

## The star

Jade sat huddled alone under the covers of her bed. It was bitterly cold, the wind buffeting and howling against the glass that looked out into darkness. Her bedside lamp was the only thing switched on, the dim, yellowy light casting her shadow so high up onto the wall until it looked ready to consume her. In the moment, she wished it would.

It had only been a few months since her family had migrated to Australia from Hong Kong. It felt so different from her home in Hong Kong, with its crowded streets filled with hustle and bustle, the dense skyscrapers spanning across the whole city and the oddly comforting smell of old cigarettes and distinct sourness of the streets. Her parents said everything was meant to be better in Australia, a new start but she'd faced nothing but hardships since she arrived.

Learning English felt like an insurmountable wall. Jade found difficulty trying to express herself; her tongue was heavy and tied down, her words twisting into unintelligible garble. It felt like she was on a battlefield when she was in class, phrases from her classmates whizzing by her like bullets. She felt like not being able to understand the language holding her back from flourishing as a student like she once was.

It wasn't as if her classmates were cruel; they didn't make fun of her or call her names, but somehow that made it worse. Whenever the teacher called on her to answer questions, she saw their looks of pity lurking behind her like a dense unshakable fog, trailing her all the way to the blackboard.

Jade looked up at her tear-stained report card, ashamed of her academic performance. She couldn't read much English but she knew what a C was. Back at home, she was a shining star, the brightest in her year, but here she was an extinguished fire, barely scraping by.

Her thoughts were broken by the creaking of her bedroom door. Jade looked up to see her mother standing in the door frame holding a plate of fruit as she turned on the light. She placed the plate on the desk and offered a slice of a fragrance pear on a small toothpick to Jade, just like they would back at home. As Jade took a bite, the gush of familiarity and thoughts of home flooded her mind like a towering wave. The enveloping blanket of both warmth and tenderness entwined was enough to relieve her of this nightmare she was living, reminding her it was not the end of the world.

She smiled up at her mum with wet eyes, recognising the love projecting towards her, but could notice the bitter hurt, a blend of sympathy, regret, and a guilt, deep in her eyes. Pulling her mum into a comforting embrace, she realised the sacrifices she made for her, and making her feel guilty is the last thing she wanted to do. Jade silently vowed to strive in academics, making sure to never let her mum feel guilty about herself ever again.

Eventually, Jade let out a yawn and with a weary smile, her mother tucked her into bed just like she had when Jade was a little girl. As she turned off the bedside lamp, Jade turned and looked out the window at the moon. The silvery light filtered through her window, and as she turned her head back towards the ceiling, she noticed all the shadows were gone.