Module 12: Weekly writing exercise

A woman, with a rag in hand and a disinfectant spray in the other, was busy wiping down the shelves in her house. She was busy rearranging things and making sure that everything is spotless. Her daughter was going overseas to find a job, and she was asking help to pack her stuff. As she was trying to find other things that her daughter needed, she accidentally came across a box, tucked into the farthest corner of the shelf. It triggered a memory, and she remembered she put it there years ago. She gingerly opened the box and saw beloved but forgotten mementos: a bracelet, remnants of a scarf, a worn and empty red packet, and a small handwritten note of her favorite tea recipe by her father. Then came flooding the memories of her journey that led to where she is now.

In a small town, a lone young woman named Qiao stood at a bus stop with all her hopes and dreams packed in a full and brand-new backpack and suitcase. She looked up and closed her eyes to feel the cold west wind and to allow the flurries of snow to settle on her face. She shivered from the cold and the flurries that had started melting on her face, but she smiled, knowing full well that she was on her way towards a better future. The sun had not yet risen, but she was afraid of missing her flight, as this was her first time to leave her hometown, and it would be her first airplane ride. Aside from that, the plane ticket cost almost half-a-year’s savings. Nevertheless, the prospect of moving to a big city like Shanghai was exhilarating, but she knew that she had to do her best to find a job right away. The first bus to the airport arrived and she hopped on, leaving her hometown and her worries behind.

On the plane, amidst the cacophony of a wailing baby behind her and an irate seatmate, she quietly laid out the trinkets that her family gave her before she left on the tiny airplane tray. There was the “lucky” bracelet that her sister gave her, a red packet from her grandparents, a scarf that her mother specially picked out for her, and a box of special tea that her father knew was her favorite. And of course, she had a copy of their family picture, to keep them company even when she was far away. Tears were threatening to come, so she quickly switched to happier thoughts. “I shall conquer Shanghai!” she thought to herself. She couldn’t wait to see what it was like! The trip would mark a new start in her life, and she was going to achieve her dreams in Shanghai, a place full of challenges and opportunities.

And she met her first challenge upon arriving at the airport. While waiting for her suitcase to come via conveyor belt, an airport employee approached her and the others waiting for their luggage, too. “I’m sorry to inform you that some of the luggage was transferred to a different flight by mistake. Please write down your respective information on this sheet, and we will contact you once your luggage is here and we will send them to you. It may take anywhere from a few hours up to 24 hours. We are truly sorry for the inconvenience.” Qiao promptly took the lead to put her information down before the she got swallowed up by the ensuing chaos of people complaining. “I have no time to think about this misfortune. I have to go and find Cousin Xin who is picking me up,” she muttered to herself.

After navigating through the big airport and finally seeing the exit, she looked around, trying to spot her cousin. Xin was 3 years older than her, and he had a small apartment that he was willing to share with her while she had no place to live in first. Xin was her closest male cousin as they were only a few years apart, and they lived next door to each other until he left for Shanghai. Xin spotted her first and ran to her and gave her a hug. “Hey, you’ve grown!” Xin joked. “Ha! Maybe you just got shorter!” Qiao retorted. Somehow, Qiao felt like everything was going to be okay despite the misfortune earlier that day. In fact, she was already excited to live in Shanghai and explore its hidden gems. She knew, though, that she had to find a job first. She knew that if she did not work hard, her dreams in Shanghai would stop at that- dream that were unattainable. She thought about the remaining 500 RMB left in her purse and realized it will only last her a few more days. She was thankful that Xin was already helping her out about the apartment for the meantime.

As Xin drove through the streets of Shanghai, she could see that it was already drizzling. Cocooned in the car, she could feel herself like a mere speck among the tall buildings and skyscrapers. People also seemed to be in a hurry most of the time, and she could see why Shanghai was a place where people aspired to be: it was a prosperous city. Qiao started feeling incompetent and minor, but Xin interrupted her thoughts, “Don’t be scared about the big city. I am here to support you no matter what. I promised Uncle and Aunt that I would take care of you here.” After a few more minutes, he stopped at a quaint little family restaurant.

Xin tells Qiao to get down as they were going to eat. “This is Yan’s little restaurant. It may not look like much, but Yan has been receiving newcomers like you for decades. I came here, too, when I first started here in Shanghai. She is incredibly warm, and she reminds me so much of our grandparents. When they enter the restaurant, she sees a little old lady huddled at a table, cleaning up the plates of a customer who just finished eating. She turns around and welcomes them with a smile. “Why, hello there, Xin! And who is this pretty young lady you are with?” Yan asked.

“Yan, this is my cousin, Qiao. She is here to find a job… Just like me 3 years ago!” Xin said. Qiao made a little bow and greeted Yan, “Hello there, Yan. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.” Yan ushers them both in and yells to the cook to make the best dishes to welcome Qiao to Shanghai. “Don’t worry about the bill, Xin has already paid for it beforehand,” she said with a wink. “Just enjoy your meal and your stay here. Welcome to Shanghai, Qiao. Oh, I’ll get back to you in a bit, another of my patrons just arrived.” Qiao and Xin waited patiently as Yan shuffled to another table to greet her customer. She made small chit-chat and the cousins left her to tend to her other customers.

When they finished eating, Yan went over and introduced a man to Qiao and Xin. “Qiao, what luck! Mr. Zhang here is in need of a temporary assistant at his firm. Are you any good at computers?” Yan asked. “Why, yes, Yan and Mr. Zhang! I am very well-versed in computers, and I am very willing to learn more,” Qiao answered. “Ah, I like how enthusiastic you are, Miss...” Mr. Zhang said. “Li Qiao Ai, Mr. Zhang. I am very pleased to meet you,” Qiao added. “Here’s my calling card,” Mr. Zhang said, handing her business card. “I want you to go there tomorrow and bring your documents. I may have a job for you,” Mr. Zhang added. “Oh my goodness, thank you so much, Mr. Zhang!” Qiao gushed. Mr. Zhang said his goodbyes, and the three in the restaurant cheered. “I can see that you are definitely going places, Qiao. You have it in you,” Yan said. “I think I like it here already,” Qiao said. “Yes, opportunities come to those who deserve it. And I know that you will work hard to attain everything you wish,” Xin added.

Qiao remembered that day just like it was yesterday, as well as the giddiness she felt. Now, as she was getting ready to send her daughter off overseas, she wanted her daughter to feel the same excitement she had when she first stepped foot in Shanghai. Gathering the items in the box, she sought her daughter to pass on the mementos to her for good luck. She wanted her daughter to make new memories with them, just like she did.