

## Him

You know how growing up, you'd have those faint crushes that creep up out of nowhere on the randomest of people, say, your best friend's older sibling or some guy you caught a glimpse of through the window of a silver Toyota? Well, he was not one of those people. In fact, he was the opposite. He was someone you didn't want to think about. He was someone who two nine-year-old girls secretly wished would just cease to exist. Perhaps it had something to do with that god-awful smell of his... For two kids with strangely heightened senses of smell, he was not someone we wanted to spend more than half a second around. Yet for that entire year, we found ourselves stuck in a breathless car with him, every single morning and afternoon. Even after he left, traces of him remained. It was almost as if his stale, sweaty smell had permanently mixed with that of the new car leather from over a year ago, producing a sour stench you wish you could forget. But alas, some wishes are too good to come true. That was him, my cousin's driver—I don't even remember his name. Perhaps that says something about just how privileged we were, but it also says something about him. He was unspectacular—a typical Hongkonger dressed almost always in a plain white t-shirt and khaki cargo shorts. His hair was always disheveled and his eyes dull and puffy from a consistent lack of sleep. No... not always. There was that one time—that one time when he came to pick us up with what seemed to be... newly trimmed hair with geometric side shavings? *How scandalous*, we thought. *It simply can't be*. And I'd lying if I told you I remember exactly what it looked like, but what I can say is that we couldn't quite take our eyes off of it. Not because it was beautiful or enhanced how he looked in any sort of way, no. If anything, it made him look rather dumb and as if he were trying too hard—way too hard. But it was the change that caught our eyes. It was different. It wasn't... him. He had turned around and looked at us, and for a second, there was almost a glimmer of something. But it faded just as quickly as it came, and those same slumping shoulders and droopy eyes brought us right back. It was him. Who else could it have been? It was him alright—ordinary, run-of-the-mill, him.

Whether we realized it or not, we knew too much—more than we'd ever have liked to. We knew exactly why he got his haircut, and exactly what was running through his head. And without realizing it, we sympathized with him. We felt indignant about his wife's affair and cursed the man she left him for. We felt his anger, his pain, and his helplessness as he watched his world crumble, even though he was nothing—nothing to us. You see, we wanted him to be

the successful man that his daughter could look up to, rather than the man-child who sat in front of us each day—a fully grown man who still lived in his mother’s spare room and spent most of his time, even while driving, playing mobile games that were just a little too explicit. And to this day, I have yet to understand why he was so nice to us, or how he could smile, almost genuinely, when we got in the car every morning... For he was the one throwing his dignity aside, time and time again, asking our parents for money, while desperately trying to avoid the eyes of the two elementary schoolers sitting in the back seat—eyes filled with judgment and pity. That was him. I can’t even remember his name. But that look on his face, that nervous, cocky look he wore the day his wife left him, is one I’ll never forget.