

Buried under those couch cushions

Sophia Shi

---

It all started when the doctor told her that the ache in her knees was 'normal'. That it was due to the general wear and tear they'd been through. That it was quite commonly seen in the elderly.

*Elderly.*

What a condescending word. Mrs Gao scoffed in scorn and looked disdainfully at the small blue box with the knee braces the doctor had given her. Elderly was what you used to describe people who... who lived in nursing homes and needed help down the stairs, and had people give up their bus seats for them. No, Mrs Gao thought, that wasn't her. She prided herself on her independence, her energy, her health. She lived alone in her squat little house on the corner of the roundabout, with the elegant silver knocker which glistened in the sun, that none of the other doors on her road had. She made her own food, drove herself around and was totally in control of her own life. The shameful blue box was quickly tucked away in the bottom drawer of Mrs Gao's closet, ready to be forgotten.

But when Mrs Gao turned on the television to see the Olympics playing, she couldn't help but feel a little twinge of guilt. The Olympian's perfect physiques, toned limbs and slim figures moved with an ease that was worlds away from hers. In comparison, her age spots seemed darker, her wrinkles seemed deeper, and her hair thinner. The pain that bore Mrs Gao down seemed not only in her joints, but her heart also. Turning off the television with a decisive click of the remote, she buried any feelings of resentment under the couch cushions, where they wouldn't be found.

It was the day after, however, when those feelings of resentment became a bit too large for the couch cushions to cover. Mrs Gao was watering her plants on her front porch outside with her excess rice water, a habit which she found satisfaction in. Upon picking the pot of rice back up again, she found the pot to be slightly heavier than she expected. The sound the pot made as it struck the floor could be heard 3 houses down. Mrs Gao stared in shock at the glistening rice scattered on the ground, feeling the weight of each grain as if it were her own pride spilled out in front of her. She stooped slowly to scoop up the granules, the rice growing wetter from the grains from her own eyes, the ache in her joints a reminder of what she had lost.

Later, Mrs Gao heard the heavy clacks of her glistening silver knocker against her door. Opening the door, she found her neighbour, Hana, a young woman who had inevitably heard her drop the pot of rice. Mrs Gao sighed, thinking that Hana had come to express some more condescending sympathy. She tightened her grip on the door handle,

repressing the overwhelming urge to close the door and go back to feeling sorry for herself.

Instead, Hana greeted Mrs Gao with a small smile.

“Would you like to come take a walk with us, Mrs Gao?” asked Hana, as she gestured towards the group of others waiting behind her.

Mrs Gao jumped to refuse, the familiar feelings of insecurity and uncertainty twisting her words, before remembering something.

“Hold on, let me get something first,” she told Hana.

Mrs Gao slid the bottom drawer of her closet open and felt around with her hand before finally resting on a small blue box.