

Members Are Sunflowers

Chris Collins
Santa Barbara, USA

Sometimes I think it's so funny this world. You know the male whale? They jump out of the sea and spread out over the water. They jump while they swim and not always stay under the water, and sometimes they float on the sea. And when the hook catch the female, the male whale will swim alongside, and stay close by. Then he will jump high up out of the water to see where she go.

Anyway, I say this to the man at the investigating company—and some people there, too. Then I tell them why I go to there really. I say, Some damn guy, bug my phone, I could kill him one day.

I say this and a thing more about wanting to kill.
Why not? they tell me.
Oh, can you offer me this service? I am just joking.
We might find someone, they say.

They are just joking. He's trying to take my money. Not the man talking but for the company. The accountant takes the money. And because I am curious to the price for murder in China I ask, How much?

Thirty thousand yuan here, they tell me. Killer from Guangdong, two times.

Thank you, I say, I must go home. Bye-bye! I tell the taxi driver, First Hotel, and *whoom!* we get out of that damn place. You know, the social is no good. Corruption and man. Evil wins here. But the investigating business is good!

Afternoon my boyfriend come to here. He's Westerner. China people say *wai guo ren*. Outside people. Someday he will love me a lot. Stay with me forever. Until I am very old. And every time he bring me nice gift. This time he bring me chocolate stick and I open it and take the big bite. He's young guy. Twenty-four or twenty-five. I am fifty-eight. Chinese age fifty-nine. Not so big difference two people love each other, I think so.

When my boyfriend come in he sit at the comb-the-hair, makeup table and he look at the floor and he laugh a little. Something so interesting to see there? I say.

Nothing so interesting to see there. McDonald's papers on the floor, that's only. Maybe you like Oriental old baby, I say, to take his attention. I'm right, right? Honey? Right? My boyfriend just laugh more. So I sit up on the bed and look to him serious. I say, You okay, honey? Is there a thing wrong with you?

Oh, he laugh big then. Laugh until he drop his teeth. Me! he say. Something wrong with me! Then he use my name. He say, Pei Ning, don't you understand how it works? When you take food out of McDonald's, you're supposed to leave the tray.

Oh, his words make me mad. I understand one thing, I say. Your laughing is at me, I understand that! I wish to scold him more for this, but—I can't help—I'm laughing, too. My boyfriend, he's so funny. Big shiny teeth, smile so big, how can I do? Only I can do is put my head down like a shy one and say, Honey, don't make me lose my face.

When I try to tell my boyfriend about the man at the investigating company, he only look at himself in the mirror and combing his hair. Again I yell to him. Honey, are you listen to me? Don't you want to know this bad thing happen?

Know what my boyfriend say? You can't believe it. He say nope, he doesn't really care about it. He say he doesn't really care who that damn guy is, either. He say I have a story every time.

Nobody care about me, I say. Forget it.

You know, I always dream my boyfriend and I can be together. Stay together until we are very old. And I dream one day he can change his attitude to me. Even he doesn't treat me so good, he doesn't love me too much, I know the percentage is not high, I don't give up this lovely dream. It's a very grand great pleasure in my life.

So today I try to keep a tender mood. I don't wish to fight. I wish to tell him one thing only, and he not give me quarrel. Only he lean forward in the chair and look like ready to listen to my talking. So, okay: Honey, I say. Where you are from I know a man and a man get together to operate a boutique. And in this business they cheat people. Cheat people's money. The shoe cost two dollars but sell for 149 dollars. Greed mean ambitious and much concern. Everything if you do too much, I say. How to say over?

Excess, my boyfriend say, and lean back in the chair.

Yeah, I say. Eat too much can be the poison. Life is a balance, a circle. But the two man is greedy and can't enjoy. Can't love and enjoy. And one man like to be with other woman. But his wife know. The one man say his wife is his whole life, but she know he have other woman! She know!

Finally the business is no good. And the one man and his wife live in a big fashionable house and the court take everything. Probably death is very perfect for them because they live in pain. The wife seem to agree. They put the poison into the yogurt and they are going to eat it. But first the man want to show his loyalty to his wife and say sorry, maybe.

I want to be a dog, honey, I say to my boyfriend. Dog is the most loyal. More than human being, I say. You cannot criticize their loyalty. Dog is the most loyal in the world and not cat. Even the dog's master will betray him, and the dog will forgive him and still be loyal. I just tease you, honey, I say to him. I don't want to be a dog. What I say?

Man and his loyalty, he say.

Yeah, I say. And the one man and his wife go up to see the clever man in the mountains and the wind occur, can I say that? Suddenly the one man step behind two rocks to hide and the space is narrow, and the other woman is behind, too. And the one man and the other woman they kiss. They twist together and kiss like fire. Burst a fire and sparkle.

Now the wife is alone. She run down to the field in the rain with no wind. She try to run out of that place, but no wind. No wind, no bird, there's no track to follow. And it seem like a different world.

Human beings should suffer the pain, I know. Man and woman. Pain and pleasure. Two sides. And man mistake and have shortcomings. It's true! Many! Can you conquer yourself, become the master? Can you conquer the shadow of yourself, like the evil snake in the garden to give apple? Can you conquer the seducer of a beautiful chick? Outside the mind I think cannot. There are two sides give from God. One side this, one that. But they need each other. Well, that's nature. If you have no shortcomings then you will be the God. That's impossible. God make us. Two sides.

I don't know much about this. I just talk bullshit.

But what do you think about battery? One side positive, one negative. Two sides, right? And when the car is stop by the roadside, and you need some charge, you hold the clips: one positive, one negative. Why is that, you know? No, right? Nobody know this thing! You need special people to explain this thing! I think God is very clever.

After I finish telling my boyfriend all about the one man and his wife, he mention stock. He say his stock go up a lot. Make some money, he say. Easy money. Few months ago he say I should try. So I try. I put the money in the account in the Shanghai and think what to buy. I sip green tea at the tea house and think a long time. Suddenly the idea come up from my mind. I think, Many man come to me smell like the beer, right? Why not buy stock in beer company! Stock must be good!

Next day I buy Tsingtao stock, three pieces. Two weeks later my stock still not go up. Little bit down maybe, I don't know. I say to Tsingtao, If you can stand up to 10, I'm going to sell you out!

Who knows, maybe Tsingtao never come back. Youth never come back.

Other day I receive consultant fax from the King of Man and it say Tsingtao move very slowly. I fax him back. I write, When it go up, when? Don't waste my time! Time is money for everyone, don't you learn it from kindergarten?

You know his answer? You can't believe it. He write one thing, only. He write, If you play stock you cannot be weak. If you are, you're a chicken in the sea or a fish on the farm. And there are fox all around to eat eggs.

At first I think his words are humor. But then I change my thinking. I think, How dare he is, give me this warning. He doesn't give me a respect. Treat me like a dirt, a trash. Think I am a stupid, waste my life only. Think I am a stupid woman and waste my life. I have no husband, no baby. Chinese woman usually think of good husband, and good kid—and respect I think, that's only.

I don't want to play stock anymore. I think I have no good luck. I want to go to the temple and draw the straws. Pray to the God for help. God will tell me I don't have much luck. Little bit, maybe. I feel like I am in a hole, gray color all around. I'm an ox and cannot dig the ground. If I am a rabbit or a rat it would be easy. But ox is too big.

I'm tired to listen about my boyfriend's stock market, too. I just sit and listen to his making money. I just sit and listen to his bullshit bull market. If I reply, Your country eat too much, he get very excited.

Yeah, I know, he say. Isn't it great! We're all like pigs! he say.
Pig is the top, I say.

Usually my boyfriend's emotional is like this, like a kid's, go up and down like a yo-yo *cho*. But kids are innocent and naive and easy to get together with adults. Kids grow up and learn human being's corruption. So when you think they will get together with adults you should help them try to avoid, and keep indoors, because you think adults are the beast, and they will hurt the kids one day. This is my feeling now. Before, no.

When I am kid no one fear this terrible thing. All around, millions of smiling people help each other. Just you ask, they will do. Just give a call. And tomorrow is a wonderful day in shining weather in rice fields.

But China's lovely time is not interesting to my boyfriend. If he listen about before's time it must be to do with the Red Guards. Tell me about the Red Guards, he sometimes say, to change the topic.

In all Chinese history, this is only a raindrop to a cloud.

Even today he say, What about the Red Guards? He say, Hong Wei Bing, right?

Yeah, I say. It's a little bit interesting. This is a very crazy age. Not age, a period of time. Because we can put you in jail for your wrong thoughts. You can think but you cannot talk. We can whip you, we can throw rock at you, we can make you walk on the street in the public. And parents should be careful.

Usually parents watch over kids. Now kids watch over parents. Kids watch their parents and report to their deputy group leader. They watch their parents secretly and don't let them know. When the father's friend come, their kid listen behind the door. Listen if the father make mistake and criticize somebody and be send to the jail and write why, probably. That's Hong Wei Bing ages.

One night at the university the MPs come to the dorm at the midnight and circle the building. They tell students to go this and that way and they have names. You will be gone tomorrow. Even your bones your parents cannot see. Because you will be put into the big bag. And fasten the bag with a strong string. And no air. Soon you will feel the cold and boundless water.

What water? my boyfriend say.

The sea, honey, I say.

Don't tell me about some stupid TV show, he say.

That's history, honey! I say. Not TV. We are not educated, cold-blooded creature without teardrop, because in our mind there is only one father, Mao Zedong.

Until today they gather the power in one man and eat together. Mao is die but there, too, and the lady statue. And they want the face. Lousy face! Goddamned. They want the face and kill all Chinese people!

Now if you refuse to stand or speak out, or gather at the East Gate, they take you to *lao-gai ying*. Oh, it's a very terrible place. Spy people keep in that place. In shit-smell cages. You have no freedoms. Eat lousy food. But not usual prison. Not usual criminal. Political. Your thought is not right. Like Liu Xiaobao. His wife help him get the political prize!

I tell my boyfriend all this, then I say I want to go to the cove. Tell me again, I say, I like the refreshing air at the cove.

Is that what you want? he say. Do you want me to tell you about the cove?

Sure! I say. Why not? Is there a thing wrong? I say, when I see his concern look.

No, he say. He say there's nothing wrong.

You tell me it's peaceful at the cove, I say. It's true, honey?

It's peaceful, he say.

Are there hotels? I say.

No, he say. No more hotels.

Cottages?

No.

It's wild?

It's wild.
Wow! I say. I want to visit!

But my boyfriend give me his remind. He say, Pei Ning, do you remember I told you the cove is a special place, that it presents the unknown? Do you remember? he say. And that it's—

I finish his talking.

I say, It's fill with power and good elements that open up for you like God's embrace under His warm hug, how's that? You can see moss on the rocks too, I say, and some interesting sea creatures. You can't imagine the shapes of all the creatures. The cove is friendly and tiny and like a human theater. Like a members club! The cove will relax you, and you eat leisure food, and enjoy your eyes' views, and think happy things.

I hope I have company at the cove, and breathe refreshing air, and no other thing to bother me. I don't want strangers. Woman make sex for love. Man, probably different. But as I know people use people. That is this life. But one way you make this world bright, or brighten this world, is by create and give good things to this world. Woman can born baby, right? Woman born baby can give back to this world!

That is when I say this to my boyfriend: I hate we play this lousy game all the time, honey. Love cannot be handle like a business. This is interesting to you? I say.

My boyfriend say nothing but I know his thinking.

I'm sorry for that, I say. I compensate. Stranger buy me and I buy you. I don't want to play this lousy game anymore, I say. I hate! I don't want to be a public restroom to a stranger anymore, or water me like a plant. I don't want, honey, I say. I hate. I hate and remember. I cherish my narrow world and smallness like a dot!

Oh, don't start that again, my boyfriend say, and he put a tape in the tape machine. He call the tape heroic proletarian songs. He know I like to hear this charming music. But I regret I not take his hint. Because what I do next is take the red envelope and hold it out to him, and I continue my angry talking.

I say, Is this why you come to here, honey? Money, only? How dare you are! There are a bunch of guys waiting for me in the outside. They all line up and count the calendar. They listen to me and cherish me and enjoy the company. They listen every word I say. Listen one time and follow my instruction.

I not tell my boyfriend this, but I think he should know. One guy is crazy about me. Loves me a lot. And he say he marry me. Just get his business making money, that's only. Endless waiting. He's like a mouse.

A song in translate call “The Screws of the Revolution will Never Rust” begin its play and to change the mood I sing along. My boyfriend take my photo off the mirror. He hold it in front of him and begin his dancing. Now I smile.

Don't try to lure me, honey, I say to him.

The photo is take from behind, and it show I am standing on the platform, near rice fields, holding a loudspeaker. I am a Red Guard then, and I sing out to the people in the cities of my province and in the countryside.

My boyfriend take some sticking tape from the big clock calendar on the wall. He stick my photo on the TV. Now you're on TV! he say, and laugh his laugh. That's where you belong!

I laugh, too, but still I am angry.

That's funny, honey, I say. You make it fashionable for people. What is fashion for people in this world? Killing and violence and horror and corruption. Honey, I say, do you think we are corrupted?

He not answer me. Just he continue his dancing. He swing his arms this and that way and move his feet only a little. How do you like my dancing? he say. You like my dancing?

Naked, I say. It's more attractive. I say this and look to my photo on the TV. I sing for people, honey, I say.

I know, he say and spin around.

Honey? I say.

What is it? he say.

Nothing, I say. Then I say, Honey, they are sunflowers. Sunflowers in rice fields.

After that I don't know what happen. Oh, what I am saying? I know what happen. Of course, I know! I remember I am thinking about the time in the photo. Then I think about something I tell you before, and I just say it out. I say, Woman can born baby by herself!

I say this and immediately I regret.

I am just joking, honey, I say. My joking is boring, right? You're with me for money, right? I'm noble. In my life I with man only for love. Love is really hard to find, right?

My boyfriend look like he consider it. Then he choose to answer me this way. He say, Pei Ning, I think you're probably right. And for this I yell out to him. Yell to him so loudly I think every girl in the hotel can hear it.

From today! I say. Is that what you want? All right. I'm not like you, I say. You have no heart, honey. You're cruel, I say. You think only about money. My money! Okay, I say, I follow your instruction. From now on you stop using my money. Spending my money! You like that? Go to the hell! Do that! Go ahead! How's that, I say, that's fair!

My boyfriend spin around again. Oh, don't say that, he say so sweetly like my words are not something important. You want two, right? he say.

I want you to go, I say. But I not yell this to him. I not feel angry. Anyway, I'm not feel angry to him now. Just I wish to tell him some things more, that's only. Make him understand some things. I don't want to dream anymore, I wish to tell him that. And my heart is still young, I think. Good nature's in human beings, I would say to him. Not always bad. What do you think? Do you think people are too bad? I think love keep the globe running.

My boyfriend stop his dancing. He put his hands on his hips and he stare to me. All right, he say, and throw his hands to the air. I'll go. Is that what you really want?

Yeah, I say. I say, I don't torture you too much. Set you free, I say. And tomorrow is a wonderful day in shining weather in rice fields and sunflowers.

Then my boyfriend make ready to go. And this time I not try and stop him!

You, know, I think life is a torture and also a happiness. Good and bad things both two sides together. And human beings have soul. Some soul good, some bad. And the soul hide in your spine. It's so funny, don't you think? Soul hide in your spine?

When a people is die the soul will fly out. Disappear! No matter how rich or poor you are, you cannot resist at the end. No matter how much you like your love, you must say goodbye to him. Say goodbye to your body, to your family, your money, your hopes, your wishes will leave you, your soul will fly to the space and combine with the universe and unite with the earth again. Probably you will be back a hundred years later or tomorrow.

My boyfriend go out the door then. Never to be see by me again maybe.

###