

## 青春之思 *Reflections on Youth*

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夜色朦胧，街灯零星闪烁。阿碧和阿洁跟着阿英，拐进水库新村狭窄曲折的村道。小路像一座迷宫，刚走进去，方向感便迅速消失。低矮的房子一间挨着一间，灯光昏暗，空气里混杂着潮湿与饭菜的味道。她们沿着逼仄的楼梯摸黑爬上三楼，脚步声在空荡的楼道里回响。

阿英推开门，客厅出乎意料地空荡。只有一张简陋的饭桌，几把旧椅子，几乎没有多余的摆设，显得清冷而仓促，像一处临时避世的落脚点。

然而，一进卧房，情景骤然不同。一张阔大的床几乎占去大半空间，床上铺着华丽的丝绒薄被，弹簧床褥柔软而富有弹性，人一坐下，便被稳稳托住。床边是一张梳妆台，各式化妆品和香水整齐摆放；一侧的大衣柜嵌着明亮的镜面，将原本不大的房间照得通透明亮。床头对着一台大电视，躺在床上，几乎不用起身，便可看上一整晚的节目。

三人并肩横卧，床仍宽绰有余。阿碧和阿洁从未睡过如此柔软的床，动也不想动。她们只是静静听阿英低声讲述自己初到深圳的经历。她的声音在夜里显得格外平缓。不知何时，两人沉沉睡去，半梦半醒间，似仍有细语在枕边萦绕。

阿英年轻貌美，性情温和。来深圳不久，便在酒楼找到一份知客的工作。来喝茶的客人，常在入座前与她闲谈几句，被她的声音和笑容留住。熟客渐渐多了，酒楼的生意也随之兴旺，老板对她愈发器重，许多场合都让她出面招呼。

那段日子，阿英对前途抱着希望。她相信，只要肯做、肯熬，总会有回报。她几次向老板提起加薪，语气一次比一次恳切，却始终换来含糊与沉默。

失望，正是在这反复的沉默中慢慢累积。老板的敷衍，让前途变得模糊。也就在此时，一位常来酒楼的熟客——大家都称他黎生——对阿英明显格外关照。他私下邀她吃饭、唱卡拉 OK，时常送她新衣和饰物，体贴周到，步步靠近。

渐渐地，阿英发现，自己在酒楼起早贪黑，一个月的辛苦收入，竟买不起两条像样的裙子。权衡之下，她辞去了工作。黎生替她租下这套房子，添置床柜和家电，她的生活，自此换了一条轨道。

睡觉，成了她消解旧日辛劳的方式。她不再找工，日夜颠倒：醒了便看电视，困了便再睡。饿了，披件睡衣、趿着拖鞋，下楼买点吃的便回。她渐渐与周边的女子攀谈，发现这村里许多女孩，过的都是同一种日子——平日里昏睡、看电视、与姐妹闲聊；到了周末，那些被她们称作“男朋友”的香港人便跨境而来，一同吃饭、赴夜总会、唱 K。热闹浓缩在两天，其余时日，又退回悠闲而空洞的日常。

青春既可以换来衣食，也可以换来另一种选择。阿碧和阿洁的雄心未减，仍对前途抱有执念，不肯轻易低头。阿英的经历，却让她们放慢了求职的脚步，也不愿将时间耗在酒楼或办公室里，日复一日地苦熬十几个小时。

深夜里，三人常常围坐一处，一遍遍商量前路：工作，还要不要继续找？感情，该如何抉择？人生，是否可以先安顿下来，在一个相对稳妥的环境中磨炼自己、积蓄力量？

《易经》乾卦的第一爻辞——“潜龙勿用”，反复在阿碧的脑海里旋转。那并非退却，而是在时机未到之前，选择沉潜。

这三人的相遇，她们各自的经历、理想与勇气，交织成一条尚未出水的潜龙。至于有朝一日是否“或跃在渊”，要等时间推着她们，走到该遇见“大人”的那一天。

## Reflections on Youth

Night was dim, the streetlights scattered and unsteady. Abi and Ajie followed Aying into the narrow, twisting lanes of Shuiku New Village. The paths felt like a maze; once inside, all sense of direction disappeared. Low houses pressed tightly together, their dim lights mingling with damp air and the smell of cooking. They climbed a narrow staircase in the dark, their footsteps echoing in the empty corridor as they reached the third floor.

Aying pushed open the door. The living room was unexpectedly bare: a simple dining table, a few old chairs, almost nothing else. It felt cold and makeshift, like a temporary shelter from the world.

The bedroom, however, told a different story. A wide bed occupied most of the space, covered with a velvet quilt. The spring mattress was soft and buoyant, holding the body firmly the moment one sat down. A dressing table stood nearby, cosmetics and perfume neatly arranged. Beside it, a wardrobe with mirrored doors reflected light across the room, making the space appear brighter and larger than it was. At the foot of the bed stood a large television. Lying down, one could watch for hours without moving.

The three women lay side by side; the bed was still roomy. Abi and Ajie had never slept on anything so soft and found themselves unwilling to move. They listened quietly as Aying spoke in a low voice about her early days in Shenzhen. Her voice was calm in the stillness of the night. At some point, the two drifted into sleep. Half-dreaming, they seemed to hear her words still lingering by their pillows.

Aying was young and attractive, with a gentle temperament. Not long after arriving in Shenzhen, she found work as a hostess at a restaurant. Customers often lingered to chat with her before taking their seats, drawn in by her voice and her smile. Regulars increased, business improved, and the owner grew more reliant on her, asking her to handle many of the front-facing interactions.

In those days, Aying held hope for her future. She believed that if she worked hard and endured, something would eventually come of it. She raised the subject of a pay raise several times, each request more earnest than the last, only to be met with vague replies and silence.

Disappointment accumulated quietly in that silence. The owner's evasiveness blurred the path ahead. It was then that a frequent customer—known to everyone as Mr. Lai—began showing her particular attention. He invited her to dinner and karaoke, gave her new clothes and accessories. His care was attentive, his approach gradual.

Before long, Aying realized that after months of early mornings and late nights, her wages could not even buy two decent dresses. After weighing her options, she quit the job. Mr. Lai rented this apartment for her and furnished it with a bed, wardrobes, and appliances. Her life shifted onto another track.

Sleep became her way of dissolving the exhaustion of the past. She stopped looking for work. Day and night lost their order: when awake, she watched television; when tired, she slept. When hungry, she threw on a robe, slipped into her slippers, went downstairs to buy food, and returned. Gradually, she began chatting with women nearby and discovered that many girls in the village lived much the same way.

On weekdays, they slept, watched television, and talked among themselves. On weekends, the Hong Kong men they called their “boyfriends” crossed the border to visit. They ate together, went to nightclubs, sang karaoke. All the excitement was compressed into two days. The rest of the week sank back into a loose, empty rhythm of sleep and television.

Youth could be exchanged for comfort, or for another kind of choice. Abi and Ajie had not yet let go of their ambitions. They still held fast to the idea of a future and were unwilling to lower their heads too easily. Aying’s experience, however, made them slow their search for work. They no longer wished to spend their days in restaurants or offices, enduring long hours of repetitive labour.

Late at night, the three often sat together, turning their future over again and again:

Should they keep looking for work?

How should they choose in matters of the lover?

Could life begin by settling into a stable environment, using that stability to train themselves and gather strength?

A line from the *I Ching*, the first hexagram, kept circling in Abi’s mind: “*The hidden dragon should not act.*” It was not retreat, but waiting—choosing to remain submerged until the time was right.

Their meeting, their experiences, their ideals and courage, intertwined into a dragon not yet risen. Whether one day they would *leap from the depths* or remain hidden would depend on time itself—on when they would finally encounter the moment, and the people, that could draw them upward.