead bodies to remove jewellery and even gold fillings from the teeth of the dead. The authorities had so far not been alerted of the practice as they only dug out freshly laid graves and left no tell-tale signs that the graves had been disturbed. Bill had paid them well and they had

agreed to remove the body for him. There was no risk of discovery.

Soon they were at the cemetery and Bill told Joe to take a good look from where he had stopped the car. Joe saw a group of people wailing at a grave-site about a hundred metres away from them. The earth looked freshly turned and the mould of earth over the grave, with the wooden slab which formed the temporary tomb stone, the wreaths over it together with the altar of joss sticks, gold and silver paper ingots and edibles looked like any ordinary freshly laid grave.

Bill opened the boot of his car, brought out a bouquet of roses and a packet of white candles and motioned to Joe to accompany him. Joe harboured the fear that somehow his guilty conscience would betray him. He felt weak in the knees. The last thing he wanted to do was pay his respects at the desecrated grave. But Bill explained to him that he was going to pay respects only at a nearby grave in order to allow Joe to listen to the conversation of the mourners to assure himself that all was well.

They stopped at a grave twice removed from that of Jin Tuan's. Bill placed the roses into the built-in vase of the cement altar and proceeded to light the candles. Together they prayed over the grave of their supposed friend. Some of the nearby mourners turned to look at them. Joe could make out the name Jin Tuan amidst the wailing. After that Bill went over to Jin Tuan's grave and bowed three times in front of the grave. Joe, with trembling knees, followed suit. The mourners thanked them and offered each of

them a sweet and a piece of red thread to ward off evil spirits and misfortune. Joe learnt that the night before she died, while watching television she had developed convulsions and became unconscious. When they brought her to the hospital the doctor informed them that she had suffered a brain haemorrhage and had advised urgent surgery after a brain scan. Unfortunately, in spite of the surgery, she could not be saved.

On the way back to town Joe expressed his satisfaction to Bill for the way he had so professionally handled the whole affair and rewarded him with a few more hundred dollars.

In the days that followed, Joe had one great obsession and that was Jin Tuan's corpse. He utilised the latest technology and was ingenuous in consulting various texts on the subject and getting information from institutions overseas on the science of embalming. It was said that he even obtained translations of Egyptian hieroglyphics to try to study the Egyptian's secret of preserving their pharaoh's mummies. But Joe was not satisfied with mere preservation of Jin Tuan's corpse.

At the beginning of his medical course he had been drawn to a female cadaver, even fallen in love with it. The medical terminology for this condition – when a person makes love with a cadaver – is necrophilia. For Joe it had started with his artistic inclination; the drawing of nude female forms. He had some lessons in art with life models and everytime a model moved he would silently wish that she could be immobilised forever. With his introduction to anatomy and his artistic inclination, he soon concluded that the ideal model was the female cadaver. He made

many drawings of female cadavers, embellishing their female contours and enhancing their appearances with his artistic skills so that each of them was the product of his creative imagination, a female beauty in her natural form.

Each time he caressed a cold female cadaver, he had in his mind's eye thoughts of a lovely woman asleep, waiting for him, wanting him as much as he wanted her. Day and night his thoughts would stray to the cold lonely cadaver lying on the dissecting table, recollecting parts of its body he had caressed lovingly. He became irresistibly drawn to it. As a medical man he knew that it was an abnormal craving, but he reasoned to himself that he was not doing harm to anybody. After all, a cadaver was not a person anymore. It was a dead body.

But with Jin Tuan's body he realised that the situation was different. He was soon obsessed with the idea of giving her a semblance of life. Even though he knew that he could not restore her to life, he was nonetheless resolved to do everything within his power to give her "life", using the latest technology. For a start he wanted her to have mobility in the limbs. He overcame the rigor mortis of the dead body by removing the stiff joints and replacing them with synthetic joints. He could now make her sit on the sofa with him apart from lying down in bed with him. Carefully carrying her from bed to sofa, sitting down close to her, he would put his arm around her shoulder, smell her cheeks, caress her hair and tell her about the day's events at college.

He had also treated her hardened skin by injecting it with emulsifying agents and specially imported oils together with expensive perfume, and derived great

pleasure applying oil when massaging her skin which had by now become fragrant leather with a texture and suppleness comparable to the finest calf leather used to make expensive bags.

Joe would lovingly manicure the nails and every now and again, would give the nails a new coat of cutex and varnish. He had become an expert on the application of cosmetics, and was familiar with the various foundation creams, powder bases and rouge which he applied lovingly to her face. The eyes, however, remained closed and the eye balls were becoming more and more sunken. He had still not been able to find suitable artificial eyes for her. He had wanted glass eyes which resembled the colour of oriental eyes. He constantly referred to her photographs to study the details of her features. He had removed her hair which he turned into a wig. He would occasionally send the wig to the shop and have it styled into the various hairstyles that he had taken a fancy to.

His love for Jin Tuan's cadaver was all-consuming. He told himself that he was like a married man who came home each day to attend to an invalid wife, cleaning her, massaging her skin with oil, talking, caressing and loving her.

"Hi, Jin, I'm home," Joe would tell her. He would then take off his coat and tie, and going up to the settee where he had sat her before he left for work, say, "I know you miss me, Jin. But, try to understand darling. I've to work hard, do well in my exams. My success will also be yours." He would put his arm around her, then looking her in the face, he would lovingly touch her cheek, stroke her hair, smell her fragrance and then hug her close to

him, inhaling her fragrance all the while, eyes closed, muttering, "Jin, my Jin. I love you, love you. I promise you, I'll always love you."

On one occasion, after dinner, he sat Jin on the sofa in front of the television and told her, "Darling, sit tight and watch the show first. I'll do the dishes and then join you for a cup of hot coffee afterwards." He patted her on the head and gave her a kiss on the cheek, his face beaming with contentment.

Jin Tuan's cadaver remained a closely guarded secret. He had sworn Bill to secrecy and they never discussed it. As Joe lived alone in the house and the room in the basement was always locked, his secret was safe. The cleaning woman only came in during the weekends when Joe was at home and she was given instructions not to venture into the basement.

Joe was a contented man. In fact he was more like a happily married man. He divided his time between his medical studies and Jin Tuan's cadaver. He was a man with few friends and whenever anyone invited him for an outing he would politely decline, saying that he already had a prior engagement. After a while, some of his classmates spread the rumour that Joe was secretly married. Joe preferred to let the rumour go unchallenged, having no desire for any other form of female companionship and his life alternated between medical school and home.

Joe had bought a large assortment of clothes for Jin Tuan which filled two huge wardrobes. He would dress her in a housecoat and seat her on a chair in the basement bedroom before going to school. In the evenings when he came back for dinner, he would dress her up and seat her

at the table with him. At night, she would be made to wear her pyjamas and sleep with him on the bed.

Joe also observed the festivities with Jin Tuan. During Christmas and New Year he would buy her a pair of shoes, a dress or some exquisite perfume or jewellery. Of late, he had installed an electric circuit in her body so that when he embraced her he would feel some warmth from her body.

One Christmas, a parcel arrived from Germany which filled Joe with anticipation. It was a pair of artificial eyes with mobile eyelids that would enable the eyes to open and close. They were specially made to order and the size and colour resembled the oriental eyes as far as Joe could ascertain. It was probably the best Christmas present he had ever given to Jin Tuan.

After dinner one evening, Joe had a new idea. He had not taken a bath with Jin Tuan before. The more he thought about it the stronger the urge became. Without another thought he filled the bathtub with water and stripping her stark naked, carried her to the bathroom. He had made a mental note that she seemed lighter as the days went by. He knew that her skin was becoming tighter and her body was in fact shrinking. It would be good if it absorbed some water.

He poured bath foam and perfumed talc into the bath water. He removed his own clothes and lowered himself into the bath next to Jin Tuan. Her body was still cold in spite of the warm water. Without sparing a thought, he got out of the tub and connected the electric circuit which he had fixed to Jin Tuan's body to the plug

which he used for his electric shaver. He felt Jin Tuan's body warming and started caressing and kissing her, oblivious of the cosmetics which were flaking off from her face. As he pressed his body against hers and felt his passion rising, he was acutely aware of how warm and tender she was. This union with Jin Tuan was so different from all the other times. The sensuality of making love with her in a warm bath was exquisitely thrilling.

Suddenly, as he was reaching the height of his passion and calling out her name, he felt a sharp bolt of pain which coursed through his body. A few seconds later, he collapsed on top of Jin Tuan's cadaver. There was a final splash of water in the bathtub as the two bodies slumped into the water, followed by an eerie silence, punctuated only by the occasional drip, drip of water from the tap. The water in the warm bath with the two bodies slowly became cold.

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At the coroner's inquest, a verdict of misadventure was recorded for the deceased male and the cause of death was attributed to electrocution causing cardiac arrest. As for the yet unidentified female cadaver, the cause of death was attributed to a brain tumour. It was further established that the cadaver had been mummified for some time already and it was the coroner's opinion that the deceased male had, prior to his death, engaged in sexual intercourse with the mummified corpse. The word "necrophiliac" was written next to the name of the deceased.